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The Importance of Authenticity with AI.

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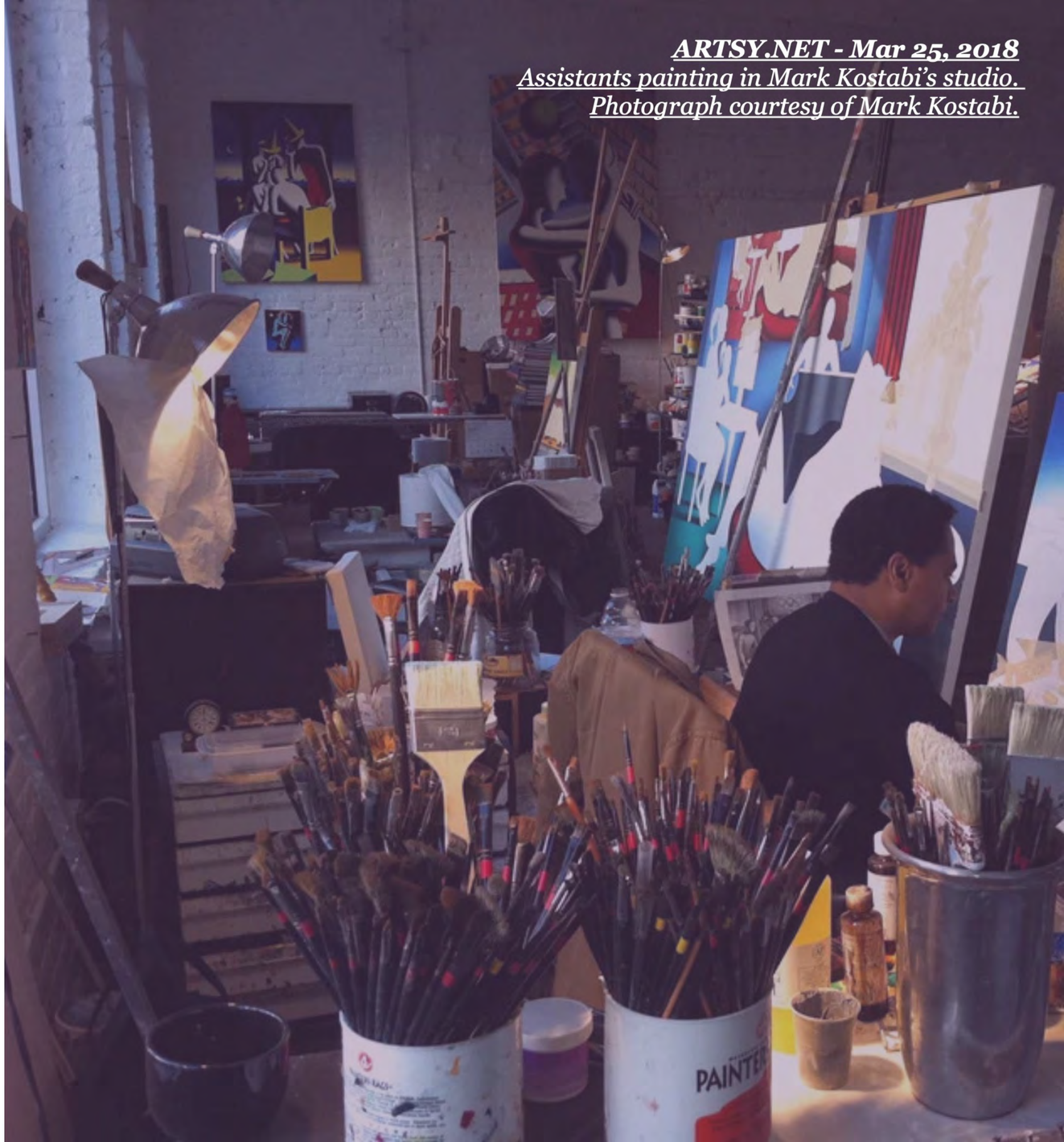
Work in the era of AI is confusing.

