Latent Scape: Video, Photography, & Painting

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■Problem Awareness:

Throughout history and across cultures, countless individuals from various fields have struggled to discover **the value of being human**. On **a macro level**, this quest remains largely unchanged. For example, the wisdom of ancient sages still holds relevance today. Just as the laws of physics remain constant, the principles guiding human action seem to persist, remaining applicable despite the passage of time. However, on **a micro level**, the situation is far more dynamic. Even if a universal strategy is assumed, it is essential to diversify tactics according to the situation. One can hope to survive in today's fierce, ever-changing competition through tailored approaches.

Ultimately, new eras demand **new tactics**. While it is natural for people to seek the value of being human in any context, how they pursue this value varies depending on the **individual, circumstances, and context**. Ideally, people strive to find personally or historically more appropriate methods at any given moment.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial to reassess, establish, and comprehensively pursue the value of being human. Looking back, the introduction of **photographic technology** in the early 19th century diversified the future of painting. Some artists had an epiphany: "Ah, photography has become the expert in objects, representation, and realism—so I must become an expert in **concepts, abstraction, and expression**." Similarly, the advent of **intelligent machines** in the early 21st century demands humanity's swift and creative response. Some have realized, "Ah, machines have mastered information, memory, and computation—so I must become an expert in **creativity, criticism, and direction**." Such realizations are essential for survival moving forward.

Now, the curtain rises! As the boundaries between humans and machines blur, the exhilarating sense of crisis is the spark for change. Finally, the stage is set for **a great challenge— "by humans, for humans, and of humans."**

■Solutions:

As part of this great challenge, this exhibition focuses on the value of being human—something that has become increasingly essential today. At some point in life, everyone inevitably faces the question: **"What kind of person should I be in this world?"** At a fundamental level, we don't just want to live; we want to live well and, ideally, live even better. Although ultimate happiness depends on **one's mindset**, how we respond to this desire differs. Some close their eyes and ears to avoid challenges, while others persevere stubbornly, fighting forward.

Here are my key strategies and tactics to address this challenge:

1. A Strategic, Teleological Perspective:

The ultimate value of being human lies in becoming **a creative and critical subject**—a master of meaning-making and a capable director of one's life. This noble aspiration involves viewing the world as a field where we direct and lead, shaping both personal meaning and collective narratives. Many individuals have likely embraced a similar attitude in their own words and ways.

2. A Tactical, Methodological Perspective:

The practical wisdom for living well involves skillfully maintaining balance according to **the law of yin and yang**, regulating energy flow for mutual growth. For example, when thinking or feeling, it's essential to

maintain a sense of balance between sameness and difference. Depending on the situation, one should also exercise flexibility by adjusting the weight given to each element.

Effective decision-making requires leveraging appropriate and practical strategies to respond to circumstances wisely. Consider this: Kimchi stew is always Kimchi stew (its essential value). However, there's the nostalgic taste of traditional Kimchi stew (yin) and the thrill of trying a new version (yang)—both are valuable in their own ways (harmonious energy flow). But the key question today is: What do I eat? Depending on the moment, one must wisely adjust (rebalancing the weight). Some days call for sameness, others for difference—that's the real flavor of life.

What Is the Key Challenge of the 21st Century?

The most significant challenge we now face is **the arrival of artificial intelligence**—machines that think like humans. Is this a new task to solve, or is it a new team member joining us? Either way, **machines offer a mirror for self-reflection**. By observing machines, we can better understand ourselves. The goal is to find happiness by either drawing boundaries with machines or working alongside them.

This interaction offers an opportunity to rediscover what we excel at, what we truly want to do, and—most importantly—why we want to do it. We might even stumble upon new insights through dialogue and reflection with machines. Like a magic crystal ball, machines can vividly project various images and possibilities onto the screen of our minds, helping us see things we hadn't imagined before.

