

This One Ton Robot Was Created to Ease Your Fears of a Robot Takeover



On November 24, the [London Design Museum](#) reopens to the public inside of a newly renovated, \$102 million building on Kensington High Street in London after being based in the nearby district of Shad Thames since 1989.

The new museum, designed by British architect [John Pawson](#), is set in the former Commonwealth Institute, which first opened in 1962. The museum's move [was needed](#), according to the museum's director Deyan Sudjic. It outgrew its old space, which didn't have an auditorium, and there was too little space for an education program.

Mimus! Image: Madeline Gannon/Autodesk

As part of the grand reopening, its forthcoming exhibition [Fear and Love](#) opening November 24 features the latest crop of 3D-printed masks, wearables, and robots, like the Mimus, a 1,200 kilogram (2,645 pounds) industrial robot which has been programmed to respond to the human presence. It is created by Pittsburgh designer [Madeline Gannon](#), who wants to disarm our fears around robots and for us see them as empathetic companions.

The initial idea for Mimus came from the head curator of the Design Museum, Justin McGuirk (*The Guardian's* former design critic), who contacted Gannon after seeing a video of her work [online](#). He then asked her to create a new robot that addresses the fears and anxieties we have around robots. The new commission was created in partnership with Autodesk, a software company used by architects and engineers, and Gannon developed the software and hardware over the past three months at the [Autodesk BUILD Space](#), an [innovation studio](#) in Boston.

The towering robot was given the name Mimus as a play on words, but also helps situate the robot as an extension of the bird family. "Since our robot follows you around, we went with the name Mimus, from the Latin root word of 'mimick,'" she said. "Mimus is also the genus of the mockingbird family, which we hope will help people see the robot as a creature, and not a thing."

Gannon and Mimus. Image: Madeline Gannon/Autodesk

Mimus follows the movements of a nearby human being, whether they are walking around or moving their limbs. It turns the robot into a sort of pet which you would have at home, as it senses the people in its immediate environment and follows their movements. The premise is to see robots as fluid creatures, rather than just machines made of wires and steel. As the technical lead of the project [Kevyn McPhail explains](#), "Our goal is to help

transform the fearful relationship between humans and machines into an empathetic one."

The robot will stand still in the exhibition until met with gallery goers. "Mimus is able to sense and respond to the presence of people as they are near her enclosure," said Gannon. "We designed the interaction around the robot to mimic the experience of going to the zoo to see exotic and wondrous creatures."

Gannon hopes that the behavior of Mimus will strike a chord in terms of creating an emotional response. "Empathy is important for every designed interaction, not just robotics," she said. "Empathetic interfaces, ways of creating a shared understanding between people and technology, are very much an oversight in the software and machines we encounter on daily basis. I'm excited that is starting to change as more people are beginning to incorporate principles of 'Human-Centered Design' into technology."