



As AI Slop Spreads, Handmade Goods Are Having A Moment

R. Daniel Foster | July 21, 2026

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As AI Slop Spreads, Handmade Goods Are Having A Moment

As AI-generated content floods the internet, some consumers and collectors are paying closer attention to who, or what, made the things they buy. Handmade has become a selling point.

By R. Daniel Foster | July 21, 2026, 08:00am EDT



Artist-entrepreneur Casey Rickey finds that customers favor the handmade, and want high engagement with his creation process. Courtesy of Casey Rickey

Artists, designers, and other creative professionals have long sounded the alarm about the “AI slop” aesthetic, especially as digital content becomes nearly limitless. That warning has coincided with a countertrend, as consumers and collectors appear to place greater value on things made by human hands. Some call it “the luxury of imperfection.”

That shift is happening against a rapidly expanding market for handcrafted items.

The global handicrafts market, a broad category that includes furniture, textiles, pottery and numerous other handmade products, was valued at \$740 billion in 2024 and is expected to reach \$983 billion by 2030, according to a July Grand View Research report. The numbers are partly driven by artisans who increasingly access e-commerce platforms.



Woodworking led the global handicraft market with the largest revenue share of 26.71% in 2024, according to Grand View Research. getty

The figures don't prove that AI is sparking an interest in handmade work. But they do suggest that demand for artisan goods is growing at the same moment AI-generated images, videos and products are flooding the marketplace.

'The Handmade Revolution Is Real'

"The handmade revolution is real," said Catherine Ryan, senior vice president of communications for Novica.com, a fair trade e-commerce marketplace that ships artisan goods (jewelry, home decor, apparel, textiles, fine art, and gifts) to customers worldwide. "We've definitely witnessed a surge of interest in handmade," said Ryan in an interview. Founded in 1999, Novica has regional hubs in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and represents over 18,000 artisans, according to Ryan.

Novica has reason to promote that narrative: this year the company launched a second marketplace, handmade.com, aimed at capturing more of the demand. She said the new site "already has exceptional growth and a long waiting list for sellers," although exact figures were not available. The site casts a wider net than its parent, and includes sellers from the United States, Canada, and other regions.

Ryan said the site was partly in answer to problems that have bedeviled Etsy.com, which saw AI-generated crochet patterns on its site in 2024, according to an NBC News story. That same year, Etsy released its 2024 transparency report, noting a fourfold increase in removal of listings that violate its handmade policy.



AI hasn't automatically made all handmade art more valuable, but the distinction between the two is now in high relief. Getty

With a few exceptions, items sold on Novica are backed by stories of artisans who create them, such as Ghana-based mask maker Victor Dushie, who grew up in a community of woodcarvers. “That’s what customers crave, and what technology can’t replicate—the human hand, a real story and cultural meaning,” Ryan said.

Perception Shifts Once AI Is Revealed

While consumers are readily adopting AI in many areas, they can sometimes be biased in terms of whether they know a product is AI-created or not. More than half of consumers felt more engaged with AI-generated content, a 2024 Bynder study found. But that was before they knew it was AI—then, their level of interest dropped. Bynder is a digital asset management platform.

That dynamic plays out in how galleries talk to buyers too.

