



Putting the “Art” in Artificial Intelligence

Ken Wilber and Corey deVos



[00:00:00] **Corey:** There we are. Hey Ken. Good to see you, man.

[00:00:02] **Ken:** All right. Good to see you buddy.

[00:00:04] **Corey:** Back in action. Back in the saddle. Yeah. Yeah. So, um, as I was coming up with ideas for this show, you know, one of my processes, Ken, is we've, we've spent a lot of time together, uh, doing the Ken Show and we have, I mean, something like 20 something episodes, uh, dozens of hours that we've recorded with each other and

[00:00:23] **Ken:** Right.

[00:00:23] **Corey:** The challenge is always like, okay, so what's next? What are we gonna talk about next so that we're not just sort of retreading territory.

[00:00:29] **Ken:** Right.

[00:00:29] **Corey:** And it occurred to me that one of the things that we haven't really talked very much about in this show is art.

[00:00:38] **Ken:** Right.

[00:00:38] **Corey:** So I thought maybe what we would do is wrap an episode around sort of the deeper principles of integral art, but especially as applied to some of the new technological innovations that have been emerging.

Recently, you know, as, as you probably know, Ken, one of the things that's been going on recently, there's been a lot of buzz and, you know, maybe a little bit of consternation too, about these artificial intelligence platforms, that are basically allowing people to input a series of textual prompts, which the algorithm kind of takes in, and then reconstructs images that are based on those prompts. And this often leads to, you know, really interesting and occasionally really, really stunning pieces of art. And I just find this absolutely fascinating, because this raises all sorts of fundamental questions about what art is, who art belongs to, the creative process itself, various tools that we use in order to express whatever it is we happen to be trying to express. And it's interesting to me that this technology is sort of forcing us en masse, collectively, to take a closer look at some of the questions that I think we've probably been able to sort of take for granted, up until recently.

So, you know, as an example, Ken, I just wanna share this image. There's this image here I'm about to share, which actually won the Colorado State Fair Art Competition, which was actually pretty controversial. So let me pull this up here.

This is an incredible work of art and the fact to me that this was generated purely by artificial intelligence in response to, you know, sort of these user prompts that people are putting in, is incredible to me. And, you know, it sort of fits into this ongoing story of artificial intelligence over the last several decades, which we have talked about in the past. But, you know, it used to be like, oh, you know, computers are good at some things, but they'll never be able to beat human beings in chess. And then computers started kicking our butts in chess. And then it was like, okay, well chess maybe, but they

can never win at a game like Go, that requires too much intuition. And now computers are creaming us at go. So it was always, you know, we kept sort of like incrementally pushing off sort of these pieces of humanity that we were just very confident computers and artificial intelligence would never be able to touch.

And here we're now...

[00:03:03] **Ken:** Even things like translating. Because it used to be said, we'd never be able to translate, it just, it's too complex. And yet computer systems are translating quite significantly.

[00:03:19] **Corey:** Yeah. Yeah. So there there's any number of sort of human feats and human accomplishments that we were convinced, no, this is ours, computers are never gonna touch this. And now we have computer algorithms making art. And not just making sort of crappy motel art, but, again, in some cases really just interesting and beautiful art.

And this is one of the things that we're gonna be talking about today is sort of what are the differences between beauty, for example, and art, right? I use the example, and we'll go over this later, but I use the example of like, I can go outside and I can see a beautiful sunset or a blade of grass, and it'll be beautiful and I'll be struck by the beauty, but it's not necessarily art.

[00:04:00] **Ken:** Right.

[00:04:00] **Corey:** Until I take a camera or a paintbrush and I frame it in a perspective and I take a snapshot, suddenly it's converted into art.

[00:04:10] **Ken:** Right.

[00:04:10] **Corey:** And that's amazing. That's fascinating. It's borderline miraculous in a lot of ways. And again, I feel like artificial intelligence is bringing so much of this online and in a lot of ways almost democratizing our creativity and our access and our ability to

perceive beauty in the first place.

And, you know, I've had a lot of fun playing with these platforms, as have a bunch of friends of mine, and I've been using one in particular called MidJourney, which was the same software that was used to create the image I just you showed earlier. And it's a really interesting experience, Ken actually using the technology, playing with these kinds of platforms, because, you know, again, what you do is you input your prompts and the parameters into a text field, you hit enter, and then you wait for the artificial intelligence to, to basically respond. And what it's doing is it's basically filtering through countless images that already exist on the internet, and it's synthesizing them in interesting ways according to your prompts and your parameters and et cetera. And it's an interesting experience, because there's an aspect of it that feels, it feels almost like a dialogue, you know what I mean? It feels like I'm saying something, the computer's responding, there's this kind of back and forth. But of course, that's not actually what's happening. The computer, the machine doesn't have any genuine interiority.

[00:05:28] **Ken:** Right.

[00:05:28] **Corey:** It's just sort of reflecting objects back to you that may or may not have something to do with whatever intention you as an artist or as a creator are bringing to the platform. But it feels dialogical, which I find absolutely fascinating. And you know, I've experienced some, you know, almost like altered states just by using this and seeing the type of... you know, it's almost like communicating with an alien that's trying to figure you out, you know, as you're trying to figure it out.