*Every day we're confronted with hard questions about **authorship** & **authenticity**.*

ARTSY.NET - Mar 25, 2018
Mark Kostabi in New York City, 1994.
Photo by Michael Brennan/Getty Images

These conversations pre-date AI... look to the 80's art world.

GALLERY 98
"Kostabi World," oversized print handout, c. 1988



ARTSY.NET - Mar 25, 2018
Assistants painting in Mark Kostabi's studio.
Photograph courtesy of Mark Kostabi.

Technology:
People (factory model)

Kostabi stirred raging debate about art & authenticity.

But is it "fake" when you explicitly disclose your context, values and methods?

"I'm basically one person who has a brain with ideas pouring in all the time. I want to get all of them made. ***I only have two hands and I must have money to hire people to execute my ideas.*** *It's that simple. Every cent I make goes right back into the creativity."*

PROCESS TRANSPARENCY

It's hard to make it as an artist. So, Kostabi created another operating system for himself, articulated it and let the market sort out whether they valued the work or not.

KOSTABI WORLD PRODUCES ART IN THE MANNER OF REUBENS, REMBRAN
RAPHAEL, WHERE ART IS CONSIDERED A PROFESSION. INSTEAD OF WORKING F
CHURCH OR THE STATE, I AM INDIVIDUAL WORKING FOR MYSELF, EXPRESSING MY
IMAGINATION USING THE INDUSTRIAL METHOD.

ART AS BUSINESS? I RECOGNIZE MONEY AS AN INEVITABLE MEANS TO CONT
PRODUCTION. I'M BASICALLY ONE PERSON WHO HAS A BRAIN WITH IDEAS POURIN
ALL THE TIME. I WANT TO GET ALL OF THEM MADE. I ONLY HAVE TWO HANDS AN
MUST HAVE MONEY TO HIRE PEOPLE TO EXECUTE MY IDEAS. IT'S THAT SIMPLE. EVE
CENT I MAKE GOES RIGHT BACK INTO THE CREATIVITY. I PROVE THAT AN ARTIST CA
LIVE WITHOUT THE ART SYSTEM. I HAVE ABANDONED THE ART WORLD AND CREATE
MY OWN WORLD, KOSTABI WORLD.

MARK KOSTABI
CEO, KOSTABI WORLD

KOSTABI

600 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10012 TEL(212)925-3065 FAX(212)925-3055

Technology:
Auto-Tune

T-Pain was accused of "ruining music" -- popularizing a gimmick to mask a lack of ability.

In 2014, his NPR Tiny Desk Concert confirmed he had vocal chops.

SHIFTING VALUES

Sometimes the processed version is the authentic artistic choice, not a crutch.

Technology:
Music videos & lip-syncing

Milli Vanilli's deception betrayed trust -- and damaged their professional brand.

In front of 80,000 live concert goers discovered that Fab & Rob weren't really singing.

THE RESULT OF OBFUSCATION

When you're not up front, it can take YEARS to earn back trust

Technology:
Generative AI

So what is authenticity in the age of AI?

It's ALWAYS been a moving target...

It's not binary.

It's driven by different values held across diverse audiences.

It morphs over time.

Authenticity =
showing up in a way that builds brand

relevant at every altitude whether it's:
retail customers,
business partners or
colleagues.

It requires active conversation that...

surveys what you value

makes your intentions known

makes it easy for people to decide if their values align

B2C brands do well when they share an intentional approach to AI.

Hermes defined authenticity for luxury customers: human creativity & artisanal craftsmanship

Search

HERMÈS
PARIS

Account Cart

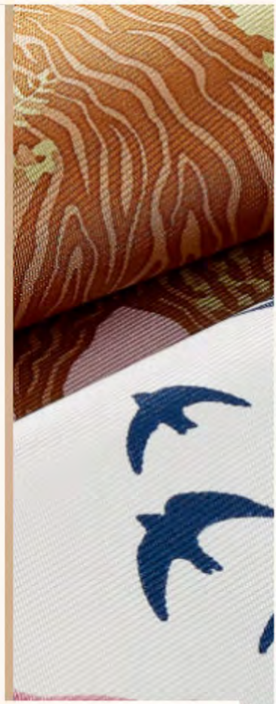
WOMEN MEN LEATHER GOODS JEWELRY WATCHES FRAGRANCES AND MAKE-UP HOME AND ART OF LIVING EQUESTRIAN GIFTS ABOUT HERMÈS