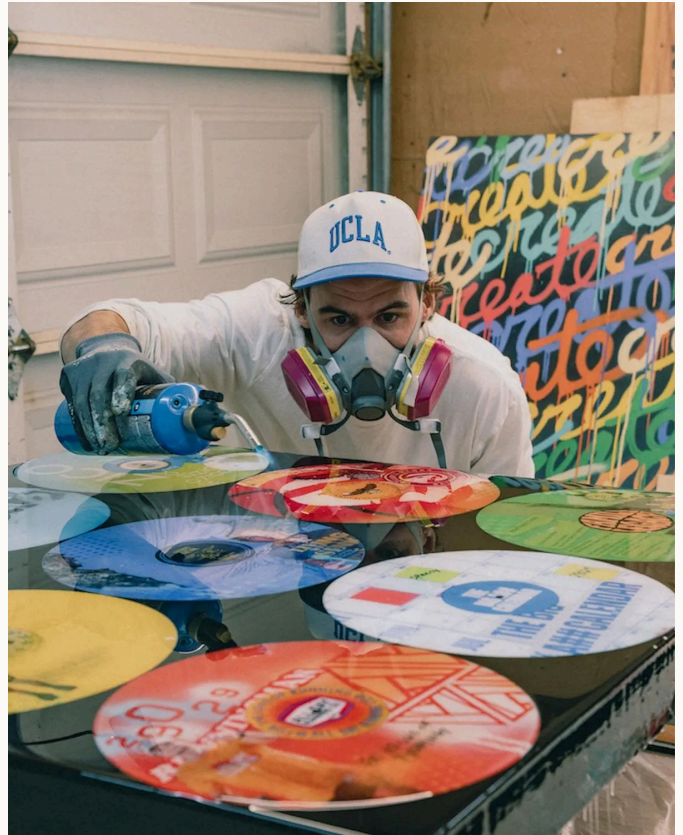
Jefferey Cornett, an artist and co-founder of Chicago’s Distelheim Gallery, agrees that stories are central to a creation’s allure. “Increasingly, our conversations with prospective collectors move beyond aesthetics. They want to know, ‘Who made this? Why was it made? What was the artist trying to express? What experiences shaped this work?’” Cornett shared his thoughts in an email.



San Diego artist Sara Wilczynska (Swil Arts) draws her creative environment and shares it with followers to help increase engagement. Courtesy of Sara Wilczynska

Cornett doesn't see evidence that AI has increased the value of handmade art. "Rather, I believe it increases the value of authentic human intention," he said. Given AI's ability to create innumerable words and images, "the scarcity is no longer the image itself," Cornett said. "The scarcity is the lived experience behind it. I believe we're entering an era in which the artist's story will become inseparable from the artwork itself."

Artist-entrepreneur Casey Rickey, based in San Diego, has discovered that his customers desire high engagement with his creative process.

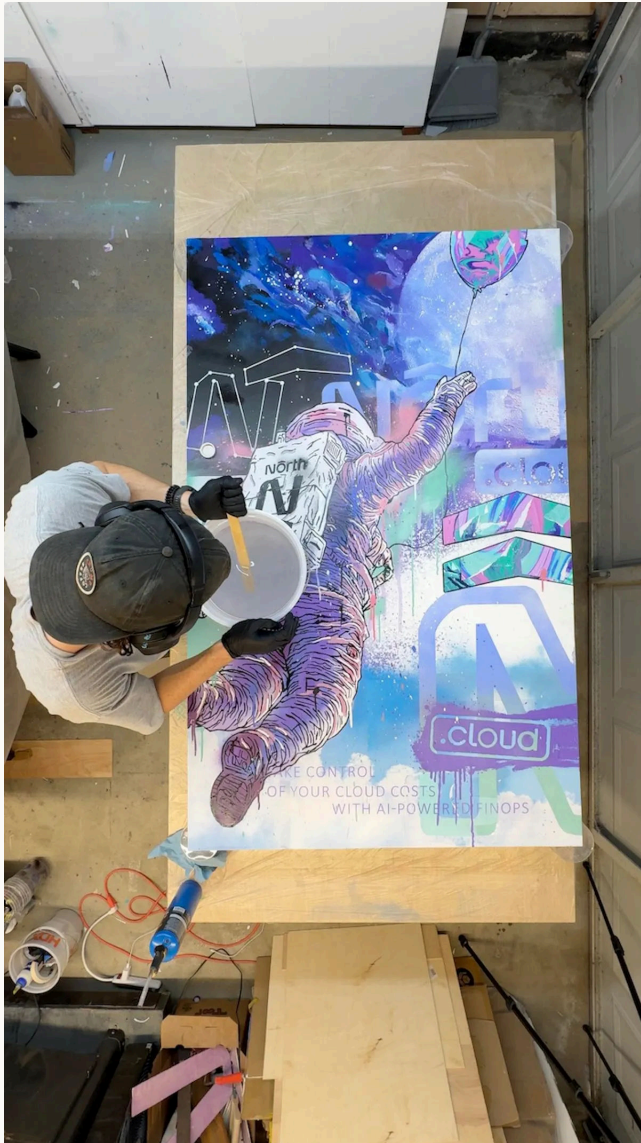


Casey Rickey creates mixed-media pieces that incorporate graffiti, neon, and digital processes. Courtesy of Casey Rickey

"When I started this business a little over a year ago, my ethos was simple: people are going to want real, handmade things personalized to them," said Rickey in an email. "Creating things with a computer is easier than ever before. But creating good things that are useful to society is the challenge. I have been told countless times, 'I tried to use AI for this design, but it didn't come out very good. Can you help?'"

