

Would you fuck a robot? Obviously not C3P0, but what about a hot one? The question has been most forcefully posed by Hajime Sorayama, a Japanese artist and erotic illustrator. Sorayama's best-known series, Sexy Robot, centres on the figure of the Gynoid. Gynoids are female androids, and in Sorayama's pictures they are also sado-masochists, silver bodies and silver chains glinting.

Sorayama is now the subject of a joint exhibition with the Swiss surrealist H. R. Giger, accompanied by a catalogue with interviews and essays. In Giger's work the Would You question matters less: the robots are coming to fuck you either way. He is best known for designing the "Xenomorph" in Alien, a parasitic monster that impregnates its victims then bursts from their bellies, beginning with John Hurt's. Giger created the Xenomorph from car parts and snake vertebrae, an amalgam of organism and technology. It's equally sexually ambiguous. (Is that an orifice or a phallus? are those high heels?) In this exhibition Giger has some Gynoids too, not as hot as Sorayama's, and much scarier.

Although superficially contrasting – Giger's grim chiaroscuro could be the shadow of Sorayama's poppy neon – both offer the same vision of technology. Forensic attention to detail belies a fetishistic view of the machines. The artists' obvious desire for the Gynoids lends the work an unlikely poignancy (assuming, against Ovid, that love for automata must be unrequited). But by fixating on their all-too-human desires, Giger and Sorayama miss what their artistic forebears knew: for all its melting clocks, surrealism is achieved not by representing the biomechanical, but by aspiring to it. In the Surrealist Manifesto, Andre Breton defines the budding movement as "pure psychic automatism", a practice designed to suppress human consciousness. The dreamlike, primal realm of the subconscious is accessed by becoming more automatic, not more imaginative. This is perhaps why Giger and Sorayama seem closer to fantasy than the historical avant-garde.

Breton's paradoxical linking of automatism and creation has proved the more prescient. The practice of pure psychic automatism has persisted, in the literalised form of the online bot. Robots are no longer surrealist art, they're surrealist artists. Read the disjointed, imitation-human style of algorithmically generated writing: Invest in BITCOIN to-day and. Earn MILLIONS. Or its schlocky mix of fear and horniness: HAVE YOU checked your PROSTATE. DANIEL: Local WIDOWS need YOU. Breton practiced automatism to access his subconscious – the bots want to access yours. All your grubbiest horrors and desires are there in your junk inbox, your worst self written in code. Look at the Gynoids again: while you were dreaming about fucking them, they painted your picture.