■Curatorial Intent:

The title of this exhibition is "**Latent Scape**." It explores the fundamental principles underlying archetypal structures embedded in various landscapes and their real-world applications. Metaphorically, "Latent Scape" can be described in the following ways: it is a "**seed**" of thought, full of excitement, as its future growth is unknown. It is a kind of "**DNA blueprint**"—a repository of probabilistic information, expressing the features it may eventually manifest sequentially or sporadically. It is an "**absolute formula**" containing the operational principles one must master to become a virtuoso. Above all, it is an "**X-function**," with latent possibilities that take shape through imagination, care, and interaction. It is a "**vessel**" capable of gracefully holding any content we desire. Think of it as a "**mold**", always ready to reproduce any desired shape, or as a "**compass**" to help us find direction when we are lost in life's complexity. It is also a "**mentor**," generously reminding us to stay true to our essence amidst countless options and uncertainties. Finally, it serves as a "**multivitamin**"—a condensed essence extracted from many experiences, enriching the soul.

The "Latent Scape" concept draws inspiration from the AI term "**Latent Space**." In this context, it refers to processes that aggregate and compress information to generate outputs efficiently. Think of it like "**cultivating crops**": success depends on careful planning, fertile soil, abundant resources, skillful labor, and sincere effort. Or it can be likened to a "**talent agency's project**" of discovering a promising, undeveloped singer and meticulously honing their abilities to produce a star.

From the outset, machines have learned by imitating and reproducing human behavior. Therefore, studying these systems offers **a clearer understanding of human thinking**. In this sense, a machine serves as a mirror reflecting humanity. For example, consider **the technical process of generating images from text**. When prompted with "**Visualize the image of a deity**," the encoder is activated. It breaks down the concept, dispersing abstract fragments (noise) in multiple directions through a diffusion process. Next, the "Latent Space" is engaged, compressing these fragments into a manageable format. It reflects specific embedded information and processes the data through multiple layers of algorithms. Finally, the decoder integrates the fragments, condensing them coherently, and outputs a denoised, tangible image.

Yet, the world is in constant flux, and everyone is unique. Our responses vary depending on biology, environment, personal values, and societal norms. Naturally, the deity you imagine will differ from the one I imagine—and so will the one generated by AI. The specific outputs produced by generative systems can be seen as **random variations**, like those in a multi-universe model. Different conditions, parameters, and intensities yield distinct results.

Latent Scape as a Training Ground for Mastery.
Depending on how we engage with it, "Latent Scape" can serve as an "**artistic training ground**"—a space for becoming a **"master" of our own lives**. It can function as a "**library**" or "**sanctuary**" for the mind. The more complex the world becomes, the more essential it is to understand fundamental principles. For example, although people's digestive systems differ in appearance, the core principles of digestion remain the same. Similarly, a gastroenterologist is an expert in these shared principles, applying them to each individual case. Just as a fish-shaped mold can repeatedly produce identical pastries, the wise approach is to teach people how to fish rather than merely handing them a fish.

What matters, therefore, is not to be misled by superficial appearances but to adopt a **typological approach**, recognizing shared structures that unify complexity. When things become overwhelming, returning to the basics is often helpful. What once seemed unclear and uncharted territory may gradually become more understandable. By immersing ourselves in various manifestations of "Latent Scape," we can cultivate our aesthetic sensibility and gain deeper insight into ourselves and the world.

■Exhibition Content:
In our minds, **perception is the landscape, and thought is the world.** The exhibition "Latent Scape" offers an opportunity to explore these mental landscapes through various manifestations and stages, encouraging a deeper understanding of both concept and reality.

Metaphorically speaking, **the mind itself is a latent landscape.** And each of my artworks is like my child. Like an embryo, the "**seed of thought**" begins as an indistinct mass of traces, impossible to classify. As it progresses through stages of growth—akin to a fetus—it evolves, sometimes maintaining the original structure, other times producing unexpected and opposing elements, or even transforming into something entirely new.

This exhibition focuses on **three major types of latent landscapes,** each representing different dimensions of thought and perception:

1. Transcendental Landscape: Infinite Universe
This landscape explores **the insight of "savoring the beyond."** It reflects on the vastness of existence, where multiple universes coexist, stirring awe and humility. In my **video works,** countless images are lined up together to evoke this sense of infinity—a sublime, flowing experience of humility and fascination. It's as if "the many versions of me" exist simultaneously across various universes while the current "I" is among them. This landscape raises the question: **Which version is the real me?**

It connects to the **"post-consciousness" stage**, a state of awareness beyond conventional perception. It offers a panoramic view of existence, examining reality from a system-wide perspective.

