# Getty Images lawsuit against Stability AI could redefine UK copyright law



Getty Images’ high-profile copyright lawsuit against Stability AI has opened at London’s High Court, a case that could reshape how UK law treats the use of copyrighted material in artificial intelligence. The Seattle-based image licensing firm accuses Stability AI of unlawfully using millions of its images to train the Stable Diffusion model, which generates images from text prompts.

This legal battle is one of several emerging in response to generative AI tools, which have raised urgent questions about copyright and the use of creative content. Stability AI denies the allegations, insisting its practices reflect a commitment to innovation and creative freedom. A spokesperson said artists using their tools produce work inspired by collective human knowledge—a principle they argue aligns with fair use doctrine.

The case’s implications stretch far beyond these two companies. A ruling in Getty’s favour could set a legal precedent, subjecting AI firms to increased scrutiny and potential liabilities. Legal experts suggest it could shape UK policy on copyright in the digital age. Rebecca Newman of Addleshaw Goddard described the case as navigating “unparalleled legal terrain,” while Cerys Wyn Davies of Pinsent Masons warned the outcome could influence market practices and the UK’s attractiveness for AI development.

The lawsuit is part of a broader wave of legal action. Visual artist Kelly McKernan has filed claims against AI companies over copyright infringement, citing lost freelance opportunities as clients turn to cheaper, AI-generated content. Meanwhile, Getty is also pursuing legal action in the US, underscoring the global ramifications of these disputes.

Stability AI has questioned the UK court’s jurisdiction, arguing its model was trained on servers outside the country. The jurisdictional complexity adds another layer to a case already seen as a landmark in copyright law.

Creative industry figures, including Elton John, have called for stronger protections for artists, warning that unchecked AI development threatens the integrity of the creative process. They argue creators’ rights must be protected from exploitation.

As the case unfolds, its significance is clear. The court’s decision could either solidify the operational basis for generative AI or force a recalibration of how innovation and intellectual property coexist. With legal and policy developments also underway in other jurisdictions, the outcome may influence how governments approach AI regulation—and how the rights of human creators are protected in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://whbl.com/2025/06/09/gettys-landmark-uk-lawsuit-on-copyright-and-ai-set-to-begin/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/gettys-landmark-uk-lawsuit-copyright-ai-set-begin-2025-06-09/> - Getty Images has initiated a significant copyright lawsuit against Stability AI at London's High Court, alleging that Stability AI unlawfully used millions of its images to train the Stable Diffusion AI model. Stability AI denies the allegations, asserting that the case pertains to technological innovation and freedom of ideas. This lawsuit is part of a broader trend of legal actions concerning the use of copyrighted material in AI training, with potential implications for AI development and copyright law.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/580ba200a3296c87207983f04cda4680> - Getty Images is suing Stability AI over alleged copyright violations in a landmark trial at the British High Court. The Seattle-based photo agency accuses London-based Stability AI of using its vast photography collection without permission to train its AI image generator, Stable Diffusion. Stability AI argues the case should not be heard in the UK, claiming the model was trained on Amazon servers based elsewhere. This trial is significant for the generative AI industry, potentially setting precedents on the legality of using copyrighted material to train AI systems.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/tech-companies-face-tough-ai-copyright-questions-2025-2024-12-27/> - As 2025 approaches, crucial copyright lawsuits loom for tech giants such as OpenAI, Anthropic, and Meta Platforms. These companies are accused by authors, artists, news outlets, and musicians of using their copyrighted content to train AI systems without permission or compensation. The central legal issue is whether this usage constitutes 'fair use'. Tech firms argue that their AI systems create transformative content from the studied materials, while copyright holders claim it threatens their livelihoods. Some content owners have started licensing agreements, but others persist in litigation. Different court rulings could result in varied outcomes and appeals are expected. Early decisions in cases involving Thomson Reuters and Ross Intelligence, and a dispute between music publishers and Anthropic, may set precedents. The case's outcomes could profoundly impact the AI industry's future operations.
5. <https://qa.time.com/6309445/kelly-mckernan-2/> - The visual artist Kelly McKernan noticed AI-generated images mimicking their unique sci-fi style without consent, leading to significant personal and professional repercussions. McKernan, along with other artists, has filed a class-action lawsuit against AI companies like Midjourney and Stability AI for copyright infringement. As AI image generators gained popularity, McKernan observed a decline in freelance opportunities, as clients opted for affordable AI alternatives. This legal action, if successful, could potentially safeguard the livelihoods of creative professionals affected by AI technology. Other notable lawsuits in this realm include Getty Images and Sarah Silverman against AI developers for similar grievances.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/shutterstock-merge-with-getty-images-deal-valued-37-billion-2025-01-07/> - Getty Images and Shutterstock have announced a $3.7 billion merger to create a leading stock-image company positioned for the era of artificial intelligence (AI). This strategic move aims to cut costs and unlock new revenue opportunities amid challenges posed by generative AI tools like Midjourney. Shutterstock shareholders have options for receiving the deal's offer, valued at over $1 billion. Despite shares of both companies having declined over the past four years, their stocks surged following the announcement. Getty CEO Craig Peters will head the combined entity, which expects to generate close to $2 billion in annual revenues. The merger faces potential antitrust scrutiny, but Peters is confident about receiving approval in the U.S. and Europe. This deal represents a significant shift in the stock photography market, aiming to adapt to evolving technology and market demands while generating substantial cost savings.
7. <https://newsroom.gettyimages.com/en/getty-images/getty-images-statement> - Getty Images has commenced legal proceedings in the High Court of Justice in London against Stability AI, claiming that Stability AI infringed intellectual property rights, including copyright, in content owned or represented by Getty Images. Getty Images alleges that Stability AI unlawfully copied and processed millions of images protected by copyright and the associated metadata owned or represented by Getty Images without a license, to benefit Stability AI’s commercial interests and to the detriment of the content creators. Getty Images believes artificial intelligence has the potential to stimulate creative endeavors and has provided licenses to leading technology innovators for purposes related to training artificial intelligence systems in a manner that respects personal and intellectual property rights. Stability AI did not seek any such license from Getty Images and instead, according to Getty Images, chose to ignore viable licensing options and long-standing legal protections in pursuit of their stand-alone commercial interests.