

Written by Sharon Golan Meiri and published on the 25th of July 2022

The artist Shahaf Ida ([@shaw.gal](https://www.instagram.com/shaw.gal)) admires women who reclaim and profit from their sexuality and simultaneously feels anger for the objectification women go through from youth; She claims – that every action performed by a woman has the potential for a sexual connotation, even when it's not the case.

In her graduation show, Ida tried to stretch those boundaries: she posted a video on Pornhub that looks proper for the website at first glance but is not sexual at all.



Shahaf Ida. Photographed by: Vered Shlauzer-Ida.

We live in a society that is used to objectify women and perceive them as sexual objects. Non-sexual actions are getting scandalous interpretations and exposed bodies are leading campaigns for products that have no connection for female nudity. When the sexuality of a woman is serving the needs of others it's acceptable – but at the same time, when women ask to reclaim their own sexuality and profit from it – the mob is ready with their pitchforks and torches.

When feet pics for sale become art

Ida, a graduate of the School of Arts at Beit Berl College, delved into contemporary female experience already in her third-year project; she presented an exhibition titled "Selling feet pics xx," composed entirely of depictions of her own feet. "I saw posts about women making money through discreet websites, selling pictures of their feet to men with a fetish. I liked the idea that women could use something they already have, their feet, and capitalize on it. That is, they don't have to participate in this fetish – but they can profit from it. There are women who manage to make a living from it, and if a woman says, 'I can use this to improve my situation' – then it's an amazing opportunity," she explains.

"Even though I don't like my feet, I decided I also want to take part in this," says Ida. "I signed up for the Whisper app, which is also used for selling such pictures, and I would receive notifications from girls who advertise there – pictures with titles like 'kiss my soles' or 'pick my nail polish'." Thus, the spark ignited in Ida behind the idea of the exhibition. Using digital printing technique, she created various depictions of her feet ("It came out distorted and somewhat repelling, but I liked it"), and gave each one a title from that same app. While turning her foot pictures into pieces of art, Ida wondered about the difference between selling pictures of feet online and selling artworks: "Like pictures of feet, art is a commodity," she explains. "In the end, most artists want to sell their works."

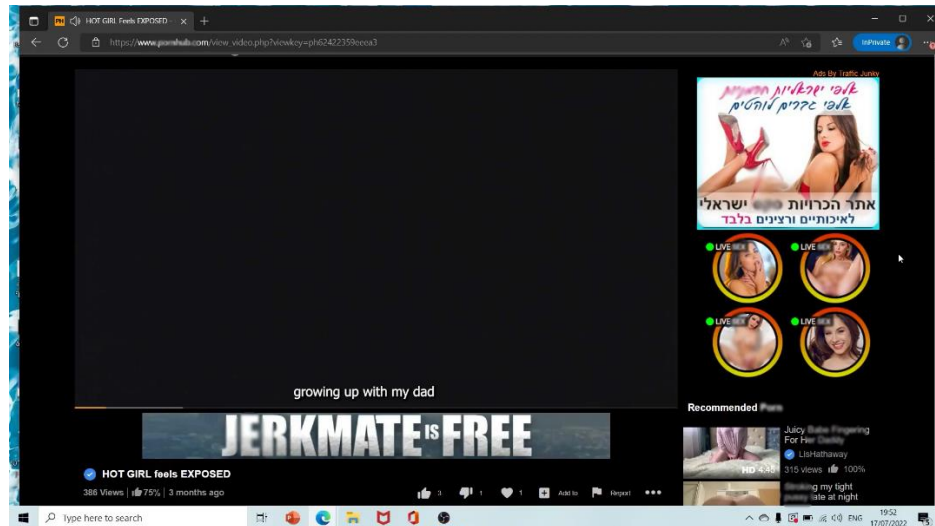


"Pick my nail polish" from the "Selling feet pics xx" Series. By Shahaf Ida

"If everything we do can be perceived as sexual, how far can this go?"

One can admire women who take control of their bodies and see this choice as empowering, yet one cannot deny that the world still belongs to men. In any space, physical or online, women's actions can be interpreted as provocative even when they themselves are not interested in that. "As women, we grow up with this sexual potential. People always see something sexual in us," says Ida. "I remember even from high school, for example, the appalling term 'Instagram whores', referring to girls who post provocative photos. And overall, I recall my experiences as a teenager, thinking to myself 'I won't eat a banana', 'I won't ride a bike'. Everything we do gets a sexual meaning. It really annoys me."