← BACK

Since 1837, Hermès has remained faithful to its artisanal model and human values. The freedom to create, the constant quest for beautiful materials, the transmission of exceptional know-how, right down to details designed with use in mind – or the aesthetics of function – all forge the uniqueness of the house, creator of objects designed to last. An independent, family-owned company that encompasses sixteen métiers, Hermès is committed to retaining the majority of its production in France through its 63 production and training sites, while developing its network of almost 300 stores in 45 countries. The group employs more than 26,000 people around the world, including 16,300 in France. Hermès has been led since 2013 by Axel Dumas, a sixth-generation family member.

Hermès: an economic and social stakeholder

For six generations, Hermès has been an independent, family-owned, artisanal, creative, innovative and responsible French house. While designing timeless and durable objects, it seeks to safeguard, pass on and develop its know-how and exceptional skills in line with its human values rooted in craftsmanship.



Other brands being intentional...

Many leading brands have articulated how they're using AI while amplifying their values

to customers

Dove's Real Beauty Pledge *renews the brands vow to champion real beauty with its "commitment to never use AI created or distorted women's images."*

to customers

Lego's values as policy *limited the extent of AI adoption and announced it will reserve building set designs to human creatives*

to customers, staff & investors

IKEA's commitment to people: *IKEA retrained and redeployed 8,500 worker from call center agents to services specialists, growing its previously limited remote interior design service into a revenue powerhouse.*

B2B brands at our level should too...

Hover is explicit about the value we bring...

years of hard won expertise amplified (not driven) by AI

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INSIGHTS · STRATEGY · ACTIVATION

We make strategy *real.*

We close the gap between vision and the people who have to deliver it — leaving teams aligned, capable, and in motion.

Hover Media LLC is a New York City strategy consultancy founded by Elizabeth Zietlow and Shannon McGarity.

What we do Meet the team →

WHO WE ARE

Joyful pollinators. Nimble guides.

Former VP- and Director-level brand and CX leaders — we don't observe your problems from the outside. We've lived them.

Shannon McGarity

Co-founder

Branding & Identity · Experience Design · Content Strategy · Learning Design · GTM Strategy · UX & Service Design

Former Senior Director, CX Strategy & Research. A rare talent for transforming complex data and research into emotionally resonant stories — ensuring those stories become clear, actionable strategies that business teams can actually use.

Elizabeth Zietlow "EZ"

Co-founder

CRM & Loyalty · Customer Research · Segmentation · Digital Strategy · Journey Analytics · Voice of Customer

Former VP of Experience Insights, Research & Strategy. A systems thinker who sees customer experience not as a department but as the connective tissue of a brand. She uses data to ground groups and move them forward through complex, matrixed enterprise organizations.

WHY HOVER

An un-agency agency. A different kind of partner.

We deliver what others promise.
Here's what makes us genuinely different.

We've sat in your seat

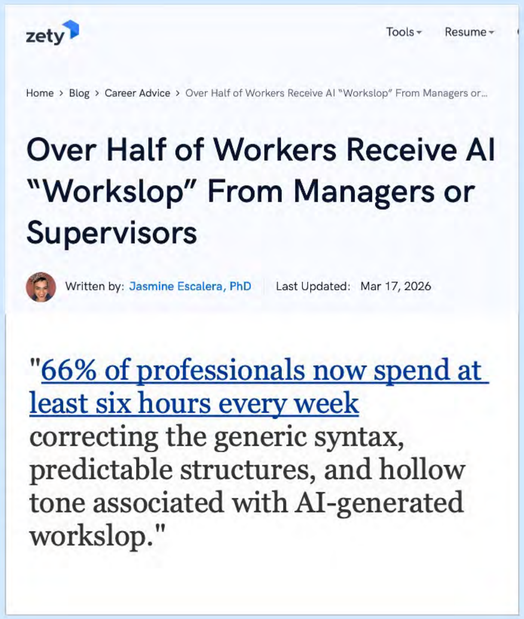
Former VP- and Director-level brand and CX leaders. We've navigated the budget fights, the stakeholder politics, the organizational complexity — from the inside.