And of course there's a lot of people who then consider AI art to be not "real art", at least according to classic definitions. And this is always the case whenever there's a new tool that emerges that we use to, you know, further our creative expression. They said it when programs like Photoshop emerged, or Illustrator. There's a lot of people who look at my woodworking, a lot of like old-timey woodworkers, and they're like, "that's not woodworking, you're using a computer and a robot to, you know, produce your designs." And, and of course I see myself as a woodworker, but fair point. At the same time, I don't think I should be limited only to the tools that you'd find, like in an Amish barn to create quote unquote "real art". But there it is. I mean, so it's bringing up these questions of authenticity and even legitimacy around these expressions.

[00:06:43] **Ken:** Right.

[00:06:43] **Corey:** So this is gonna be an, a really fascinating discussion that brings up, I think, among many others, the following questions: what exactly is art?

What is integral art?

What's the relationship between beauty and art?

Does art require some kind of artist's intent?

Can art be created by non sentient processes that don't have artist's intent?

How does all of this inform our enactment of AI generated art?

And are the AI algorithms themselves something that we could and maybe should consider as art?

So it's a wide open topic with really interesting applications. And before we get into sort of my first main questions, I'm wondering if you have any comments just to sort of set things up and introduce us.

[00:07:29] **Ken:** Well, I mean, one of the first questions is what is art, and also what is beauty, and how can you tell them apart? And it's particularly difficult to define, both art and especially beauty. Because beauty is, it's not like rationality where you can give a definition of what rationality is. It isn't like morals where you can give a definition of what morals is. And it isn't like emotions where you can define what an emotion is. And I have found that one of the best definitions for beauty was actually the one that was used for pornography by the Supreme Court Justice. He was asked to define what pornography was and he said, I can't define it, but I know it when I see it.

And that's beauty. I'm not sure I can define it, but I know it when I see it. And that's a really important distinction. And I find it very in, in a goofy way, very useful, that I know it

when I see it. And that's what beauty is.

And then art is generally taken to be beauty plus some sort of action or activity or perspective or something, and that equals beauty. So you have "beauty plus perspective equals art". And the idea is that it's some sort of action on something that's taken to be beautiful, but it's created. And I used to also in a kind of silly, goofy way, I once defined art as anything with a frame on it.

Right, right.

Because that fits almost all forms of art, including artifacts. And it even fits your "beauty plus perspective equals art", because your perspective is a frame.

[00:10:27] **Corey:** Right, it's a frame of reference. That's right.

[00:10:28] **Ken:** Yeah. So those are the two general ways that I think about art and beauty. And we have a little bit of difficulty with definitions as they apply to post-modern art, simply because most post-modern beauty is hardly beautiful. I mean, like, if you go to a performance art piece, a post-modern performance art, and the person gets up and urinates in a jar and then drinks the jar, that's not beauty.

[00:11:16] **Corey:** Right. It's just subversiveness is all it is.

[00:11:20] **Ken:** Yeah. So we have to be a little bit careful when we talk about postmodernism. But of course that's true in almost any form of postmodernism. Goofy and silly and crazy and idiotic. So we'll just have to wait till we get from green to teal and then we'll be back on track.

[00:11:51] **Corey:** Right. Well, and real briefly, Ken, this is one of the reasons I wanted to have this conversation with you about AI art in general because most of the conversations I see taking place right now around it are basically confirming the sort of post-modern view of art, which is one that is, where meaning is a hundred percent entirely culturally created, it's a cultural construct, and actually sort of artists' intent is less relevant in post-modern art than ever before. And here we have AI art, which

doesn't even have an agency creating the art in the first place.

[00:12:27] **Ken:** Or a consciousness or anything.

[00:12:29] **Corey:** Exactly. Exactly. And this fits right into ,even sort of perpetuates and extends in a lot of ways, the post-modern arguments about art that we have become very familiar with over the decades.

[00:12:42] **Ken:** Right. Yeah. When we think of AI, generally we think of algorithms. And an algorithm doesn't have intent or consciousness or even meaning. It's just, well, it just is what it is. But it doesn't have consciousness or intent or meaning or anything like that. And so you can't say that an algorithm is... I'm trying to think if I wanna say, you can't say it's beautiful, or you can't say it's art. An algorithm, because it can produce a beautiful object, like the winner of the Colorado State Fair thing you showed, I mean, that's beautiful, but the intent that went into that artifact was not the intent of the artifact, it was the intent of the artist.

[00:14:05] **Corey:** Right.

[00:14:06] **Ken:** So that means it's beautiful, you can actually in some sense say that beauty lies in the algorithm, but it takes a beauty plus an action, a perspective or something, to create an artwork.

[00:14:31] **Corey:** Right.

[00:14:32] **Ken:** So that would particularly work in this case because the action, the activity, the intent, would be your intent. And so that could produce an artwork, because that's beauty plus perspective, or intent, or even a framework, can produce a piece of art. So I think that by us distinguishing between beauty and art, we can have a distinction between an algorithm that's beautiful and an artwork that's the product of creativity or an intent or perspective or something. And that probably we could get away with. So we could talk about an artwork produced by an algorithm, if we spoke about it in those terms.

[00:15:52] **Corey:** And then it gets tricky of course, because it's like if I create a piece of art, quote unquote, with this algorithm, who created the art? Right? Who takes ownership of that creativity? Is that mine, because I'm inputting the prompts? Is it the designers of the algorithm themselves, who basically created a piece of art that creates collaborative art with others? Do you know what I mean? Do you see what I'm getting at? So it's like, I try to track the agents in the equation. There's an agent on this side of the screen, there's an agent way on the other side of the screen who created the algorithms in the first place. And then the artwork, in terms of who owns it, it feels like a collaboration. It feels like a collaboration between me as a user and the developer and the designer of the algorithm, at which point the algorithm itself basically becomes something like the paintbrush.