"If everything we do can be perceived as sexual, then how far can this go?" says Ida; this thought process, the attempt to stretch the boundary, is what stands behind one of the standout works in her final exhibition - currently on display at Beit Berl College alongside the final exhibitions of other faculty graduates. The mentioned work, created as part of a series of works, is actually a video that Ida posted on Pornhub: a video that outwardly appears pornographic in every way - but in reality, it contains no sexual content.

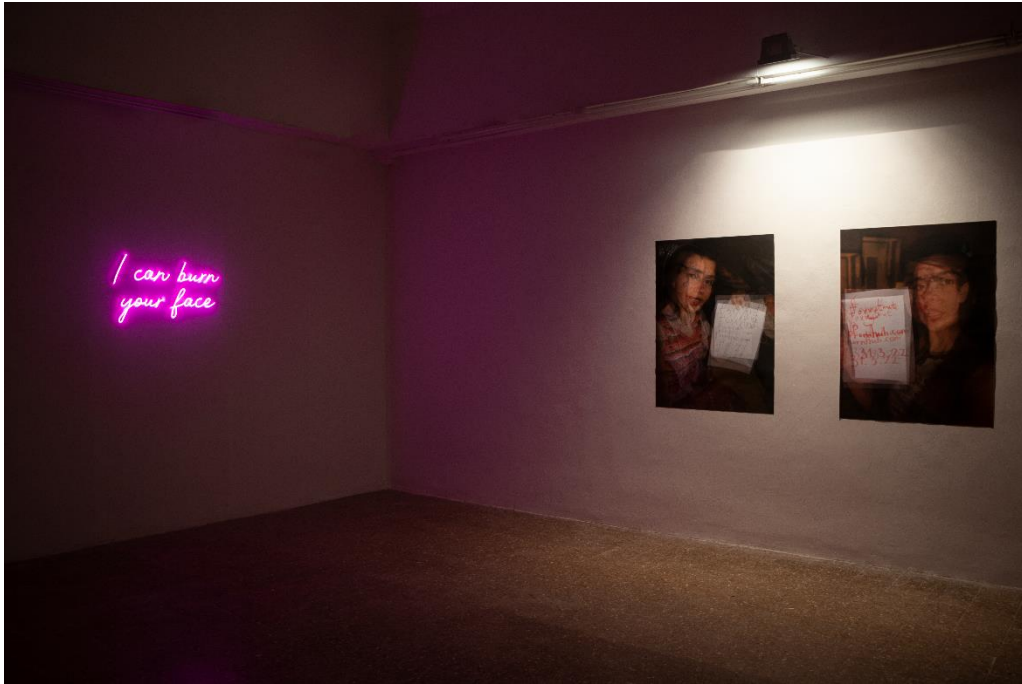


"HOT GIRL feels EXPOSED" video by Shahaf Ida

[Link to Vimeo](#)

"I knew I wanted to create a series of video works, that the only platform through which they could be viewed was Pornhub," Ida recounts. "Two things intrigued me. One was confronting the viewer who doesn't enter porn sites with this digital space; my video itself isn't pornographic, but one can't avoid the pornographic ads surrounding it. And secondly, confronting the target audience of the site with something foreign." "I tried to create a crack in the narrative," she says, "but one could also see it as a form of trolling."