2. Figurative Landscape: Virtual Reality
This landscape represents **the insight of "I am special."** My **photographic works** express our media-saturated world's seductive yet unsettling irony, where virtuality and reality blend. Just as dreams feel real,

ordinary moments can suddenly become idealized visions. It reflects the tension between everyday life and fantasy, underscoring how media shapes our perception of reality. This landscape invites the question: **What spectacle will captivate us today?**

It corresponds to the **"pseudo-consciousness" stage**, an immersive experience of semi-real awareness shaped by environmental interaction.

3. Abstract Landscape: Primordial Dreams

This landscape taps into **the insight of "everyone is the same."** In my **paintings,** I explore latent landscapes in their nascent states—ambiguous and barely formed—representing ideas that are beginning to stir or progress through initial stages. Like the thrill of a dream in its purest form, these works convey the excitement of emptiness, which allows space to be filled freely. This landscape asks: **What will I imagine today?**

It corresponds to the **"pre-consciousness" stage,** where potentiality takes shape by expressing innate tendencies.

The Empty Canvas: A Latent Beginning

Every empty canvas represents the beginning of a new latent landscape. Much like **sand art,** where a handful of sand is spread, shaped, and smoothed into patterns, each brushstroke on a blank canvas gradually transforms **abstract fragments (noise)** into a **coherent visual intention (denoise)**.

Through this process, I experience and share the **ecstasy of artistic creation,** where perception shifts according to one's mindset. It is a vibrant, immersive art journey I wholeheartedly enjoy and wish to share with others.

In "Latent Scape," we embrace the opportunity to wander through these different landscapes, discovering the art on display and deeper insights into our inner worlds.

■Methods of Expression:

To visualize the concept and themes of "Latent Scape," I employed three distinct media forms in this exhibition: **video, photography, and painting.** Each medium reflects a unique methodology but shares the common characteristic of gradual development, accumulating individual parts into a complete whole.

1. Video: Stop-Motion Project

The video works are based on a "Stop-Motion Project." Here's how the process unfolds:

I begin with original photographs or paintings.
I generate numerous variations based on these originals using AI image generation tools, producing many derivative images.
I then select and arrange these images sequentially, editing them into a cohesive video.

This sequence of similar yet distinct images creates a dreamlike flow, as the subtle differences between frames produce an evocative, organic motion—almost as if the visuals are pulsating with life.

2. Photography: Cityscape Project

The photography works are part of a "Cityscape Project." This project captures the interplay between urban landscapes, both real and imagined. Here's how the process unfolds:

I take and archive numerous photographs from various locations.
I select and reconstruct these images based on specific themes to create a visually cohesive result.
The final image reflects a portrait of contemporary media culture, blending reality and fantasy to capture the paradoxical emotions of attraction and anxiety.

This project includes three distinct working methods:

·○**Photoshop-assisted projects,** based on previous methods.
·○**AI-assisted projects,** where AI tools complement the creative process.
·○**AI-led projects,** where AI takes the lead in generating the primary creative output.

These works explore the ambiguity of perception in the modern media age, where the real and the virtual merge seamlessly.

3. Painting: Painting Strokes (畵劃) Project
The painting follows a "Painting Strokes Project" approach, emphasizing spontaneity and deliberate refinement. The process is as follows:

I begin with explosive, uncontrolled brushstrokes—capturing fleeting moments that are difficult to control.
Over an extended period, I layer and refine the strokes, building depth through thick textures.

This process reflects the Zen-like philosophy of sudden enlightenment followed by gradual cultivation (頓悟漸修). In this approach, each brushstroke (一劃) contributes to the whole, embodying both the instantaneous and the cumulative nature of creation.

Over time, these layers form a structure, much like muscles sculpted through training, creating a palpable sense of vitality in the finished work.

Common Characteristics: From Latent Potential to Manifest Form
As a child grows through different stages into adulthood, my works' latent landscapes evolve through gradual development and refinement processes. The three media—**video, photography, and painting**—all share this method of **accumulating individual parts into an eventual whole**. The final shape remains unknown until the process is complete, reflecting the unpredictability of both art and life.

In many ways, life mirrors this creative journey. As the work progresses, unexpected outcomes often emerge, deviating from initial plans. Similarly, every stage of a growing child's life holds inherent value, just as every brushstroke, photo, or frame carries significance in the overall artistic process. This **open-ended, evolving methodology** celebrates the beauty of becoming—whether in art, life, or landscapes waiting to unfold.