[00:16:48] **Ken:** Yeah.

[00:16:48] **Corey:** This is just the instrument that we're using in order to produce beauty through a frame of perspective.

[00:16:57] **Ken:** Right.

[00:16:57] **Corey:** Does that math work out in your mind?

[00:17:00] **Ken:** I think it does, because you've got, you're separating the ingredients quite clearly. And what you're particularly tracking is the intent of the design crew. And so that's what's important, when you take beauty plus some action or perspective or framework to get art, then that's the important ingredient, is the intent. And so the fact that you're tracking intent across any number of designers or the producer of the algorithm or the design team — that would provide that missing link. And so you would be able to get away with that, I think.

[00:18:14] **Corey:** Okay. That's helpful. You know, cause there's another aspect of this, Ken, where it feels almost like, you know, we, we've often talked about, for example, you've done long presentations before where you are basically trying to anticipate some of the big technological developments that we'll see in the future, and how they will or will not support the emergence of integral consciousness, for example. And one of the things that you've often talked about is sort of, we're going to become increasingly post-

human, post-human in the sense that we will become increasingly integrated with our technologies, right? We will find all sorts of ways to expand our senses through technology, or expand our communicative capacities through technology, or what have you. And in a certain kind of way, these platforms feel to me like a part of that augmentation. Like, you know, in the same way that I can, you know, now that I'm carrying this thing around in my pocket and I have all the world's information at my, you know, it's like another hemisphere of my brain that I now have access to, sort of, you know, in the moment in order to pull data and constellate it in interesting ways.

This, in a certain kind of way, feels like an extension of that. Like, okay, my third hemisphere of my brain, my digital brain is now expanding and enhancing itself to the point where I have access not only to all of this imagery that the human mind has created around the world, but I actually have interesting ways of synthesizing all of those images into something that's new, and into something that hasn't existed before. Which feels, at least if I frame it that way, it feels kind of teal, right? There's sort of a teal altitude element of that, where it's like, this is still my agency, I'm just sort of upgrading my tool set so that I can actualize these visions that I see sort of in here, and bring it into the world out there.

[00:20:17] **Ken:** Right. Yeah. And that also includes taking an action, or a perspective, or a framework, or some sort of activity. And that would meet our broad criteria for an artwork. And so you're basically just adding to your capacity to create art by adding these extra tools, or these extra actions, or these extra frameworks, or these extra perspectives.

And so I think that's fairly adequate definition. And notice that the definitions, we're having a fair amount of trouble defining, are mostly modern and post-modern. Because it used to be, in the times of Plato or Aristotle or St. Thomas Aquinas or Spinoza, it was fairly easy for them to come up with meanings for the good, the true and the beautiful. And they wouldn't get caught up on those at all, because those were traditional forms that they were using. But as we get into modern forms such as AI or iPhones or any of those, it starts to get tricky. And particularly gets tricky with postmodern forms, both art and beauty. Although the way we've defined beauty as "I can't define it, but I know it when I see it" — well, that could apply to performance art. And then beauty is, "I know it when I see it". Even if it is not particularly gorgeous, I could still recognize it as a post-modern attempt at beauty. So we can, within those sort of loose definitions, we can come up with examples of different types of art and beauty. And that's, I don't know,

important.

[00:23:24] **Corey:** Yeah, it feels important. It really does. And especially since, Ken, it also feels like there's a range, there's a spectrum both in sort of the beauty ledger and in the art ledger, right? Like with beauty, there's narrow definitions of, you know, something's pretty versus it's ugly, right? But as we know from another point of view, things that are ugly can still be beautiful. Right? So really, there's an aperture of awareness, and as it expands, especially as it expands to, you know, into sort of these higher states of consciousness, particularly, and especially once we hit sort of the non-dual Always Already, everything is always already beautiful, exactly as it is. Right?

[00:24:12] **Ken:** Right.

[00:24:12] **Corey:** Now that can also feel.. Well, it's like, okay, I can say that and I can feel that, I can mean it with like full sort of authenticity in the moment, and it's kind of boring to talk about like, everything's beautiful. Okay. Well let's talk about relative kind of beauty and proximal beauty and things like that. And the same seems to be true of art, because there's a part of me that feels like, you know, just like perspective is critical for art, it also feels like a bit of communication. There's a "miracle of we" aspect to art that feels fundamental. I've got just a paragraph or two here. I'll, I'll read real briefly.

What is art at its most fundamental level? This is one of those perennial questions that we've been asking and re-asking at every stage of the human journey, from the first cave drawings all the way to today's fancy AI algorithms. And now these technologies are once again blurring the lines between art, beauty, and perspective, forcing us to find new ways to answer these questions. It seems to me that art is part of the genuine "miracle of we", where we choose a set of exterior signifiers to communicate a particular referent in our own interior consciousness, reaching out across the infinite void of our own absolute subjectivity in order to make contact with another subject.

And then that signifier lands somewhere on your subjective horizon, where you approach it, you examine it, and you attempt to decipher its meaning. If this signifier successfully corresponds to a similar interior referent within both of us, a new shared reality emerges between us. And this is truly a miracle, I think. In which case, would we say that art requires some element of communication in order to actually qualify as art? Would we then consider all communications to be artistic expressions somewhere in

this spectrum, narrow or wide?

