AI disqualification yields new Nikon Small World in Motion winner

Credit: Nguyen Nam Nhat.

Last month we covered the winner of Nikon's Small World in Motion video: Ning Xu of Tsinghua University in China, whose video captured tiny cilia beating in the airways of a child with a rare respiratory disorder. But allegations surfaced about Xu's use of AI while making the video. Nikon launched an investigation and concluded that Xu's entry did not comply with competition rules. The new winner is Nguyen Nam Nhat of Vietnam with a video of a tiny roundworm and a single-celled organism (above).

According to a BBC report, some researchers expressed concern that Xu's video had structural abnormalities and that cell features appeared and disappeared in a way one would not see in actual cellular biology. Others spotted what looked like AI watermarks embedded within the source files. Xu said he used AI "to distinguish and visualize features in the reconstructed grayscale images"; however, he denied that AI was used "to generate the experimental movie, the cilia, or their motion."

Founded in 2011, the Nikon Small World in Motion competition is a spinoff of the company's Small World Photomicrography Competition, which has been around since 1974. Both are meant "to showcase the beauty and complexity of things seen through the light microscope"—one through still photographs, the other through photovideography, taking advantage of all the technological advances that now allow users to make movies or time-lapse images through the microscope.

The other winners also moved up a notch with Xu's disqualification. Benedikt Pleyer of Bavaria, Germany, placed

second with a video of jellyfish larvae suspended in water droplets; Andrew Moore of Howard Hughes Medical Institute in the US placed third with a video of synchronized cell division in neighboring cells; Patrick Hickey of Hypha Research Ltd. in Edinburgh, Scotland, placed fourth with a video of the dynamics of mitochondria and chloroplasts in Turtle Vine leaf cells; and Igor Adameyko placed fifth with a video of a tiny, colorful sea slug (*Cyerce kikutarobabai*) on the move.

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