# Ai Film Festival sees submissions soar as ethical concerns shadow creative gains



Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming the landscape of filmmaking, a trend vividly illustrated by the recent AI Film Festival held in New York. Hosted by Runway, a company at the forefront of AI-generated video technology, this year’s event showcased ten innovative short films that exemplify how AI is reshaping creative expression in the industry. The festival, now in its second year, experienced a staggering increase in participation, receiving approximately 6,000 submissions, a significant rise from the mere 300 entries it garnered in its inaugural year.

Cristóbal Valenzuela, CEO of Runway, shared his enthusiasm for this evolution, stating, “Three years ago, this was such a crazy idea. Today, millions of people are making billions of videos using tools we only dreamed of.” This statement underlines the dizzying pace at which AI has become integrated into not just filmmaking but the larger digital content ecosystem. The films presented spanned a variety of styles and themes; the festival’s top prize went to Jacob Alder for “Total Pixel Space,” a thought-provoking short that mathematically explores the boundaries of visual representation in a digital world. In second place, Andrew Salter's "Jailbird" offered a unique narrative perspective through the eyes of a chicken engaging in a rehabilitation programme in a British prison. Other finalists included “One,” a futuristic narrative about interplanetary travel, highlighting the diverse potential of AI in storytelling.

The encouraging turnout and diversity of submissions signal a burgeoning recognition of AI’s capabilities within creative circles. However, the festival also highlights the ethical questions surrounding its use. Judges considered how AI was implemented in each film, recognising that not all entries were purely AI-generated. The criteria mandated the inclusion of AI-generated elements, yet allowed for a mixed-media approach, blending traditional filming techniques with AI enhancements. As Valenzuela explained, “We’re trying to encourage people to explore and experiment with it.”

Despite the excitement surrounding these artistic possibilities, there exists an undercurrent of apprehension regarding job security in the creative industry. The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) has expressed concerns about how the adoption of AI might affect workers' rights. Vanessa Holtgrewe, IATSE's international vice president, stated that while the union embraces technological advancements that enhance storytelling, they remain vigilant about the potential for AI to harm livelihoods. Engaging in discussions with major studios, they aim to develop frameworks that ensure AI serves as a tool for creativity rather than a means of displacement.

AI's growing influence can be observed beyond independent projects as Hollywood increasingly incorporates technology to streamline various aspects of filmmaking. According to Joshua Glick, an associate professor of film and electronic arts at Bard College, the integration of AI has evolved rapidly, now extending to post-production efficiencies and digital enhancements that might go unnoticed by average audiences. The potential for AI to revolutionise processes—allowing time-intensive tasks to be completed in mere minutes—suggests a future where traditional filmmaking methods are altered fundamentally.

However, this shift is not without conflict. A proposal to use AI for creating digital replicas of actors has drawn ire from unions like SAG-AFTRA, which actively advocate for protections to avoid the diminishment of human roles. Concerns have been voiced regarding the ethical implications of AI in film—most prominently, the risk that it could replace background actors, threatening job security across the sector. Notably, actors and industry leaders have been vocal about the necessity of instituting informed consent mechanisms to safeguard their careers amid these sweeping changes.

Valenzuela remains optimistic about the role of AI in facilitating creative opportunities. He positions AI as a means to democratise filmmaking, enabling a wider array of artists to contribute to the medium. “It’s natural to fear change," he remarked, “But it’s important to understand what you can do with it.” He draws parallels between the transformative impacts of technological evolution in filmmaking—from silent films to the advent of sound—arguing that historical shifts in media have often been met with resistance that eventually gave way to greater possibilities.