[00:26:05] **Ken:** Yeah, I think you can say that art is, or has, a form of communication. But not all communication is art.

[00:26:22] **Corey:** Okay.

[00:26:25] **Ken:** And so there is a distinction that's sort of important to keep in mind. All communication isn't art, because many forms of communication are linguistic, for example. And we don't necessarily think of linguistics as an artwork. But to use art and create art and create a signifier for another person that communicates meaning, that's very important in most forms of art. And that's why you can also use perspective to hook beauty and art. As you put it, the mathematics of art seems fairly straightforward, and it is fairly straightforward. Those are two roughly distinct meanings of communication. And so as long as we, we keep that in mind, I think we're okay.

[00:27:43] **Corey:** That makes sense. So not all communication is necessarily art. However, like I can say, like doing these shows with you, when I'm engaged with you, I try to communicate artfully, right?

[00:27:56] **Ken:** Right.

[00:27:56] **Corey:** So you can bring some of that creative intelligence, and we've talked about this before as an intelligence, we have an aesthetic intelligence that allows us to perceive beauty, and then we have a creative intelligence that allows us to create beauty, to bring beauty forth. And both of these feel absolutely critical to this conversation we're having right now, both in terms of recognizing art, recognizing beauty, and creating art as a reflection or a communication of beauty. It really requires both of those lines as well as the cognitive. What are you trying to communicate? What sort of, you know, scaffolding are you using to communicate? Along with moral: is your communication creating more goodness in the universe and et cetera. I mean, all these different lines — mathematical intelligence is gonna be huge for certain kinds of art. Verbal intelligence is gonna be huge for other kinds of art. So art really is drawing on sort of this entire process of opening up and all of the lines that this path of opening up comprises of. And all of those become sort of the cosmic address of the artist, as they

are in that moment, trying to communicate whatever it is they happen to be trying to communicate.

[00:29:17] **Ken:** Yeah. Well that makes a certain amount of sense.

[00:29:22] **Corey:** You know Ken, I also think about an example of... I was talking to Bruce Alderman about this, and we're talking about birds, we were talking about bird songs. And this is really relevant cuz I was just telling you before the show, I got back from the zoo yesterday and I always come back sort of in an altered state and slightly transformed when I have these experiences and encounters with these beautiful animals. And that's a whole other conversation, I'd love to actually talk to you sometime about like, I have a good sense of what an amber zoo is, what an orange zoo, what a green zoo is. I wanna know what a turquoise zoo is, and get your thoughts about that. But that's for another conversation. But you know, there is this, when I'm standing in front of one of these incredible animals, I was telling you a story about an elephant where I was making eye contact with an elephant, and you feel this field of intelligence behind their eyes. And it's not an intelligence I can access or understand or sort of extract meaning from, but I can feel it. Right? It's there. There's a really deep interior behind that eye staring back at me. And we're both kind of trying to figure each other out.

So I think about how this conversation applies to the rest of the animal kingdom. So Bruce and I were talking about birds, and he was asking a few questions like, do I think a bird's plumage is "art" you know, there's a lot of birds in, you know, for example rainforests that are very colorful, especially in the males, which is always something that's been interesting to me, that in the animal kingdom, it's always the dudes who are wearing all the makeup and getting all pretty and all that, and then we kind of just invert that in the primate kingdom. But you know, you'll have a beautiful bird with these beautiful markings and colorations and all that. And, you know, Bruce asked me, is that art? And no, I don't think that's art. There's no action that the bird is taking, it's just, that's the bird's physical form that happens to be beautiful.

[00:31:14] **Ken:** Right.

[00:31:14] **Corey:** And then Bruce asked me, okay, so what about...

[00:31:17] **Ken:** You did say, for example, that a peacock which has beautiful plumes, and that's just beauty.

[00:31:26] **Corey:** Right.

[00:31:26] **Ken:** But it's not art.

[00:31:28] **Corey:** That's right.

[00:31:28] **Ken:** But as it starts singing and dancing, and expressing, then that is art.

[00:31:34] **Corey:** Exactly.

[00:31:35] **Ken:** It fits our broad definition.

[00:31:38] **Corey:** Yeah, no, exactly. And what I love about this example is it to me, it shows me that art is not just sort of a human artifact, right? It's not just a human sort of feature. Like, this capacity to perceive and create beauty in the universe is probably, to some increasingly narrow degree, an aspect of all holons, everywhere we find them. Especially once we get to holons with nervous systems, right?

[00:32:09] **Ken:** Yeah. Especially living holons, because they all have intent, they all have a prehension, they all have a certain amount of awareness. And that's the crucial quality that was left out of algorithms, for example.

[00:32:32] **Corey:** Right, yeah. Because algorithms are gonna be purely... I mean, basically it's just electromagnetic, in a certain way, processes guided by some rational structure. But it is all lower right quadrant stuff, it's just objects kind of bumping into other objects. And, you know, that's why I've started to think of these AI programs as, you know, getting back to the metaphor I used earlier of a sunset "I can see a beautiful sunset, but it's not art until I take a picture. In a lot of ways, these AI programs seem to be almost like "sunset generators". They're just creating an endless variety of possible sunsets, of just possible combinations of form, any one of which I can recognize as beautiful, and then even go a step beyond adding a layer of meaning, an

interpretive layer that suddenly transforms it into art.

