ON THE COVER; IN THIS ISSUE

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AI — A PERSONAL STORY, NOT A LESSON OR LECTURE

Does the cover of this issue look to you like it was created with artificial intelligence (AI)? It wasn't.

"Dudey McDuderton" is an original oil painting by Mat Ollig, a Minneapolis-based artist and graduate of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). With all the talk of AI in what feels like every conversation these days, Mat's vision is to turn everything on its head – instead of using AI to create artwork, he prefers to create original pieces that only look like they were. He notes the irony of creating art that exists in the "physical" realm, yet as soon as it's put online it becomes digital.

Mat's twenty pieces exhibited in November 2025 at MCAD's annual student and alumni art sale – the largest of its kind in the U.S. – definitely turned heads. I stood in the room for 20 minutes watching every single person who walked in have nothing less than a visceral reaction to Mat's artwork. I have been attending this annual three-day event for years and have never seen such overt responses to an artist's work. Some burst out laughing. Almost everyone took a selfie. One older gentleman kept repeating, "It's a cat ...it's a cat!" A woman who looked as if she came straight from shopping on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills grabbed her husband and brought him nose to nose with Dudey. "Honey, look at the scarf; you can see each brushstroke – this is real!"

She was right, there are slight imperfections, but you have to be on top of the painting to notice them. Mat's execution is almost flawless by design; the imperfections as a result of being created by a human hand are intentional.

So, why secure the artist's permission to display his painting of a cat on the cover of a quarterly engineering magazine?

First, this is our inaugural "financial" issue and we wanted something eye-catching that was also a color associated with money and this fit the bill (no pun intended). Second, sometimes you have to dig a little deeper for true understanding, and as engineers, it's something at which we excel. We don't necessarily take things at face value – we question. Luckily, I was in a position to witness this painting causing many people to do second-takes and ultimately question the art, artist, and their own perceptions. We wanted to give you this opportunity as well.

On a final note ... have you ever attended a charitable event and gotten caught up in the action? That's not a bad thing. It feels good to support young people and encourage them as they begin their careers (from artists to our own engineers). Students build confidence and competence with early successes; Tau Beta Pi is an important part of making that happen for the top engineering students. I feel I can speak with authority on this subject having been involved over the last 33 years as a student, volunteer, and now staff member, on the front lines watching students take these first steps aided by the hard work of our Association Officials, Advisors, and Alumni Chapters.

The future is moving forward with AI, whether we want it to or not and more quickly than most may realize. Those of us with many years in the workforce will be impacted as well as those just entering. Creating efficiencies is important, but so is the human touch. As with Mat's artwork, hopefully a balance and appreciation of originality will result.

It ended up being a good show for Mat – he sold all but two of his works.



Sherry Jennings-King.



Artist Mat Ollig.

ARTIST BIO DETAILS:

- Patent illustrator for 5 years before the office began accepting photographs and CAD drawings.
- Studied abroad in Italy at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Firenze.
- Draws inspiration from early pop artists such as Richard Hamilton (those super-perfect straight edges – they're all done free-hand).
- Almost lost his painting hand in a metal lathe accident, but it miraculously deflected off his cell phone.