

## TOK Essay Extract 2: Do we need custodians of knowledge?

### Do we need custodians of knowledge?

I N T R O D U C T I O N	<p>In this essay, a custodian is defined as an entity responsible for safeguarding and maintaining knowledge. There exists a clear societal demand and function for custodians of knowledge, as they serve a role in sustaining the authenticity of knowledge and creating trust in the transfer of knowledge, particularly to less expert communities. Custodians also support the creation of knowledge among experts. However, the necessity of custodians can be questioned, as their presence may complicate knowledge access and production. Therefore, the need for custodianship varies based on the communities involved and the custodians' nature. This essay argues that the demand for knowledge custodians in the arts and natural sciences outweighs the challenges they pose, highlighting an existing need for custodians.</p>
S E C T I O N  1  S U P P O R T I N G  A R G U M E N T	<p>In the arts, custodians of knowledge traditionally serve an important role in preserving and providing art for the masses, thereby supporting the transfer of artistic knowledge. Art associations, galleries, and museums serve as custodians for artistic knowledge by conserving and guarding physical artworks for people to experience, but also guarding the definition and value of art by making choices about the works to be included and presented. This type of custodianship can be considered necessary and useful for transferring artistic knowledge to people without expertise in arts, as the art curated by the custodians is known to have 'artistic value.'</p> <p>Custodians of artistic knowledge, such as art associations, galleries, and museums, can also provide additional information about the artist's intentions and work's value. For those unfamiliar with art interpretation, this extra information often enhances their emotional and cognitive responses, making the art experience go beyond just visual appeal. This is important because all items correctly classified as art can contribute to human knowledge, and <a href="#">the cognitive value of art lies in the emotional responses it generates in observers</a>. Custodians of artistic knowledge can create a feeling of seeing and experiencing worthwhile art, which in itself can create a stronger emotional reaction to the artworks.</p>



	<p>This demand for custodians can be seen in the public reaction to art made by artificial intelligence. When an artwork is observed to be less creative and meaningful, it causes less intrinsic emotional interpretations and reactions and therefore lacks contribution to human knowledge and understanding of the arts. For example, a psychological study with 2965 participants published in <a href="#">Nature</a> magazine found that humans had a negative bias toward art labeled as AI-made compared to art labeled as human-made, even if the art was practically indistinguishable or kept constant. When art is thought to be created by AI, it is automatically perceived as less creative which gives it less value among the observers.</p> <p>This subjectivity in our perception of art proves the need for custodians of artistic knowledge. When knowledge of art and its background is protected and maintained by custodians, the common observer can gain levels of understanding beyond visual experience by knowing and trusting that the pieces must have artistic value. By enhancing human appreciation and understanding of art, custodians of artistic knowledge facilitate the transfer of information to non-artistic communities, effectively fulfilling an important need.</p>
<p>S E C T I O N  2  C O U N T E R A R G U M E</p>	<p>However, institutions that act as custodians for artistic knowledge can be seen as restrictive in artistic communities. ‘Official’ bodies maintaining artworks, such as established museums and galleries, can hinder artistic creativity by having certain entrenched notions and biases of what art should be and rejecting other types of art.</p> <p>A notable example of a conservative custodian of artistic knowledge is the Künstlerhaus Genossenschaft, a prominent Viennese art institution that significantly influenced the <a href="#">Vienna Secession</a> movement in the late 19th century. The Künstlerhaus rose to prominence as Vienna’s primary exhibition venue, and thus membership of the institution was essential for established artists of the time. Their annual exhibition selection process often favoured traditional academic painting over impressionist and modernist styles. Many notable artists of the time, such as Gustav Klimt, started to oppose the conservative institution, believing it caused ‘stagnation of the arts.’ This led to the artists starting new societies, such as the Siebener Club, resulting in the Vienna Secession movement.</p>



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This serves as an important example of the power that official and established custodians can have on contemporary artistic expression. The opposition from artists highlights the challenges custodians of knowledge pose to the creation and development of artistic knowledge due to their focus on preserving traditional art forms and specific ideas of what art should be.

However, the Vienna Secession movement also demonstrates how new art movements can give rise to new custodian bodies created by the artists themselves, protecting the movements and helping to disseminate new artistic knowledge. This indicates that having custodians of artistic knowledge can serve a purpose in the production of new knowledge in the arts, suggesting a need for custodians within communities of artists.