I use the example of, I did a talk with Ryan Oelke from one of our episodes, Inhabit: Your Bardo, where we were talking about, you know, basically everything in life is temporary. It's all a transition. As you say it, it arises, it tortures us for a little while, and then it passes. And that's one of the only constants that we ever experienced in this universe, is that there are no constants, other than the Ground of Being itself.

And that was one of the things that we talked about, was how all of these sort of, these, these, these temporary grounds that we try to use to sort of create an identity or to feel like a separate self, they're all transitional. They're all temporary. And they inevitably lead to another ground, leading to another ground, et cetera.

So anyway, it came time to create an image, and I was using MidJourney and I had sort of something in mind, I wanted a silhouette going through a psychedelic tunnel to kind of represent the bardo and transition. And it gave me a surprising image. It gave me an image of the figure in the tunnel like I asked it to, but underneath his feet was a series of, like, rugs. Just these little rugs, right, that are all, you know. And that just immediately "â€” I recognized that as resonating with this point that I was trying to make about these temporary grounds. I was like, this is a perfect depiction of sort of, you know, the ego trying to find a place to kind of plant a flag, but like, oh, that's not really very solid, is it? Right? It's never solid, until you get to the Ground of Being, which never enters the manifest world in the first place. And there was, there was that resonance, it was that recognition that, like, this random constellation of forms that the algorithm created for me, is now resonating with a point that I was trying to make in the talk.

That was the moment. As soon as I recognized that, that to me was the moment this image was converted, was transformed, from being a pretty sunset to something that's artful. Because it's like, okay, now I can add in my layer of meaning, and suddenly it's, okay, this is communicating something now.

[00:35:35] **Ken:** Right.

[00:35:36] **Corey:** And it was an accident! That's what I find fascinating about it, it was accidental.

[00:35:42] **Ken:** What was accidental?

[00:35:44] **Corey:** The particular constellation of colors and forms and shapes that it gave me, right? Like I put in a few prompts, it gives me four examples. I might kind of like one of them, but it's an "accident", quote unquote, because again, there's no interior on the other side of the screen trying to make sense of my prompts and put together images in a deliberate way. It's just sort of like, "oh, here's something. Try that. Oh, you don't like it, let's try again." You know? But this particular image, it just so happened like, oh, I recognize something meaningful in that, now it's communicating something, for me, from me, to the rest of the world. And that seemed to be the moment that, sort of, the randomness of the lower right quadrant turned into conscious artist's intent in my upper left quadrant.

[00:36:32] **Ken:** Right.

[00:36:32] **Corey:** Which hopefully communicates meaning through the lower left to our audience, right? Hopefully they see in that image what I saw in it. And if so, that was a successful communication, and therefore, hey, artful.

[00:36:45] **Ken:** Right. Yeah. Makes sense.

[00:36:49] **Corey:** It's fascinating. It really is fascinating. You know, there's another piece of this too, Ken, that I think about, which is how over the last several decades, particularly in the rise of the internet, there's a certain aspect of human creativity that I feel like has been almost devalued, right? Like, it's harder than ever to make a living as a musician, right, to sell albums, because music has just been commodified and it's just background noise now, we're no longer writers, you know, we don't produce books of, you know, we produce copy, we produce marketing copy. There's, there's these aspects of human creativity that just don't feel as valued by the rest of our culture as they did even, let's say, 30, 40 years ago. Part of me wonders, as these AI algorithms get more plentiful, more ubiquitous, we're about to get surrounded by a flood of AI generated art and music and writing, they have AI doing marketing copy for people now. Like, it's, it's

nuts. Right? As we get flooded by that, it makes me wonder whether that's gonna force us to begin valuing human creativity once again. Where human creativity is now suddenly a scarce resource once again because we're surrounded by, you know, I don't wanna say meaningless art, cuz I just talked about how it can be meaningful, but you have to provide the meaning, right? Almost as an observer, you have to provide the meaning. This makes me wonder whether or not there will be a resurgence, a creative resurgence, for organic art, which seems to make sense, you know, from an almost economic point of view. It makes sense why art has gotten so devalued, but it also makes sense how this could be an opportunity for artists to finally almost reclaim what was previously a fairly important role in our society.

And it's ironic to me that creativity and artistry is being devalued at the same time that we have become the most thoroughly entertained culture in human history, right? Like, we're surrounded by TV shows and music and movies and films and video games, and, you know, all of this. We're just surrounded by it, to the point where it's so easy to take for granted. Which only feeds the further devaluation of human creativity. And there's a part of me that suspects like, hmm, this might actually bring human creativity into popular demand again.

[00:39:30] **Ken:** Yeah. Which would be a very nice thing.

[00:39:33] **Corey:** Yeah. That'd be good. That'd be good news. You know, when we first launched Integral Naked back in 2003, about to hit our 20 year reunion soon, you purposely put art at sort of, you know, it was the masthead, right, of this new enterprise that you were creating. Integral Naked began as an aesthetic experience as much as an intellectual experience.

[00:40:02] **Ken:** Yeah.

[00:40:03] **Corey:** The first dialogue you released was with Stuart Davis talking about art like three episodes later, it was with Alex Grey talking about art, and we did all these art galleries and you, you know, I always really loved how you framed that can, and maybe you can unpack that a little bit for us. I always loved how you framed it by saying, artists play a very... I'm sorta paraphrasing here, so you can correct me, you can say it more prettily than I can. But artists have a unique role in our society, largely because they are given permission in a way that other occupations aren't given

permission, to sort of seek out new frontiers, to sort of, you know, as you often talk about, if your development is either too low or too high, you will be punished by your surrounding culture.