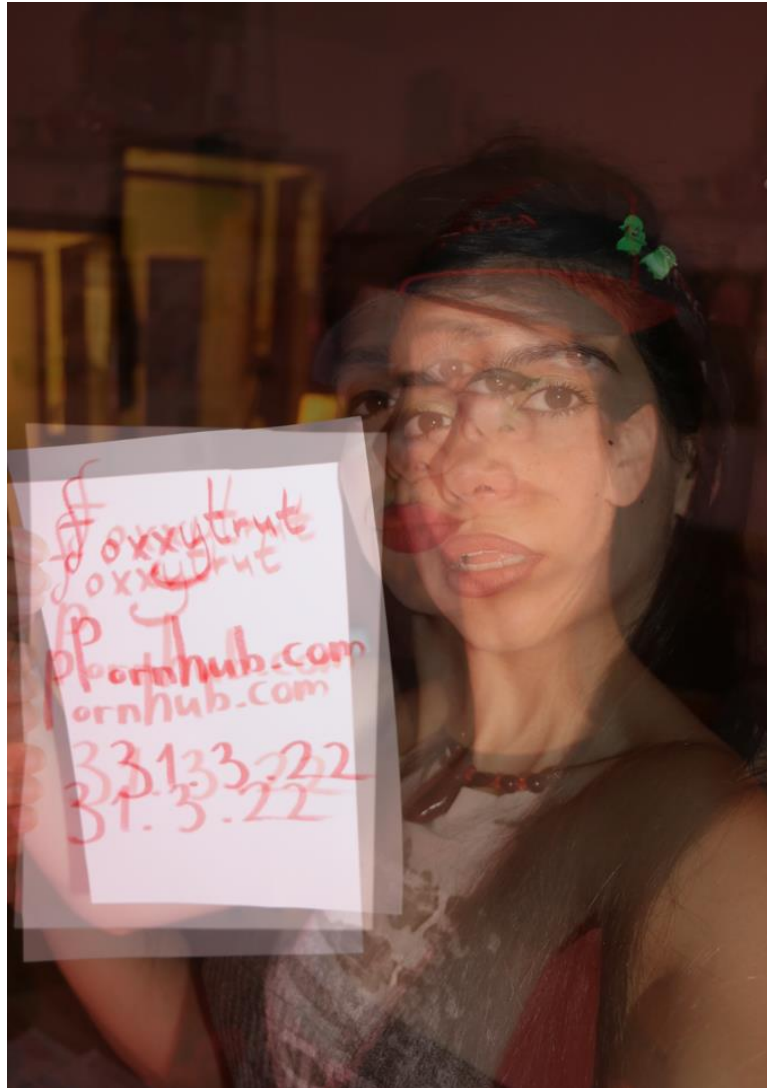
The video's title, as published on the site, is "HOT GIRL feels EXPOSED." Visually and in terms of content, the title speaks the site's language: it's written in large letters and contains clickbait. But here the deception only begins. After all, the word "EXPOSED" can be understood in two ways – physically exposed and emotionally exposed. "Those who enter think they know what they're about to see – a girl performing some sexual act and suddenly someone else enters the scene, and then a sexual act occurs between them, or something similar," the artist says. But in the video, posted by the artist under the username Foxytrut, there's no such imagery; it's a recording of her recalling a painful childhood memory from the age of 11.



From Ida's graduate show.

"In the video, I say 'I feel like I can be open with you.' That is, even within the video, I use words - like 'open' - that can have sexual connotations," she explains. "At a later stage in the video, for example, I talk about a 'thick book,' saying 'my hands were too small to hold it.' If you said something like that in everyday life, people would comment on 'that's what she said'." And it's no coincidence that the girl exposed in the video is described in its title as "HOT": "I'm always this 'hot girl,' no matter what I do, no matter if I'm crying now," Ida explains.

Not only does Ida's video outwardly resemble a pornographic film, but it also meets all the conditions required for such a video on Pornhub itself. "The categories on Pornhub are very detailed: after all, viewers of these videos know exactly what they're looking for," the artist explains. "So, when you upload a video to this platform, you have to mark the categories that precisely describe what's in the video, so it reaches the perfect viewer. They ask you for a lot of details about what's happening in it: among other things - sexual orientation, language, body structure, number of participants, actions." In her video, Ida describes a day in her childhood when she hurt herself after feeling she disappointed her father; when she uploaded the video to Pornhub, she tagged it under the categories "self-harm" and "humiliation."



"Verification Image" by Shahaf Ida

"The only thing that matters when uploading a video to Pornhub is that you are over 18," says Ida, explaining that only verified users can publish videos on the site. To perform verification, the site asks its users to upload, among other things, a selfie holding a sign with their username, the website's address, and the date the photo was taken.

Ida also turned this verification photo into an art piece — but she manipulated it: for Pornhub, she uploaded a standard selfie, but for the exhibition, Ida merged several of her selfies into one image. "I thought it was interesting that a photo meant to verify my identity is strange and distorted," the artist says. And overall, she adds, "I'm playing on the seam between exposure and concealment." "On one hand, I openly state that this is my art, and on the other hand, I don't show my face on the site, and I won't either. There's a sense of danger; it's anonymous but not really, and it speaks to me."