The Grand Exhibition of Prompts, a netprov

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Submitted in homage to the wonderful *Casting Off Tyranny.*

In this collaborative creative writing game (netprov — networked, improvised role-play) on a threaded discussion platform, players experiment with AI image-making programs, but concentrate on the expressive, literary power of the verbal prompts they write. As language arts, image-making prompts are amazing! They are concentrated, evocative, use sentences, fragments, lists and non-sequiturs. In other words they are poetic (but don't tell players that until later!).

Materials Needed: A collaborative writing space such as Discord. An accessible AI text-to-image generation program (i.e. Craiyon)

Time Frame: ~2 weeks

The Invitation to Players

Introduction

People are having fun writing verbal instructions – prompts – for **powerful artificial intelligence programs to make visual images** on text-to-image platforms such as Dall-E2 and Craiyon. The visible results so far are mostly glitchy and clichéd – just what you'd predict.

On the other hand we are entranced by the **words** folks use in their prompts to **describe what they want to see!** These prompts are strange, powerful, revelatory. Using phrases, fragments, and lists sprinkled with lumps of aesthetic and technical jargon, aspiring artists are writing short texts of startling depth and impact. Help us explore and celebrate prompts as literature!

Come and write prompts with us! Join a community of prompt artists where you can collaborate and play! Join an art movement! Start an art movement!

Then enter your best prompt into the Grand Exhibition!

> *AI images are but the stepping stones to writing more beautiful prompts.*
> – Hans Paedeweyder

History and Culture of the (imaginary) Grand Exhibition

For the visual artists of Paris in the mid-19th century there were two crucial moments: the exhausted morning they dropped off their freshly-finished oil paintings to the Grand Palais to be judged by the jury of the Salon des Beaux Arts, held every two years, and the nerve-wracking instant the doors of the exhibition first opened. They mobbed the entrance. They ran inside. Was

my work chosen? Was it hung at eye-level or way up by the ceiling? To be a professional artist meant being seen at the Salon. Everything depended on it.

Now, it's happening again! The Grand Exhibition of Prompts has become the premier gathering place for AI-art prompt writers from all over the world. For weeks before the deadline writers gather in Discord, sharing, discussing, and encouraging. Each aspires both to help the others and to be the best.

Every two years the main artistic styles or "schools" of the Grand Exhibition hang out in their own Discord channels, refining their aesthetic "sound' and "feel." This year there appear to be three dominant styles – Emo, Retro, and Fido. **Emo** (revealing inner turmoil), **Retro** (love of the past, real & imagined, sincere or ironic), **Fido** (pets and how incredibly cute they are). The schools are all welcoming, but they're very loyal to their styles.

The Grand Exhibition of Prompts store is currently sold out of the very popular "Imagine Me Like This" hoodies. We'll let you know when they're available again.

This netprov is about

- Playing with the technology
- Exploring the strangeness and verbal novelty of the prompts as a new form of literature
- Reflecting on how we phrase what we want to see

Basic Play

This netprov can occupy about two weeks, but netprovs often have minds of their own and run longer

1. Invite players to explore and make a few practice images with an AI text-to-image program such as Craiyon. Ask players if they have tried this before. Have players share practice prompts and results with other players.
2. Have players make up a character to play, an artistic prompt writer (see below).
3. Assign players to one of the three styles of prompt art — Emo, Retro, Fido — as their basic style in approximately equal numbers, or let players choose their own style.
4. Have players write (3) prompts and post them in their own style's Workshop thread, and (2) experimental prompts, one in each of the other style's Workshop thread. Goof around with it! Have fun! Remind players that they will choose their "official submission" to the Exhibition of Prompts at the end of the assignment period. This should help them relax and be playful in writing their experimental prompts.
5. Each prompt, review, and #secretdiary entry begins with:
   From: [charactername]
6. Encourage players to write their own prompts in response to others' prompts that they like. Write to imitate, write in contrast, write to continue a story; make the prompts a conversation
7. Have players write (3) kind and constructive reviews of other players' prompts.
8. Have players write (3) #secretdiary entries in which their characters reflect about writing prompts in the "Chat" channels. This is a great way to narrate your journey as an artist. Secret diary entries start with the hashtag #secretdiary and are public.