Artists seem to be an exception to that, to that rule. Artists are allowed to kind of pioneer, and to almost pull visions of the future back into this reality, in a way that we don't allow other professions to do.

[00:41:08] **Ken:** Yeah.

[00:41:09] **Corey:** I mean, if a doctor was just like going out there and trying all these avant garde medical techniques, killing 9 outta 10 patients on the table, just we wouldn't allow that. You know? But an artist, they have kind of carte blanche. And I always thought that was a really smart way to frame sort of an any integral platform that we happen to be developing. Make art central.

[00:41:31] **Ken:** And that's what it was. It was, I mean, there was artwork on almost every page and it was really quite beautiful, and very creative, and it included everything from like Buddhist Tantras and how that was reworked into a creative fashion. It even had pictures of me, nude, surrounded by fire...

[00:42:10] **Corey:** You're such a show off, Ken.

[00:42:12] **Ken:** Yeah, I know. Somebody had just drawn that picture and I thought, well, what the hell, might as well try it. We had animals, horses, all sorts of things. And I wanted that because of just what you were saying, that it allowed an image of the future, and a creative future, and a future that could come our way. And I wanted those images to be central to what Integral Naked was doing. So I didn't want what was central to be just a bunch of intellectual stuff. And so I went for art, and it was a great idea. And it worked just beautifully. And when we start up Integral Institute again, I wanna start the same way that I started Integral Naked. In other words, I want it to be artistic, and I'll know it when I see it.

[00:43:39] **Corey:** I'll know it when I see it. That's right. That's right. Well, and it really was critical. You know, and of course one of the interesting stories here is that we've

been through multiple platforms over the years, beginning with Integral Naked, and multiple variations of integral life. And that throughline, that precedent that you set on day one of Integral Naked, I've at least to the best of my abilities, have tried to carry that through all of the content we've ever published. In fact, like my favorite job as a producer over these last 20 years has been, once I actually have the edited media, and I've got a nice, you know, hopefully artfully written talk page, one of my favorite things is finding a visual that can communicate whatever the essence or the core of this, you know, dialogue, or this presentation, or whatever it might be. Like, how can I take the core of this piece that we're publishing, and try to identify an aesthetic throughline that will create an almost immediate sort of recognition for our audience, for anyone who happens to be looking at it. Right? Like, oh, we're talking about, you know, death and reincarnation. What is the perfect image that I can use to convey the beauty and not just the terror, for example, of that experience. So like that, that sort of...

[00:45:05] **Ken:** Bardo realm.

[00:45:07] **Corey:** Yeah, bardo realm. Totally, totally. And it's just an example of, like, how that is such a rewarding process, of taking these large pieces of, you know, sort of textual material, dialogical material, or written material, whatever form it happens to be taking, and then wrapping it in this frame, right? That's what I'm doing, is I'm creating a frame for the publication, whatever it happens to be. And hopefully that frame is as beautiful as the contents of that particular artifact right. To me. So that's been, you know, you set that precedent on day one, and that's been something again I've probably done it better on some days and worse than other days, but either way that's been sort of my intention is to carry that through everything that we do.

[00:45:57] **Ken:** And speaking of some forms of linguistics being beautiful, we forgot to mention poetry.

[00:46:11] **Corey:** Oh yeah, that.

[00:46:13] **Ken:** And that is pure linguistics in as beautiful a form as the poet can make it. And some of these forms are just exquisitely beautiful. Whether it's Walt Whitman or Dante, or any of those, are absolutely exquisitely beautiful. And I remember particularly when I wrote the sort of third of my 30 odd books, I'd written, like SES, I would always

finish it up with trying to write it in a poetic way.

[00:47:00] **Corey:** Yes,

[00:47:01] **Ken:** And I got more positive comments on that than on anything else I would do. They would say, I love the poetry at the end, because it was occasionally fairly beautiful and that really moved people. And so that's a good example of beauty being put in an art form of linguistics, and it's some of the most valued types of beautiful linguistics that we have.

[00:47:45] **Corey:** Totally agree. If I can kind of hold a mirror to you for a little while longer, Ken, that's always been one of my favorite aspects of your writing, is that you oscillate between prose and poetry in an almost seamless way, and you're doing interesting things when you do. Because my experience of your work has been, you will write multiple paragraphs that are basically laying out the beams and the struts of whatever point it is you're trying to make in that chapter, or that section, or what have you. And it's very clear prose. I mean, you know, I've learned a lot by studying sort of your writing style, and even to the point of like, how many arguments is Ken putting into a single sentence.

[00:48:33] **Ken:** Right.