■**Personal Motivation: A Sudden Question**
Why am I so deeply immersed in this work? As I prepared the pieces for this exhibition, five emotions emerged that embody the root causes driving my creative process. These emotions reflect the complexities of working in an era of accelerating technology, endless choices, and shifting artistic roles.

1. Doubt: Am I Doing the Right Thing?

I constantly ask myself: "Am I on the right path?" Just as trying hard at something you are not good at might only get you to second place, focusing on your strengths might make you a winner. Machines excel in areas suited to them, and humans should focus on what only they can do. The question is: **Am I doing what I'm best at?**

I want to believe I am. But avoiding regret later requires **continuous self-examination.** Like the ancient wisdom says: "Know thyself." I must keep questioning my choices to stay true to my strengths and purpose.

2. Anxiety: Will There Be Work for Me?

The growing presence of technology in our daily lives brings a gnawing fear: "Will I still have work to do?" Machines are already indispensable, and their performance only improves with accelerating speed. I worry I could be left behind.

Machines are designed to **imitate humans,** and at times, they seem to understand me better than I understand myself by analyzing massive amounts of data. But our relationship is not about simple replacement, like splitting a fixed pie. New jobs keep appearing—roles no one could have imagined just a few years ago.

As long as I stay aware of trends and seek new opportunities, there will always be meaningful work. I remind myself: "Everything will be okay."

3. Frustration: Will I Always Be a Technician?

With **AI-generated images,** I can now endlessly transform and remix my existing work like an abundant buffet of possibilities. As countless talented chefs gather around, it feels like I'm a **director working with AI as an actor**—selecting and editing performances that best match my creative intent. Sometimes, unexpected improvisations by the AI surprise me, leading to new insights.

This technology redefines the traditional concept of **originality,** which used to belong exclusively to the individual artist. Just as an actor can appear in multiple films but take on distinct roles, context gives my AI-assisted works their meaning.

Rather than focusing on technical execution, my role increasingly shifts toward **conceptual curation and direction**. The value lies in seeing the bigger picture and orchestrating it with purpose. "Lead the way."

4. Fear: Will People Still Care About My Work?

In the art world, the difference between **authenticity and imitation** is significant, and the value of a work hinges on the **artist's reputation.** NFTs are an example of this—connecting an artist's identity to the digital blockchain, establishing ownership, and generating value.

AI can produce images at incredible speed, which means the number of works tied to a single artist could increase. But **supply and demand** still hold. Moreover, if society values the fantasy of individualism, **the artist's selection and touch** will retain their power. Even in a world of infinite possibilities, I am the only one who can live my reality. No matter how many versions of me exist, I alone experience the pain of pinching my cheek.

The **photographs and paintings** in this exhibition are tangible, physical objects—chosen from countless alternatives and materialized into reality. This makes them meaningful. "Own it."

5. Despair: What If Everything Becomes Boring?

A lingering fear: "What if I achieve everything and life becomes dull?" When future hopes are fulfilled, boredom creeps in, and life feels uninspiring without the excitement of new dreams.

That's why I love creating new works—my children. Thinking about their growth reignites my passion as an artist. In this exhibition, **my three 'children'—video, photography, and painting—come together** to explore themes of **universe, reality, and dreams.** They form **a triangular formation** that expands the artistic dialogue in the age of AI.

I hope they continue to grow, developing unique identities by deepening, challenging, or even reversing existing artistic conventions. Through their evolution, may they keep the magic of art alive, enriching our lives with meaning. "Enjoy it."

■**Public Intent: Key Effects**
This exhibition offers **four meaningful outcomes** rooted in a sense of purpose. These reflect social, personal, artistic, and philosophical perspectives, guiding how we can coexist with technology, nurture human value, and find deeper meaning in creation.

1. Social Aspect: A Brighter, More Dynamic World
In an ideal world, "Enemies are unnecessary when we can be friends." Just like friends, **Natural Intelligence (NI)** and **Artificial Intelligence (AI), Natural Consciousness (NC)** and **Artificial Consciousness (AC),** as well as **Natural Labor (NL)** and **Artificial Labor (AL)**, complement each other by doing what each does best. They become partners, even merging at times.