We activate, not just advise

Strategy that doesn't reach the people who have to live it isn't

Your personal brand is on the line as well.

Individually, we need to articulate AI's role in our work... before someone does it for us.



*It doesn't matter what you **intended**, if it's **perceived** a different way.*

HOVER MEDIA FRAMEWORK:

Articulating Authenticity (& Building Brand Trust) in age of AI

discuss.

Explore what needs to be true to build trust.

*What do your customers/ clients/colleagues **value**?*

decide.

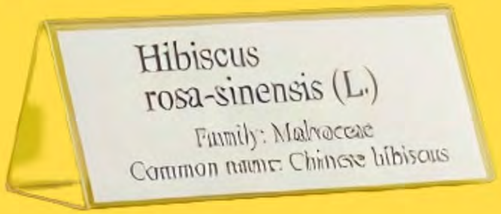
Agree to your approach & evolve it.

*What could putting **structure** around it do for you?*

disclose.

Empower others to make informed choices.

*Will they embrace your values if you **share** your approach?*



A simple tool for navigating uncertainty.

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TOOLS FOR NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

"Practice Conversation Guide"

discuss.

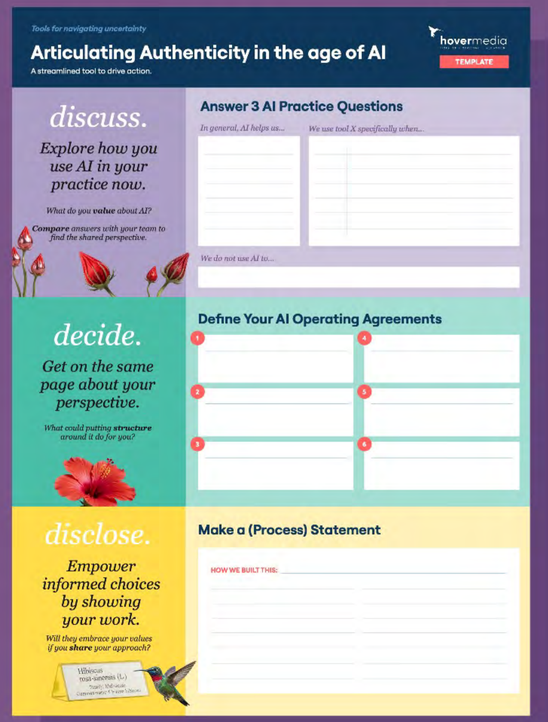
Explore how you use AI in your practice now.

Have the arguments.

I use it to...
hone my writing & synthesize my research, but only after I've documented my POV.

vs.

I use it to...
prototype my ideas quickly at a fidelity that matches my vision.



What would you add?
What do you disagree with?

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TOOLS FOR NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

"AI Operating Agreements"

decide.

Align & document your perspective.

Find the overlap to create a living guidepost for you and your team.

I use it to...
hone my writing & synthesize my research, but only after I've documented my POV.

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AI as human amplifier - *used to build upon our perspectives & hard won expertise. We don't accede rich thinking to AI.*

I use it to...
prototype my ideas quickly at a fidelity that matches my vision.

What would you add?
What do you disagree with?

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TOOLS FOR NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

"Process Statements"

disclose.

Show your work.

Help others make informed choices about how they respond.

MSA's & SOW's

Contractor Guidelines

Process Statements

What would you add?

What do you disagree with?

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INSIGHTS / STRATEGY / ACTIVATION

Our process statement for this talk...

HOW WE BUILT THIS: *Authenticity Presentation*

*We started with personal reflection and point of view, then came together to compare perspectives and find where they connected * From there we built an outline and divided up the slides — using Claude to question our assumptions and track down references as we went. * We met again to talk through the story and refine direction, developing everything in Miro before building the slides ourselves. * We art-directed Firefly to generate the illustrative imagery, with other models brought in for fine-tuning. * And before this ever reached an audience, we used Claude to pressure-test the whole deck — surfacing weak spots we hadn't caught ourselves.*

-- Shannon & EZ / 2026

Does your organization...