[00:48:33] **Corey:** Right? Versus, like, breaking these arguments out so that it flows in a more logical way and there's no, like, jumps of reasoning or what have you. Like you have a very deliberate way of writing prose, which feels in a certain kind of way, not at all in a negative sense, but reductive in the sense that you're showing us the parts of the argument. You're laying all the parts out on the table. And then you'll write this, you'll transition into a more poetic mode that takes all of those parts and pulls them together into a whole. It feels holistic, right? It feels like that's what you're doing is oscillating between part and whole, between sort of the beams and struts reductionism of, like, I need to make a rational argument with several moving interlocked pieces, but then you're taking all of that and pulling it into a higher whole, which actually allows me as a reader to kind of grok it a little bit better. It's almost, you know, this is why we call it "vision logic". Like, it's doing both. It takes all the logic you just laid out for us, and then pulls it together into a vision that I can almost see in my, you know what I mean? It's like I can see how this, this thing you just spelled out fits into this concept, which fits... and it

feels almost geometric. There is a visual kind of aspect to it. And that was always one of the things I really appreciated about your creativity and your approach to this kind of writing, because it's not something we see, especially these days, a whole lot.

[00:50:11] **Ken:** Yeah.

[00:50:12] **Corey:** That's cool.

[00:50:13] **Ken:** Well, thank you.

[00:50:14] **Corey:** Totally. And that's something we, I think, often hear from our audience as being one of the things that, you know, led them to you in the first place. They read, you know... sometimes it'll just be like some quote that they see in a pretty picture out there in the internet, and they're like, "wow, that's really, that's really beautiful", and they lean in and they learn about all the rest of your work, and suddenly they've got like 50 pound books that they're breaking their back lugging around with them.

[00:50:40] **Ken:** Right. And of course there's, um, beauty in music, and particularly for some reason, classical music, Bach and Beethoven and Mozart. These are just exquisitely beautiful structures. And I don't know what you would call musical notes except musical notes. I don't know, they're not like forms of linguistics, or they're not forms of mathematics usually, but they're just some form, and learning to play that is a very difficult thing. But the ones that do it well bring an enormous amount of beauty and it's art, because it's beauty acted on to give art. And that's just exquisite work, and I really have gone through periods in my life when I've just become completely infatuated with that kind of music. Of course, I like popular modern music as well. I mean, the Beatles, who doesn't love The Beatles?

[00:52:25] **Corey:** Seriously.

[00:52:27] **Ken:** Or even the Rolling Stones or any of those types.

[00:52:33] **Corey:** Yep. For me, it's Nine Inch Nails. Nine Inch Nails has been in a lot of ways my, you know, like I, I grew up with my parents' music, Beatles and Led Zeppelin

and Pink Floyd and all that, and that's fundamental to me. For my generation, Nine Inch Nails, Faith No More, these are the bands that have spoken to me the most.

[00:52:53] **Ken:** Nine Inch Nails, did you say?

[00:52:54] **Corey:** Yeah. Yeah. Trent Reznor.

[00:52:56] **Ken:** Oh yeah. Trent Reznor is amazing.

[00:52:58] **Corey:** Yeah. He's a genius. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, and we should do an entire show.... you know, you and I have had a great, we have a clip out there somewhere talking about the Beatles for like 25 minutes or so. And I love talking about this stuff with you. You know, one of my favorite memories with you, Ken, is going into your loft, and you had Midnight Oil blaring on the television, and you were just gushing about how brilliant these guys were, and just how much you resonated with their music. And, you know, some of my favorite chapters from One Taste was you talking about music and, uh, I remember one of the first ones was talking about someone invited you to a rave and wanted you to take MDMA with them, and you're just like, well, it's not for me, but you have fun, kids.

[00:53:41] **Ken:** No, I intentionally, because I was going through a period where I really liked modern pop, rock, hip hop, that kind of stuff, that I would at least once a month put an entry where I would just list all of the names of the bands that I loved. And it was quite an extensive list! And I thoroughly enjoyed doing that. And I also, to sort of brag a bit, I wanted people to know that I knew all of that! Cause that was like, you know, that was cool!

[00:54:34] **Corey:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:54:35] **Ken:** So cool, when I wrote all of that stuff.

[00:54:40] **Corey:** That's really funny. I think a lot of that is in your book, One Taste, which actually sort of aligns with the point I was making earlier. So One Taste is this

beautiful book that you released in, I wanna say 98, 99 maybe.

[00:54:53] **Ken:** Yeah.

[00:54:54] **Corey:** And it was your journal.

[00:54:56] **Ken:** Yeah.

[00:54:56] **Corey:** And talking about the devaluing of human creativity, if you were to do that book today, it would be a blog that's on the website for free. Right? And you wouldn't make any like, you know, book-sized revenue from it, it would just, it would just be a blog and sort of get lost in the shuffle with all the other blogs that are out there because it's just, there's endless permutations of free material on the internet, because our creativity's been so sort of commodified.

[00:55:23] **Ken:** Right.

[00:55:23] **Corey:** But that's a great example, cuz there have been times, Ken, where I've wanted to write you an email kinda like, "have you thought about taking One Taste and actually just releasing it as a blog?" And then I'm like, no, of course you don't, because you wanna sell the book, you don't...

[00:55:36] **Ken:** Right. But I mean, I've thought about doing blogs, so, you know, who knows?

[00:55:46] **Corey:** You should! I'll encourage you to do so. That'd be a fun project. You know, and, and talking about music is a lot of fun too, Ken, because it almost requires a different set of, I don't know, language or terminology to make sense of music. And it's probably true of film too, like any of these... I just consider them sort of "temporal arts", they're arts that unfold over time, right? As opposed to like looking at a picture on a wall, which is unchanging and, you know, my interpretation of it might change, but the content is unchanging.

[00:56:19] **Ken:** Right.

