

One exhibition worth seeing

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- Geumhyung Jeong, *Toys, Selected*, installation view, Canal Projects, 2025. Photo: Izzy Leung, courtesy of Canal Projects

Geumhyung Jeong: Toys, Selected

Through Saturday, November 22 at Canal Projects (351 Canal St, New York)

Every week brings in a new tide of stories about people being swept into [strangely, powerfully, and sometimes dangerously](#) emotional relationships with advanced algorithms. The rise of [highly capable, largely autonomous robots](#) is creating another kind of rip current nearby, as human life and labor collide with androids evolved enough to assist or replace us in certain contexts.

But what kind of mental and emotional states emerge when people interact with machines engineered to depend on them instead? Does caring for a fragile, fallible robot on a mechanical level translate to caring for it on an emotional level, too? Can physicality and imperfection forge a human-android bond as strong and layered in its own way as the ones now developing out of the disembodied near-omniscience of hyper-intelligent chatbots? And either way, what qualifies as an appropriate response?

These are a few of the questions raised by **Geumhyung Jeong's** [Toys, Selected](#) at the Soho non-profit space **Canal Projects**. The majority of the show consists of utilitarian worktables covered with powered-off, motionless robots the **South Korea**-based artist built out of relatively low-tech components, many of which are also artfully arranged around the finished machines in the same space. Yet the exhibition proves that physically static androids can still provoke extremely active thinking.

Instead of the advanced humanoid robots we've been set up to expect by technologists in China, Silicon Valley, and perhaps one or two other hubs, Jeong's machines look like products of a half-mad, half-genius tinkerer who maxed out their credit cards at the nearest Best Buy, AutoZone, and medical supply store. Forget GPUs, futuristic alloys, and naturalistic synthetic tissue. Her workshop's currencies include off-the-shelf wiring, rugged rubber tires, and plastic mannequin limbs.

The cognitive and physical friction is much of the point, a layer made clearest in the lone corner of the space featuring multiple TVs looping in-studio videos of Jeong constructing, training, testing, playing with, and repairing her fleet of misfit machines. Her recorded expressions and body language are almost indistinguishable from the ones I see parents make in response to their young kids or pet owners make in response to their dogs and cats.

The result feels eerie to me... but should it? On some level, those other relationships thrive just as much on how the needier party makes the providing party feel as on the inverse. So how much does it matter if the bond is human-to-human, human-to-animal, or human-to-machine? Who am I to judge the nature of the exchange?

I missed the two performances Jeong conducted with her bots at Canal Projects in late May. Having read about them in advance, I thought that my focus would have been on what the machines could do in the moment. Now that I've seen the show, however, I'm fairly confident that the most intriguing element of the performances would have been Jeong herself. I imagine she probably exhibited a mix of pride and pathos in her creations' movements—one that would have shown that the singularity isn't just about efficiencies and innovations. It's also about a kind of emotional attachment to machines that not everyone is ready to accept, even as that attachment is becoming more and more prevalent every day.