9. Later on, once you have created your favorite prompt, you'll submit that to the Grand Exhibition, which is its own, separate channel in Discord!
10. Remember: players are evaluated on their written prompts, not the images – This is surprisingly, and interestingly, difficult to remember; it makes for a great discussion about words and images. We evaluate both their own original writing and the way they support and encourage the creativity of other writers in the group.

Prewriting: Making Your Roleplay Prompt Artist Character

1. Who is your character? A Prompt Artist. Name, location, other details
2. What is their artist story? Were they late bloomers or prodigies? Did they learn their craft at the knee of a master or are they self-taught?
3. What is their relationship to the machine? Partner, workshop, tool, environment
4. What is the big challenge they are facing artistically?
5. How do they define artistic success? (Remember in this netprov, what's important is the writing (the prompts), not the visual products (the AI-generated images).

Tips on How to Play

Remember, the focus of this netprov are the prompts, not the images. Imagine the visual, inscribe the verbal.

Try single words mixed in with phrases. Play with words that are abstract mixed in with figures of speech. In fact, defy the pragmatic creation of a plain descriptive post. Make poetic sense.

Play, experiment, explore! Have fun!

You don't have to make an image for each prompt – this saves time.

Save all your variations! You never know until later which one reads the best.

Our Prompt Masters encourage you not to go to prompt writing sites, not to look at other people's advice on the web or technical specifications. That will only get you trite, tired, prompts of the now. We seek fresh, original, unique prompts of the future!

The prompt-writer character you create can be modeled on any kind of artist: painter, musician, poet, et cetera. They can be just starting their career; they can be recovering from a blip in their career; they can be a veteran artist dispensing advice to the young ones. They can be passionate members of their art style/school, or they can be unique voices. Remember that artists suffer from many more crises of confidence than their fans want to think.

Goals and Outcomes

The goal of the netprov is to get players to create a community that experiments with AI-generated art, focusing not so much on using the technology to create art, but using the space of the prompt to reflect on what it means to be human. As a result, the participants generate something that we would call poetry, writing that explores the space between language-made-practical, made machine-readable, and those parts that remain illegible to the machine.

A successful outcome is players have: understood what AI image-making does in a basic way, used language playfully and creatively, laughed a lot, cried a little, recognized how different a verbal prompt is from the images artificial intelligence makes, aimed at least sometimes to *write things that cannot be represented visually*, supported other players' creativity by writing prompts that respond to others' prompts and by writing kind and creative critiques, shown their own characters' insights and introspection via the (public) 'secret diary' entries.

Can you show us some examples of *Grand Exhibition* Prompts for AI images?

Prompt Samples

From: AceVerocchio

To be possessed of double pomp, To guard a title that was rich before, To gild refined gold, to paint a lily, To throw perfume onto a violet, To smooth the ice, or add another hue Onto the rainbow, or with a taper's light To seek to garnish the beautiful eye of heaven, It's wasteful and ridiculous excess. --test --creative -

From: Electricpersona

frigid, windy, cold, freezing, frozen, gale, cold hands, cold fingers, shaking, blustery, no sweater, howling wind, thin jacket, shaking, blowing, quivering, shuddering with cold, battered, miserable. Wrestling with A Giant Fiberglass Sousaphone which is IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTROL in high wind on a football field during band practice. soft light, in the style of Maxfield Parrish, photo realistic, art deco beautiful soft focus. And I'm not even really a sousaphone player, I'm a trumpet player!!

Can you show us some examples of Secret Diary entries?
Secret Diary Samples

From the secret diary of a famous Retro prompt writer:

#secretdiary I did SO well two years ago at the Grand Exhibition. Everyone basically told me my prompt was the best, one of the best, super good. And it was an accident. It was a weird prompt I wasn't even going to enter, not one of the ones I usually do, just a little "sigh" prompt about life before COVID. My friend Belter told me I should enter it. But now I have heard two Grand Exhibition podcasts already mention my name and looking forward to what I enter this year and I'm freaking out! Too much pressure! Have I peaked? Is my best creative work in the past? Agggh!

From the secret diary of a famous Fido prompt writer:

#secretdiary Omigod! I am shaken to the core! Carlissa M just announced she's switching from Midjourney to Dall-e2! WTH? Doesn't everybody know how much more sophisticated Midjourney is? But Carlissa claims there's a better Pomeranian show-dog database on Dall-e2 and that's all she cares about. I just never have gotten cutes as cute as Midjourney when you write "really super cute". Which makes me wonder if Carlissa M cares about cute. And THAT makes me doubt the foundations of my universe.