[00:56:19] **Corey:** And it sort of requires a different sensibility to talk about. And one of the things I've noticed with music is how difficult it can be to use stage theory to make sense of music. We can talk about it generally, like I can look at the lyrics, for example, the verbal output of a band like Radiohead, and be like, "oh, well this might be more green altitude, maybe this is pressing into teal." You know, you can do that kind of thing. Yeah. But when it comes to the music itself, it's harder to do that because you know, the music is a little bit less cognitive in a way. And that's not to say that stage materials are only describing cognitive development, but it's really useful to describe cognitive development. When it comes to sort of the aesthetic development, it's a little bit tricky. It's like, okay, well, the instrument he's playing this on is an agrarian instrument. Well, that doesn't tell me too much. Or the amount of complexity that he brings into his composition. Well, that tells me something, but that doesn't really, it doesn't feel useful to me.

What feels useful is talking about music and thinking about it in terms of both lyrical content, which can be pegged developmentally versus almost emotional content, where something like the chakras feel like a more rewarding way to kind of dissect the music. So I'll often talk about heavy metal, for example, which people often think of, you know, 1980s thrash metal, which I totally grew up with. They think about that as being, you know, almost like this is red altitude music. And I'm like, well, hang on. Wait. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait here. Because actually, if we actually take a closer look at, you know, the content of the music, of heavy metal music, particularly in the eighties, a lot of it was protest music in the face of the Cold War. So the theme of a lot of these albums was fear of like nuclear annihilation. And the music is, you know, intended to be as aggressive as those fears were. And this is why I say heavy metal kind of went to crap after the Berlin Wall came down, like once there was no more Cold War, heavy metal musicians just kind of ran outta things to say. Right? This is, but this is interesting cuz you get like this third chakra energetic hit from the aggression of the music, but the lyrics are oftentimes orange or even green in terms of how they're protesting sort of the horrors of, you know, the prospect of nuclear annihilation.

[00:58:49] **Ken:** Right.

[00:58:49] **Corey:** So it's like, even heavy metal, you can't peg it easily to a single stage. It has more complexity to it than that.

[00:58:56] **Ken:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:58:58] **Corey:** I feel the same way with hip hop, right? Hip hop, we can look at hip hop music as, well first off, the lyrical content, Jesus. I love all hip-hop music, right, and that lyrical content can go from magenta to turquoise.

[00:59:14] **Ken:** Yep.

[00:59:14] **Corey:** You got a whole range of lyrical possibilities that you can bring to the music. The music itself, interestingly, is largely post-modern. In the sense that, you know, hiphop music, hiphop instrumentation, really followed the innovation of the turntable as a musical instrument. And this was a different kind of musical instrument, because the notes, the musical notes that I'm using are little pieces and snippets of other people's art that I synthesize in, you know, sort of a post-modern way, and create something new out of.

Which brings us back to kind of what these AI art algorithms are doing. They're doing something very similar, taking all of these examples of human created art that are already out there, pulling it together in hopefully a new and novel way. Which is fascinating to me.

And this is my theory, Ken, because, you know, I can be an arrogant Gen Xer sometimes, right? And I look down on the millennials and the Zoomers, and one of the things I "I'm only half kidding here, but one of the things I often say is like, what new genres of music have you guys created? Because Gen X we created, you know, hip hop, punk music, electronic music. And of course we created these genres by creating new musical instruments. When, you know, the turntable created hip hop, just like the electric guitar created rock and roll as we know it in the 20th century. So at every step there's a new artifact, you know, that gets created out of the lower right quadrant, that becomes an instrument that makes possible a whole new genre of self-expression. And those we can talk about with stage theory. This is an agrarian instrument. This is an

industrial instrument. This is an electronic instrument.

[01:01:00] **Ken:** Absolutely.

[01:01:02] **Corey:** Fascinating. Well Ken, this has been awesome. This has been . One of our shortest, but I think really rich episodes. We packed a lot of material into here.

[01:01:12] **Ken:** Yeah.

[01:01:13] **Corey:** And it's fascinating, and I love talking about this stuff with you. And I do think we should do a whole music related episode down the line. I think we'd have a lot of fun. I just wanna hear you riff about The Beatles for an hour.

[01:01:25] **Ken:** Right.

[01:01:27] **Corey:** But in the meantime, my friend, I love you so much, and thank you, this has been so much fun, as always.

[01:01:32] **Ken:** Yeah. I love you too. And it was a terrific time.

[01:01:38] **Corey:** Yeah, it was a lot of fun. And if I can actually, real quick, I'm gonna add a little personal plug at the end here, as we're talking about the interface of art and technology. I just launched a new website. It's called VisionLogix.com. "Logix" with an "x" at the end, dot com. Where I am featuring all of my woodworking. You can see pictures of previous pieces that I've made over the last several years. You can commission new pieces. I've got a number... for example, Ken, one of my most popular pieces is the four quadrants, where I basically, what I tried to do was take these big beautiful ideas that you've gifted the world with, and trying to pull them from, you know, from the causal into the subtle, into gross matter/energy, and create a beautiful frame for it. That's been one of my most popular carvings. I got a bunch of other series as well. So I invite anyone who's watching us right now to go check that out. If you like any of the pieces, you can order them on the site, or you can commission something from me. So a little personal plug there.

All right, Ken. I love you, man. I'll talk to you soon.

[01:02:44] **Ken:** Okay, pal!

[01:02:45] **Corey:** All right, bye.

[01:02:46] **Ken:** Bye-Bye.