

Untangled: The Quiet Weight of Connection

Natalie Kaplan
Interviewed by Maya Elav Nachshon

Before generative tools entered her practice, Natalie Kaplan had already spent years constructing worlds through cinema. A screenwriter and director, her graduation film, *Aquarium* (1999), was screened at festivals in Israel and abroad, including the Berlin International Film Festival.

Her feature film *Once There Was a Girl* (2016) won Best Feature Film at the LifeArt Festival in Greece and received further recognition at international festivals. I first encountered Kaplan's work in *Almost Real*, a group exhibition I co-curated, where she presented *TIDE*. It was a brief introduction to an artistic language rooted in cinematic storytelling: carefully constructed images, quiet tension, and realities that shift just enough to reveal an inner state. Today, working across AI, photography, moving image, and storytelling, Kaplan continues to explore what happens when perception begins to shift, and the emotional possibilities that emerge from that movement.

"My name is Natalie Kaplan, and I'm a visual artist and director. Looking back, my artistic path began when my father gave me my first camera, a Pentax K1000. It was a milestone for me. Suddenly, I could work with film and hold on to whatever I found interesting or moving.

Sometimes, though, what I saw was not enough. Something felt missing, so I began rearranging what was in front of me, moving objects from place to place and altering reality to create the feeling I was looking for.

I did the same with the people around me, changing where they stood or asking them what to do or wear.

I think this impulse is what led me to film. I studied at the Steve Tisch School of Film and Television, part of the Faculty of the Arts at Tel Aviv University, where

I completed both a BFA and an MFA. I directed films, created characters and worlds, and continued to manipulate the reality around me.

Today, AI feels like a natural continuation of that path. My practice exists in the space where reality and imagination meet, and where the realistic and the abstract come together. I take familiar forms, patterns, and perceptions out of their conventional settings and rebuild them into cinematic images that do not resolve in the way we expect. I explore the relationship between inner and outer worlds, the human and the natural, the intimate and the vast. What leads me is the search for new ways to express emotions, and perhaps to create new human experiences. AI may allow us to see things differently, and perhaps even change something small in who we are."

TELL US ABOUT THE PROJECT YOU ARE PRESENTING.

The idea for *Untangled* began during a bus ride. I noticed that most of the passengers were wearing earphones. Although we were all together on the same bus, our bodies swaying in the same direction each time it turned, everyone seemed isolated, as if they were not really present.

It made me think about the ways we are connected to one another, both consciously and unconsciously. Some of these connections we recognize and understand, while others remain beyond our awareness. Among them is the bond between a mother and a daughter, a microcosm of intimacy and complexity. As both a mother and a daughter, I know it from the inside out.

"The bonds that hold us together can also awaken a desire for freedom."



In Untangled, the figures appear side by side, floating, sometimes alone and sometimes together. A thin white earphone cable passes between them, linking one to another or leaving each within a world of her own. Their movement through space is natural and gentle, a release from gravity and from the weight of life. Is it a dream, or is it the future? I leave that question open. The soundtrack inhabits the same uncertainty. It is digital and mysterious. Every so often, a faint whisper or an indistinct voice drifts through, intimate and estranged at once, like something half-heard through an earphone. Untangled remains within this ambiguity: the way intimacy can coexist with loneliness, and the way the bonds that hold us together can also awaken a desire for freedom. Throughout the video, a calm atmosphere carries an undercurrent of tension. It reflects the duality present in every relationship, including the one formed between the work and its viewers. By the end, viewers find themselves connected; they are also watched in return.

“I continue the dialogue, adjusting and responding rather than treating the unexpected result as a dead end.”

WHO OR WHAT INSPIRES YOU MOST, AND WHICH TOOLS ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING WITH?

My inspiration comes from everything around me. It might be a pair of earphones and a bus ride, a beam of light falling across the sofa, a shimmering dress I noticed in a fashion show, or a lamp I saw in a film.

It might be a woman standing in line at the supermarket or someone sitting in the middle of a backyard; something in the composition, the light, or her expression draws me in. I am always observing, storing images and figures in my memory and returning to them later. What they share is that they provoke an emotion in me. Alongside these impressions from daily

life, I also draw from my own memories and dreams. If someone asked which AI tool I would take with me to a desert island, I would choose Midjourney. There is something about the delicacy, texture, color, and depth of the images it generates that returns me to the feeling I had when I shot on film. It has a soul.

Of course, my process extends beyond one tool. I also use ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini. For moving image, I work primarily with Kling, as well as Google Flow. I use Canva for design and Suno to create music.



WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED WHILE WORKING WITH AI TOOLS, AND HOW HAVE YOU DEALT WITH THEM?

There is a long process, a dialogue, between me and AI. I may be trying to reach a very particular image, and the tool simply refuses to give it to me because, well, it is AI. It is unpredictable.

That can be frustrating, but it is also where the magic happens. Suddenly, somewhere along the way, the tool surprises me and introduces something entirely new, something I could not have anticipated. I continue the dialogue, adjusting and responding rather than treating the unexpected result as a dead end.

This element of surprise is one of the things I value most about working with AI. Our daily lives are shaped by routine and repetition. How often are we genuinely surprised? Working with AI gives me those moments again and again.