"The scarcity is the lived experience behind it."

JEFFEREY CORNETT



Casey Rickey works from his studio in San Diego. Courtesy of Casey Rickey.

Rickey creates mixed media pieces commissioned by corporate founders and CEOs, as well as for various brands. His signature look mixes “collage, neon, graffiti elements, vibrant pop-art, and custom digital processes,” according to his website. While he uses digital processes, he considers his art “a bridge between both worlds.”

Rickey doubles down on that concept, as do many artists, by sharing photos and videos of his creation process on social media. The behind-the-scenes glimpses help feed consumers’ hunger for connection to personal stories. Because the posts feel personal, they help him build and retain a following.



Handmade art “increases the value of authentic human intention,” said Jefferey Cornett, an artist and co-founder of Chicago’s Distelheim Gallery. getty

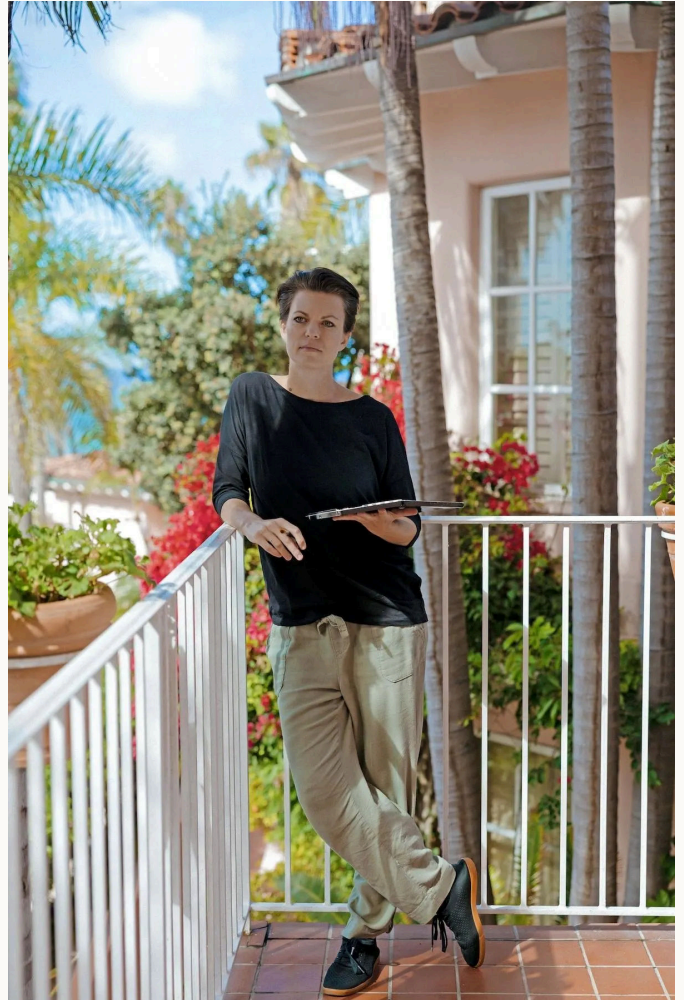
A bridge between both worlds

CASEY RICKEY’S HANDMADE AND DIGITAL PRACTICE

Selling The Imperfections

While AI hasn't necessarily made all handmade work more valuable, "it's made the distinction between 'made by a person' and 'produced by a system' more visible," said Sara Wilczynska, a watercolor and ink artist who works in San Diego. "The human-made label alone isn't enough, but when it is paired with quality and a genuine story, it has become a stronger differentiator."

In her work selling to the hospitality industry, Wilczynska said hotels, businesses and cultural organizations could easily buy inexpensive stock or AI-generated imagery. "They approach me because they want an artist to notice and interpret the details that make their place meaningful, whether that's a particular building, garden, neighborhood, local tradition, or guest experience," she said. "The irregular ink lines, transparent watercolor washes, and individual choices made by the artist are part of what they are buying."



Sara Wilczynska is a watercolor and ink artist who works in San Diego under the banner Swil Arts. Courtesy Sara Wilczynska

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