

**Zoltan Istvan**

## **CAN TRANSHUMANISM HELP PEOPLE TURN THEIR LIVES INTO ART?**

Many people associate transhumanism — the field of using science and technology to radically alter and improve the human being — with scientists, technologists and futurists. Historically, this has been quite correct. However, today, the transhumanist movement is on the verge of going mainstream. Mentions of the movement in the press have skyrocketed recently. Transhumanist academics like Singularity University’s Ray Kurzweil and Oxford’s Nick Bostrom are recognized as leading global thinkers. And social media is ablaze with talk of the Singularity — the concept where transhumanist technology creates an almost unimaginable period of exponentially growing intelligence. Behind this invigorating public push of transhumanism is a group that has historically been responsible for jettisoning movements: artists.

Transhumanist artists have recently been increasing in popularity and numbers. Whether it’s metal-welding sculptors, futurist-oriented video game developers or techno-musicians celebrating life extension, there is more of it being created every day, some of it in new forms of media.

When most people think of transhumanist art, they think of science fiction movies and novels. Of course, these forms of art have done much to promote transhumanism and the inevitable tech-dominated future. Blockbuster films like *Transcendence* starring Johnny Depp or James Cameron’s *Avatar* have recently been shown all around the world. And novels like *The Inferno* by Dan Brown, *Nexus* by Ramez Naam, and my own controversial thriller *The Transhumanist Wager* have significantly increased the visibility of transhumanism.

However, today, there are new forms of art also pushing the movement. For example, transhumanist-themed music using digitized instruments and synthesized compositions are on the rise. So is transhumanist hip hop. One such artist is Maitreya One, with his rhythm-infused songs advocating scientific immortality,

a quintessential aim of transhumanism.

A longstanding futurist and one of the original artists and designers of the transhumanist movement is Natasha Vita-More. Some of her compelling artistic creations can be seen on the site Transhuman Art.



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One of the most well-known celebrity futurists is Jason Silva, whose *Shots of Awe* — a mash-up of art, performance, and philosophy delivered through short film videos — has been massively popular to a younger generation. His recent three-minute film *To Be Human Is To Be Transhuman* has been viewed over 140,000 times.

Metal-welded sculptures are also catching on, often inspired by transhumanist and futuristic machine-like themes. One specific haunting image of a robot crawling through water focuses on the dark side of transhumanism. It has been connected to the Bilderberg Group and New World Order themes, and was recently featured by American radio host Alex Jones and his site Prison Planet, which caters to ultra-conservatives, religious fanatics, luddites and conspiracy theorists, many of whom who are skeptical of transhumanism and its emphasis on technologically upgrading human beings. Perhaps most intriguing, cyberculture is becoming essential to the transhumanist art world. Video games — an industry now larger and more lucrative than the movie industry — often focuses on transhumanist themes. *Deus Ex - Human Revolution*, *BioShock* and the bestselling *Halo* franchise are just a few that have many millions of players. Eventually, this video art will be fully merged with virtual reality, where artificial art may become as commonplace as real art. Facebook’s \$2 billion dollar purchase of Oculus VR, the virtual reality headset maker, is a sign of things to come.

“Enhancement technologies promise the creation of superhuman beauty,” says David Pearce, who co-founded the World Transhumanist Association / Humanity+ in 1988 and is also the author of *The Hedonistic Imperative*, which advocates phasing out the biology of suffering in all sentient life. Pearce adds, “Tradition says beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. Less poetically, neuroscience suggests that beauty lies in activation of the medial orbitofrontal cortex. In principle, intelligent agents can use biotechnology to amplify and enrich the molecular signature of aesthetic appreciation beyond the bounds of normal human experience. Artistic creations and the everyday world alike can look sublime.”

On the surface, transhumanist art seems like an oxymoron to some. Is it possible to combine the scientific nature of transhumanism with creative works for admiration and self-improvement? The simple answer is *yes*. Art is not bound by preset rules, which is perhaps why it plays such a special role in society, and why it has the power to push new movements forward. Transhumanism is also not bound by rules. It is, after all, a movement that seeks to improve upon and move beyond what we know and experience as humans. The creation of transhumanist beings — which we are slowly becoming — is perhaps the most artistic endeavor humanity has ever dared to pursue. Transhumanist art will help guide us to becoming masterpieces.

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