



woman standing embracing hugging herself back

Ilanit Shamia

Curator: Tamar Lev-On

Welcome to Ilanit Shamia's in-front and behind-the-scenes movie theater, welcome to an archive of objects that stepped out of the screen. Come and wait for Godot with us.¹

Authentic Emotion

Shamia defines this AI-generated video piece as the sum of her purportedly successful attempts at capturing emotion with synthetic means. These are moments of stability in a slowly disintegrating reality, but they too fade away shortly after they appear on screen, only to reemerge in the exhibition space as a physical archive.

When we come across an artwork generated by AI, we immediately dial down our emotional receptiveness to it. After all, we are not going to let a machine tell us what to feel. And so, the artist walks a fine line: on the one hand, she divulges that the space is virtual: at times the frame remains empty, leaving us with a Matrixial white space that combines figure and background perspectives in an unmistakably digital manner. At the same time, it seems that this setting, removed from the artist's fingertips and mediated through the computer, is precisely what gives her the courage to reveal and expose more.

The AI system was fed personal and documentary images of specific places to which Shamia kept returning (her childhood neighborhood, public parks) as well as intimate situations from the family slide collection – images that are not foreign to the viewer, eliciting familiar emotions. The neighborhoods turn to technology to make them seem more upscale, while the

¹ "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett, 1953. In the play, Gogo and Didi meet every day by the same tree, waiting for someone who never shows up. They are engrossed in the details of their clothes and stories about their dreams, performing automatic physical actions, and using another character as a robot.

buildings are a model of wretchedness – a dissonance between small town mentality and how we perceive AI.

Two-Way Dialogue, Back and Forth

The most important dynamic in the exhibition – as in life itself – is the two-way dialogue between the creator and the machine. Shamia feeds generative AI models with text and images, and the models respond with a moving image that can be controlled to some degree, comprising objects, figures, and movement. At that point, the dialogue between the two returns to the real world. Shamia sculpts and makes objects based on the images that appeared in the video, documents the objects she created and feeds them back into the machine.

This is a closed-loop process: The fantasy emulated the words and documentation and created an image, the image was extracted back to reality and created as an object, the object was then documented and planted back in the fantasy, and so on. The chicken and the egg. The relationship between the creator and the machine, like the relationship between the real and digital space, becomes a two-way dialogue that allows for mutual influence.

The conversation with generative AI models shapes a new language. In order to create something you imagine, you need to use plain language, descriptive words, and even terms that aren't politically correct. The machine strips away the creator's politeness and presents things as they are. Like in the exhibition title, the textual sequence behind the piece is neither narrative nor coherent. These are circular attempts to define images and emotions with words.

Between a Film and a Play

Shamia cast the participants in the work as if it were a film. She plots out the main characters: casting her doppelganger – somewhat but not really her double – as one of the leads and adds a “chorus line”: a digital cast of actors she selected out of hundreds of figures generated using verbal prompts. All the actors are in wait mode, neither active nor passive, and accompanied by an outside observer – the moose, the all-knowing narrator who watches the events as they unfold on stage.

The cinematic language offers the viewers an experience that shifts between sweetness and darkness. Intensities and emotions, gaps between power and crisis, all feed on the clothes, figures, and photos, which are inextricable from Shamia's real life. For instance, her extensive experience in designing for the dance and fashion worlds determines the figures' choreography as well as their styling.

The system of creation-participation-observations is disassembled and re-formed both in the video itself and in the exhibition space. The characters watch themselves on a screen within a screen, in front and behind the scenes, while the viewers are also presented with multiple perspectives that allow them to choose what role to take up within that system.

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Ilanit Shamia (b. 1970) is an artist and writer who works in the intersection of visual art, design, and technology. She graduated from the Department of Photography at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in 1999. In recent years, she has been exploring the reciprocal influences between humans and machines, as well as the new aesthetics that take shape as an additional creative layer in the digital age.

Shamia has a rich background in design and journalism, both as a textile and dance clothes designer and as a writer for major publications such as Haaretz weekend supplement and Yediot Aharonot's "Seven Days" weekend supplement. She currently writes a column for Haaretz's "Gallery" supplement, dedicated to the relationship between creative AI, culture, and art – subjects that she also teaches as a lecturer.

Translated by Mata Shimony