Robot entertains cats in newly launched art-tech installation

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New installation from provocative UK artist group, Blast Theory, asks if AI can make us - and our pets - truly happy

Never-before seen footage of cats interacting with an AI-powered robot arm has been unveiled this week as part of a groundbreaking new project.

Blast Theory's art installation **Cat Royale**, sees three cats - Clover, Pumpkin and Ghostbuster - go into a specially-built feline 'utopia' at the Blast Theory studio for six hours a day over the 12-day project, where they have space to relax, play and explore.

During their daily visit to the utopia, the cats are supervised by a Cat Welfare Officer, and entertained by a robotic arm. At the centre of the installation is a robotic arm, which uses AI to learn what games and snacks the cats like. The robotic arm offers treats, throws a ball, dangles a feather, jingles a bell, or offers a massage depending on how the cats interact with it.

And a computer vision system measures the happiness of the cats as they play with the robot arm, in an attempt to learn how to make them happier. The system then uses this learning to suggest new activities for the robotic arm to try.

Eight cameras capture the cats' every movement. Audiences across the world can catch up with daily highlights from inside Cat Royale, released at 8pm GMT every day throughout the project on the Blast Theory website.

In episode 1, the cats can be seen responding enthusiastically to the robot arm's offer of treats, while the narrator poses the unsettling question, "Is it best if the AI learns that they love snacks, and offers more and more of them?"

Cat Royale is also being streamed daily to the World Science Festival in Brisbane, Australia between 22 March to 2 April, before touring to Science Gallery London and Wales Millennium Centre in the UK later this year.

This is the latest project from Blast Theory artists Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj, who are renowned for creating artwork that puts the public at the centre of unusual and sometimes unsettling experiences, to create new perspectives and open up the possibility of change.

Known for controversial projects such as *Kidnap (1998)* and *Can You See Me Now? (2003)*, Blast Theory hope that Cat Royale will open up conversations around how AI can support humans and pets alike.

Lead artist Matt Adams from Blast Theory explained: "Large tech companies such as Meta and Tesla claim to be improving human happiness through technology. As AI becomes more and more widespread, it's important to explore what risks are growing as a result. Cat Royale shows AI in action as it learns: I hope the public will make their own decision about whether the cats are getting happier."

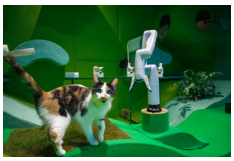
Bringing together artists, researchers and computer scientists from the University of Nottingham, Kings' College London and the Open University, Cat Royale aims to identify the potential positive influence that automated systems and AI could have in the care of companion animals, as well as understand the limitations and challenges of these technologies in care and welfare settings for humans.

Matt continued: . "Cat Royale is a playful way to explore these questions and invite a wider group of people into the discussion about what AI is and where it should be going."

Cat Royale has been developed in collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham and funded by UKRI via the Trustworthy Autonomous Systems Hub, co-commissioned by Queensland Museum for World Science Festival Brisbane and Science Gallery London.

The Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Body at the University of Nottingham and animal behaviourists from the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) are consulting with Blast Theory throughout the project to ensure the safety, wellbeing and care of Pumpkin, Clover and Ghostbuster.

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Tune in to the Blast Theory website at 8pm GMT every day to keep up to date with Clover, Pumpkin and Ghostbuster's interactions with the robot arm. If you missed Day 1 in the Cat Royale utopia, check out the update here.

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