... require a deeper understanding of what your customers will perceive as authentic?

... want to firm up its practice development & leadership around AI?

... feel passionate about creating authentic brand experiences that connect for customers?

We're here for it!

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INSIGHTS / STRATEGY / ACTIVATION
We're idea pollinators that put strategy in motion...
(Sometimes we use AI to do it... you'll always know how.)
hello@hovermedia.com

Tools for navigating uncertainty

Articulating Authenticity in the age of AI

A streamlined series of activities to drive action & trust.

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INSIGHTS / STRATEGY / ACTIVATION

SAMPLE

discuss.

Explore how you use AI in your practice now.

*What do you **value** about AI?*

***Compare** answers with your team to find the shared perspective.*

Answer 3 AI Practice Questions

In general, AI helps us...

...go deep on a topic & understand it through conversational interaction

...de-risk & challenge my thinking

...hone my storytelling

...visualize my thinking

... prototype quickly

We use tool X specifically when...

Firefly - to generate ownable creative assets that represent my design direction & uniquely solve problems.

Synthesia - to quickly produce learning modules that would bene

Perplexity - when I'm doing market research and need more trustworthy data that's citable.

Claude - to challenge my thinking, get varied feedback through multiple lenses, see things that I do not.

We do not use AI to...

... try to mimic the style of a specific illustrator or designer...

decide.

Get on the same page about your perspective.

*What could putting **structure** around it do for you?*

Define Your AI Operating Agreements

1 **Human first**

AI *accelerates* our work. It doesn't *originate* the work. Every output needs a human brain — ours — before it reaches a client. This means we'll also need to...

2 **Own the output... fully**

Assume personal responsibility. The buck stops with us. Our expertise & POV drive exploration and research. It's on us to check the work & not to pass on hallucinations.

3 **Radical transparency**

We disclose AI usage & attribute preemptively. We don't risk the chance our work will be called into question. When AI materially shapes a deliverable, we say so.

4 **Client safety always**

Our clients trust us with things they've never shared publicly. We don't feed PII into a model. We take efforts to understand our client's comfort zone around AI usage.

5 **Problems before tools**

We don't let new tools drive our effort. We stay current on and do low-stakes experiments to be familiar enough to know when to invest in a tool that solves a real problem.

6 **Care for creators**

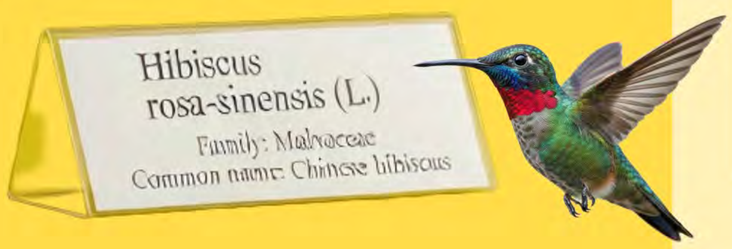
We honor unique perspectives and have an ethical responsibility to care for creators - artists, writers and designers. We don't emulate another maker's style/IP/ etc...

BONUS: Acknowledge mistakes to grow. We embrace the pain and learn from it. Anyone who doesn't admit error is hiding something.

disclose.

Empower informed choices by showing your work.

*Will they embrace your values if you **share** your approach?*



Make a (Process) Statement

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INSIGHTS / STRATEGY / ACTIVATION

TEMPLATE

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1

2

3

4

5

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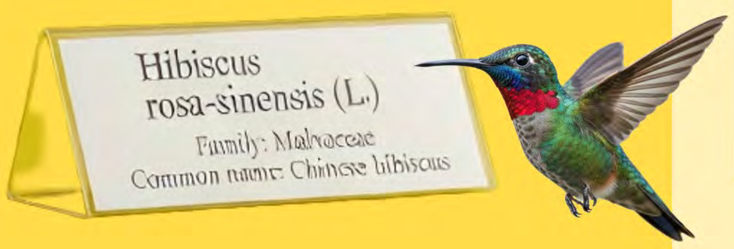

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