

apexart

2021-22 INTL Proposal

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"Can you fuck it?" - The Fembot Phenomenon

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Franchise location: Tokyo, Japan

In 2019 the United Nations released an investigative report on the biased gendering of artificial intelligence, titled "I'd Blush If I Could". This is the phrase that Siri used to say in response, if someone called her a bitch to her 'face'.

"Can you fuck it?" — The Fem-bot Phenomenon takes as its title one of the prevailing online comments made each time a newly-developed, female-appearing robot is introduced in the mainstream media. "Fine, nice work there, but can you fuck it?", ask the anonymous legions on the internet. In response to this response, the exhibition brings together accomplished international women artists working in Asia, who consistently take female-appearing robots as subjects in their creative practice. Using humor, deconstruction and the speculative reframing of a familiar figure, we offer an engaging and up-to-date critique of the modern phenomenon of the fem-bot.

Why do humans make androids in our (idealized) image? Why on Earth should a robot be sexy? What dictates the future of technology, and who 're-designs' the status quo? To properly address these questions, women's ideas must begin to be acknowledged among those ideas which usually present objectified feminine embodiment as a given, as a fait accompli. Thus, we mount a tightly-focused exhibition of four women artists working across video, installation, photography, drawing, painting, and social documentary and debate. It is possibly the first time an exhibition has been themed: "women make art about fem-bots".

The exhibition will take place in the beating heart of Tokyo — the entertainment district of Kabukicho in Shinjuku, which boasts the busiest train station in the world. The venue is strategically located in an artist-run space called the Ningen Restaurant (www.nngn.jp), which is directly opposite Kabukicho's famous Robot Restaurant. 'Ningen' means 'human' in Japanese, and this intriguing counter-culture space was initiated by radical Japanese art collective Chim↑Pom. From the windows and balcony of Ningen Restaurant and Gallery, we can look out at the flashing lights of the vast and famous Robot Restaurant, where Japanese women performers half-dressed as robots ride massive remote-controlled Transformers, and fantasy sex sells to tourists and locals alike. We stage an intervention and party here, but from a female perspective. We invite people to think about the gendering and sexualization of machinery, and of times to come — is it really about pleasure? Or is it about power?

This is a show we need. It's vital to introduce female voices into the stream of progress, especially while these robots are being made to look like us — when progress continues in the vein of stereotype for both economic and aesthetic reasons. It's urgent that audiences view our work, right here in the crucible of hi-tech. The artists are excited to send their works. The logistics take into account existing 'travel bubbles' within Asia, and operate to realistic (revised) timeframes. And people's everyday takes a domestic turn in which it becomes increasingly likely that we will exist, live, be intimate with android versions of ourselves.

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