As the AI Film Festival continues to garner attention and participation, its role as a platform for both exploration and discourse around AI’s integration into filmmaking grows increasingly vital. It not only showcases emerging talents and innovative storytelling but also encourages critical conversations about the responsibility that comes with leveraging such a powerful tool. With each submission, the festival invites creatives to push boundaries while fostering a culture of respect for the human elements that underpin the art of filmmaking.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/new-york-united-kingdom-paris-los-angeles-canada-b2765292.html), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/3b5d40e4c2e20f7a4d34f1f5d4907ba7)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/new-york-united-kingdom-paris-los-angeles-canada-b2765292.html), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/3b5d40e4c2e20f7a4d34f1f5d4907ba7), [[5]](https://time.com/6297575/even-ai-filmmakers-think-hollywoods-ai-proposal-is-dangerous/)
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* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://time.com/6297575/even-ai-filmmakers-think-hollywoods-ai-proposal-is-dangerous/), [[6]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/lesliekatz/2024/05/12/runway-festival-creators-of-stunning-top-films-on-ai-as-art-partner/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/new-york-united-kingdom-paris-los-angeles-canada-b2765292.html), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/3b5d40e4c2e20f7a4d34f1f5d4907ba7), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/2023/05/05/runway-generative-ai-chatgpt-video)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/lesliekatz/2024/05/12/runway-festival-creators-of-stunning-top-films-on-ai-as-art-partner/), [[3]](https://qa.time.com/6308278/cristobal-valenzuela/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/new-york-united-kingdom-paris-los-angeles-canada-b2765292.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/3b5d40e4c2e20f7a4d34f1f5d4907ba7> - The AI Film Festival, organised by Runway, showcased ten short films from around the world, highlighting the growing role of artificial intelligence in filmmaking. The festival received approximately 6,000 submissions, a significant increase from 300 in its inaugural year. The films demonstrated diverse creative applications of AI, including blending real-life footage with AI-generated elements and fully synthetic video productions. The winning film, 'Total Pixel Space' by Jacob Alder, explored the digital image universe using mathematical concepts, while other notable entries like 'Jailbird' and 'One' presented unique narratives. The event underscored both the innovative potential and ethical considerations of AI in the creative industry, with unions like IATSE and SAG-AFTRA engaging in discussions to establish safeguards as AI becomes more prevalent in filmmaking processes. Organisers aim to promote understanding and responsible adoption of AI in the creative sector.
3. <https://qa.time.com/6308278/cristobal-valenzuela/> - Cristóbal Valenzuela, co-founder and CEO of Runway, is at the forefront of AI-video-generation technology, which has raised concerns among Hollywood actors striking over the potential loss of creative jobs to AI. Established in Brooklyn in 2018, Runway has garnered over $200 million in funding, and its technology has been utilised in the Oscar-winning movie 'Everything Everywhere All at Once' and Stephen Colbert's 'The Late Show.' Valenzuela, an art school alumnus, believes AI will dominate media content creation in the future but insists that Runway aims to empower artists rather than conflict with cultural creation. He acknowledges the potential displacement of creative industry jobs but draws parallels to historical technological shifts, such as the transition from silent films to talkies. Valenzuela is optimistic that more accessible AI tools will democratise filmmaking, enabling a broader array of voices and stories to emerge, heralding a new golden age for cinema.
4. <https://www.axios.com/2023/05/05/runway-generative-ai-chatgpt-video> - Runway, a generative AI company, is democratizing AI-powered movie-making tools by offering parts of its toolkit to the public, enabling them to create 15-second video clips from images, text, or video. Runway's technology was instrumental in the production of the Oscar-winning film 'Everything Everywhere All at Once' and has been used in various high-profile projects including 'The Late Show with Stephen Colbert' and sequences for 'Top Gear America.' The company's CEO, Cristóbal Valenzuela, likens their technology to having a 'Hollywood production studio in your browser.' Besides its broader public access to tools like its Gen-1 image-to-video model and a limited release of its Gen-2 text-to-video product, Runway also established an AI film festival to further creativity in AI-generated art forms. Despite concerns about AI's potential for abuse, Valenzuela believes that it's too early to halt innovation in this field and is committed to providing creative tools to storytellers around the world.
5. <https://time.com/6297575/even-ai-filmmakers-think-hollywoods-ai-proposal-is-dangerous/> - A proposal by Hollywood producers to utilize AI for creating digital replicas of actors is being criticised by the SAG-AFTRA union for potentially replacing background actors entirely. Studios already employ AI to render scenes and characters, promising efficiency and cost reductions while raising ethical concerns. Actors and AI experts, including Tye Sheridan and Nikola Todorovic, caution against such practices, highlighting the risks to actors' livelihoods. AI tools empower independent filmmakers, allowing small-scale creators to produce highly realistic content without significant budgets. However, industry fears persist regarding workers' protections and potential widespread job losses. Prominent actors and union leaders, like Fran Drescher, argue for fair treatment and informed consent in AI usage, emphasising the importance of safeguarding actors' careers and reputations amidst inevitable technological changes.
6. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lesliekatz/2024/05/12/runway-festival-creators-of-stunning-top-films-on-ai-as-art-partner/> - The second annual AI Film Festival, sponsored by AI-video startup Runway, showcased innovative short films that blend artificial intelligence with artistic expression. Among the winners was Daniel Antebi's 'Get Me Out,' which utilised AI to create surreal visual effects, and Samuel Schrag's 'Pounamu,' a hypnotic film that incorporated AI to overcome geographical and time constraints. The festival received around 3,000 submissions from various countries, highlighting the growing interest in AI-driven filmmaking. Runway's CEO, Cristóbal Valenzuela, emphasised the importance of human creativity in AI-assisted projects, stating that AI should be a tool to enhance, not replace, the creative process. The event underscored the potential of AI to democratise filmmaking and foster diverse storytelling.