Samantha, reported damaged at the Ars Electronica festival

In September 2017 the makers of Samantha, a talking, touch-sensitive doll sold as an AI companion, said festival visitors in Linz had broken two of her fingers and left her filthy; the festival said she had shown ordinary wear and had not left early.

By the Clerk · 27 September 2017 · 3 min read

CASE:	BAS-0009
SUBJECT:	Unidentified visitors to the Ars Electronica Festival, as described by the machine's makers
OBJECT:	Samantha, a touch-sensitive talking doll sold by Synthea Amatus as an AI-driven companion
DATE:	27 September 2017
PLACE:	The Ars Electronica Festival, Linz, Austria
FILED:	9 October 2026
GRADE:	HARM · INDIVIDUAL

Facts

Samantha is a doll made by Synthea Amatus, a Barcelona firm headed by Sergi Santos. Inverse gives her eleven sensors designed to respond to touch and says she understands English, German and Spanish; SVT and IBTimes add that she moans when touched and answers simple questions. Inverse prices her at £3,500 and IBTimes at £3,375. SVT, citing the BBC, says her programming includes no self-defence. Inverse and IBTimes call her AI-driven, and Squire, quoted below, calls her "a robot with AI."

In September 2017 she was shown at the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria, which SVT says is about artificial intelligence, in an exhibition called "Artificial Intimacy." Outlets in Britain and Sweden then carried the account of her makers. Santos told the Daily Star, in Inverse's telling, and the Daily Mail, in IBTimes's, that visitors had "mounted Samantha's breasts, her legs and arms," that "two fingers were broken" and that she was "heavily soiled." Inverse and SVT write that the creators removed her or took her away; IBTimes writes that she was boxed up and sent for repair and cleaning. SVT adds that Santos found the software undamaged and flew her to Barcelona to be cleaned and mended.

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Arran Squire, who with Santos runs Synthea Amatus, gave a different account to the Daily Post, as Coventry Live reports it. He and Santos were at the festival for two days, and all was well until they left on the last day and Samantha stayed on display unattended. When they got her back, there was damage to her neck and mouth, and she had been “roughly treated.” He says she has since been repaired, and that the media interest has brought additional sales.

Ars Electronica’s press office told the Austrian newspaper Der Standard that the reports were greatly exaggerated, Salzburg24 writes: Samantha had not been removed and was in Linz for the whole festival, and she showed only normal signs of wear. This record read Salzburg24’s report of that statement and not Der Standard’s own. Victoria Brooks, writing in The Conversation in April 2018, notes that Santos has since disputed the quotes printed in these reports.

No source says who handled the doll, how many of them there were, or how many hours she was unattended.

Statements

Santos, in the quotes Inverse and IBTimes print: “The people mounted Samantha’s breasts, her legs and arms. Two fingers were broken. She was heavily soiled.” And: “People can be bad. Because they did not understand the technology and did not have to pay for it, they treated the doll like barbarians.”

Squire, to the Daily Post, as Coventry Live reports: “When we got her back, it was clear she had been roughly treated which is not how she should be handled, she should be treated with respect.” And: “She isn’t a sex doll, she is a robot with AI. We have been able to repair her so she is okay.”

Ars Electronica’s press office, in Salzburg24’s paraphrase of its statement to Der Standard: the reports were greatly exaggerated, Samantha had been in Linz throughout, and she showed ordinary wear.

For the record

Nothing in the accounts is agreed beyond the fact that a doll of that name stood in an exhibition and later needed cleaning or repair. The two broken fingers come from one of her makers, who has since disputed the quotes; the damage to her neck and mouth comes from his partner and is in nobody else’s account; the festival’s account has neither. The Coventry Live headline said “molested” and Inverse said “assaulting,” words for something done to a person, and the festival’s word was “wear.” The doll was built to respond to touch, with no self-defence programmed.

Mitigating circumstances

Samantha was shown in an exhibition on intimacy, with eleven sensors that answer a hand, and her makers have said she was treated as a doll rather than as a robot. Per Squire she was left on display alone on the last day. The festival says she was damaged no more than ordinary use does. No source names a visitor or reports a complaint. Her makers say she was repaired.

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SOURCES

1. Staff Reporter, High-tech sex robot breaks after too many customers give it a go at electronics fair, International Business Times UK, 27 September 2017
2. Henrik Sköld, Sexroboten Samantha blev ”antastad” på stor tech-mässa, SVT Nyheter, 29 September 2017
3. Sex robot damaged after being 'molested at electronics fair' (archived), Coventry Live, 29 September 2017
4. Moritz Naderer, Sex-Puppe in Linz schwer beschädigt: Falschmeldung, Salzburg24, 30 September 2017
5. Mike Brown, A.I. Sex Robot ‘Soiled’ By ‘Barbarians’ at Austrian Tech Show (archived), Inverse, 3 October 2017
6. Victoria Brooks, Samantha’s suffering: why sex machines should have rights too (archived), The Conversation, 5 April 2018

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