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Ai Makita: Metabolizing Machine
Celebrating and Critiquing Advances in Technology
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by Jody Zellen



Ai Makita is a Tokyo-based artist whose large-scale paintings explore interrelationships between the body, machines, technology, and AI. Makita has impeccable rendering skills and while her complex and layered compositions may originate on a computer, the finished works are meticulously painted by hand. *Metabolizing Machine* (all works 2025) is an eight by thirteen-foot painting that collages a variety of machine parts resembling shiny engines in an array of metallic colors. Makita's process is to first photograph different engines and industrial machines. She feeds the images into AI software and tweaks them until satisfied before then hand painting the resulting AI generated compositions.

The works appear to celebrate and critique advances in technology simultaneously. Makita began to distrust our reliance on machines after the 2011 nuclear disaster at Fukushima, Japan. The aftermath of that catastrophe showed that machines were not infallible, and they could fail just like people when combined with human error. Makita infused her paintings with this fear by depicting technology as vulnerable. Though not directly, the works pose the question “*what would happen if machines took over?*”

In her paintings and sculptures, she explores human/machine dichotomy. Her desire is to produce something that goes beyond a human framework and into a realm outside of what people might imagine or create without AI. That said, the works are not sci-fi. Many artists who use AI create surreal, futuristic images that can be reverse engineered in the mind's eye by thinking about what prompts the artist asked. Makita works with a limited palette — her subject matter is bolts, engine parts, chrome tubing, twisted wires and pipes that, when combined, take on new characteristics to become quasi-beings as well as surreal landscapes.

Variant XXI is a large horizontal painting divided into twenty-one square sections. Each depicts some part of a chrome engine or machine in black, white and silver. The individual pieces are close-ups of shiny, twisting tubes like those that might be part of a motorcycle. Makita focuses on a slightly different angle of the machine in each square. Together, they reconstitute the fractured machines, but not in a way that makes sense.

Three smaller oils all titled *Prosthetic Gods* are also based on AI-generated mechanical objects. The chrome finish here is punctuated with rainbow hues in what appears to be multiple overlays of imagery. Calling these paintings *Prosthetic Gods* references artificial body parts. The halos and glow around the depiction of shimmering metals also makes them otherworldly and giving them a God-like aura.

In *Form #1*, *Form #2* and *Form #3*, she realizes elements from within the paintings as objects. The modest-sized, wall-based sculptures are 3D-printed and then silver plated. They are derived from aspects of the paintings, yet here brought to life as three-dimensional forms that are abstracted representations. They shimmer in the light as something precious as well as utilitarian.

While the larger paintings encompass the viewer's entire field of view becoming giant collages, Makita skills as a painter demand each part be examined on its own. They call out for close scrutiny. As each metallic element segues into the next, they combine to form some kind of being, or machine-like force that is also quasi-human. Makita's paintings are hauntingly evocative and quite beautiful to behold.

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