Beyond algorithms: Sandra Rodriguez hacks AI tools for art

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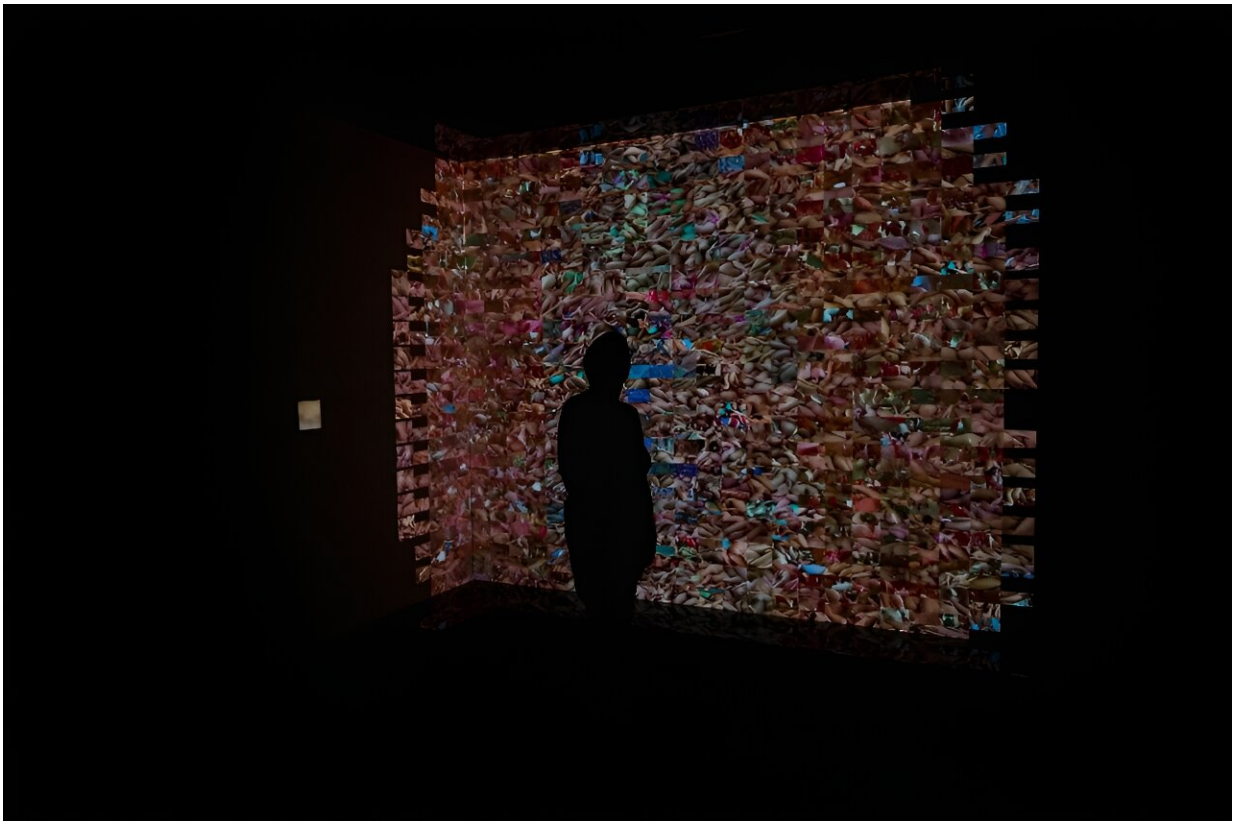

Sandra Rodriguez's exhibit was created using deep learning and artificial intelligence to guide visitors through the connection between desire and technology.

Canadian artist and academic Sandra Rodriguez, by hacking artificial intelligence, hopes to demystify the novel technology topping the news

of late, while showcasing its power and potential to brighten but also disrupt our lives.

In a dimly lit Montreal art space, visitors interact with her exhibit—an AI trained on millions of online searches for erotica that generates a mosaic of pornographic videos that eventually mesh into a soup of abstract shapes.

Skin is shown as "uniformly light" and "smooth," reflecting "what the AI sees most in current pornographic videos," explains Rodriguez, who used several generative algorithms to create the images that highlight "the social biases which exist in mass pornography."

A few months earlier, she had unveiled a conversational bot inspired by American linguist Noam Chomsky whose objective was to "demystify the secrets of AI" by chatting with the public, all in a virtual world.

"It is necessary today to create works of art that speak to the public about issues that will affect them tomorrow," Rodriguez tells AFP, adding she aims to dispel fears, as well as the "somewhat unrealistic craze," surrounding AI.

"Sandra is a bit of a hacker in a certain way," says Gauthier Gidel, who has collaborated on several of her projects and is a researcher at Mila, the artificial intelligence institute of Quebec.

"She will take the tools, try to change up their use and show the world that this twisted use is almost better than the initial reason for which they were created," he explains.

For her next project, the 40-something Rodriguez plans to mix artificial intelligence with dance, a passion she has had since her childhood in Montreal where she learned salsa at neighborhood parties.

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