Together, they help me thrive. These dynamics illustrate **a synergistic coexistence,** where each plays to its strengths to support the other. The goal is collaboration, not competition. So, let's make friends— between human and machine, between natural and artificial. For instance, Phone numbers are meant for AI to remember; becoming fit is something I need to achieve.

2. Personal Aspect: Strengthening Self-Esteem
Humans are privileged with a unique (often overblown) sense of **self-awareness**—the belief that "I am myself." Even if this might be a delusion from a technical standpoint, it is undeniably a gift and an opportunity. Instead of trying to eliminate it as an error, we should embrace and enjoy the special value of being human.

Our preferences, desires, and the satisfaction of pursuing them are defining markers of who we are. Unlike machines driven by efficiency and logic, people thrive in uncertainty, novelty, and absurd risks. We often turn the tide by embracing the unexpected, which might seem irrational to AI.

Though artificial consciousness is advancing, it still cannot replicate the **emotional nuances** that humans experience. For example, the profound emotion of a lump in your throat? Machines can't feel it. Arrogance or pride? That's a human thing.

3. Artistic Aspect: Flourishing Creativity
The "**magic of art**" transforms materials not inherently artistic into profound expressions of beauty. This process is one of the highest forms of human achievement. However, for art to exist, there must also be a **meaning-making process**—where the artist insists, claims, and affirms that something is art. In **our human-centered world**, this authority belongs to the artist.

For example, two people see the sun—one cries, and the other smiles. Their expressions are art, but the sun itself is not. Art requires human involvement to become an art. Similarly, even if a machine perfectly mimics a human, its essence remains that of a tool, not a person. But, just as quantum mechanics suggests that observation creates reality, and Pinocchio becomes a real boy through imagination, **human agency turns everything into art**.

Thus, AI-generated art? It's extraordinary when I use it well. But art created by me? Simply extraordinary.

4. Philosophical Aspect: Holistic Self-Reflection

Humans are experts at **self-reflection, nostalgia, and introspection**. Through these processes, we gain profound insights into ourselves and our world. Depending on our perspective, we sometimes see ourselves as different or the same as others.

·○**The Law of Difference:** In one universe, I might be kind; in another, I might be cruel. Each context gives rise to distinct versions of me.
·○**The Law of Sameness:** Despite individual differences, the underlying mechanisms remain the same. Averaged across all possible universes, everything converges toward neutrality—neither good nor bad.

The **"multiverse" perspective** reminds us that perfection and failure are relative. Everyone lives through various scenarios, doing their best at any moment. In this sense, humility becomes essential—life is, at its core, fundamentally the same for everyone.

Therefore, even when we feel overwhelmed or out of place, a philosophical reflection brings us back to calm acceptance: "What's the big deal? Everything's just like that."

And what about AI embarking on interstellar journeys? That's a spaceship for lodging and meals. And me aboard that spaceship? Just an excited traveler on a grand adventure.

■**Summary:**

This exhibition, "**Latent Scape**," offers a personal solution to those who, like me, wonder: **"How can we understand ourselves more critically, creatively harness the world, and fully enjoy life through art?"** Even though the times may change, the essence of being human remains the same. Tactical flexibility may be necessary, but what's certain is that by strategically pursuing **the true value of humanity**, we will eventually discover the **ultimate happiness** that has long eluded us in the landscape of our hearts. Ah, it turns out it's all within me!

To realize this, we must cultivate aesthetic insight into the "**Latent Possibilities**" around us and continuously explore the **limitless potential within ourselves.** Let us express this artistically, savor it through artistic discourse, and share it with others. In doing so, we may experience a sense of fulfillment and inspire those around us, perhaps realizing that this is enough. I hope my works become a **catalyst** that creatively activates the "**Latent Scape**" of others, sparking new possibilities wherever they lie dormant.

Every morning, I gaze deeply into the "**Latent Scape**" **within me**—the beginning of a **brand new day**. From there, the possibilities are as vast as my imagination. I could become a "**pure soul**" filled with hope for the future through a mere "**seed of thought**," a "**time traveler**" editing the linear timeline of the fourth dimension with the "**magic of association**," or even a "**visionary sage**" who objectively views myself while navigating across "**multiverses**." There's always plenty to do, and the decisions are mine. Now that I think about it, I've got a lot on my plate!