

CURRENT

The InterAccess Current program supports professional development of emerging curators and artists interested in new media and electronic practices. Each year, InterAccess works closely with an emerging curator to conceptualize and execute a group exhibition. "Current" refers to the now, of course, but it is also an energetic charge that causes light, heat, and all manner of electronic life; an apt metaphor for emergent creative practices within the ever-expanding field of new media.

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interaccess.org

Gallery Hours
Tuesday—Saturday
11AM—6PM

About the curator

Casper Sutton-Fosman is a cross-disciplinary artist, curator, and academic currently based in Toronto, ON. Their work centres conceptions of identity through a trans and disabled lens, pushing boundaries of medium and discipline to open in-between spaces for being. Sutton-Fosman is interested in troubling linearity and authorship, interactivity and implication, working in spaces between analog and digital, involving craft practices and outdated technology. They hold an MFA in Interdisciplinary Art, Media, & Design from OCAD University and a BA in Liberal Arts from Sarah Lawrence College.

Founded in 1983, InterAccess is a non-profit gallery, educational facility, production studio, festival, and registered charity dedicated to emerging practices in art and technology. Our programs support art forms that integrate technology, fostering and supporting the full cycle of art and artistic practice through education, production, and exhibition. InterAccess is regarded as a preeminent Canadian arts and technology centre.

DINNER AT THE AUTOMAT

An essay by Casper Sutton-Fosman

InterAccess Current Exhibition
November 6 – December 7, 2024

nobody works at the automat. except, of course, for the people who do.
a wall with rows of glass cabinets containing pristine food,
(un)touched by human hands; we are all equal here, all the
businessmen and the starlets and the mechanics and the
unemployed, all paying a nickel for a cup of hot coffee. insert coin,
open cabinet, eat pie. we are all equal here.
except, of course, for the people behind the wall.

the people behind the wall move quickly and quietly. they must
replace the food in the cabinets after it is purchased and removed.
they must not be seen through the glass windows. if the coffee gets
cold, they must pour it out and make a new pot. they must keep up
with demand: with sparkling clean dishes, with mathematically
perfect slices of pie, with fresh hot cups of coffee. if nobody works
at the automat, why would anything ever go wrong?

shift change. the people behind the wall clock out. they leave
through the back door. half of them go home – the other half go to a
different automat.

at the other automat, they are not the people behind the wall. they
know they’re there, but they cannot acknowledge them. now they
get to be the ones at the automat, paying a nickel for a cup of hot
coffee. and if they catch the shadowed eyes of those
behind-the-wall people, they can sit and sip their coffee and think –

i am better at being nobody. i am better at working at the automat.

When you walk in, the first thing you’re likely to see is a breast pump. I
didn’t know what it looked like when I first read Lena Chen’s proposal for
Symphony – I was struck by how bulky and mechanical it was, contrasted
with the creamy pastel yellow of its plastic casing. When the piece
activates, it layers the mechanized hum of the breast pump itself with a
recording of the artist singing lullabies to her newborn. Chen activates the
piece remotely whenever she is breastfeeding or pumping – at all other
times, it’s dormant, sleeping in the guise of a readymade.

Consistent mechanical sounds flank the
space: against the east wall, Sam
Pelletier’s The Shift grinds away, methodically rubbing mark-making tools
against paper. It sits in an acrylic enclosure atop a plinth, all of its inner
workings on display. Operating on a 9-5 schedule with a half-an-hour
smoke break, it creates one drawing a day – producing 24 drawings over
the course of the exhibition. Invoking both absurdity and exhaustion,
Pelletier questions how we value art and the labour of the artist – and
whether that labour begins and ends when we put proverbial paint to
canvas. The traces of charcoal, pencil, and ink on paper are time-cards,
direct representations of effort and physical movement. Aptly, they are for
sale at \$129 each: a rate of 7.5
hours at minimum wage.

On the other end of the room, a knife raises and lowers, leaving
scratches on the acrylic slab it’s bolted to. Raul’s Hand lingers in the
violence of monotony, a reflection of the repetitive movements of factory
labourers. Shay Salehi recounts reading an interview with a meat plant
worker, who spoke about the strain and injuries that come with performing
the same motion over and over again for eight hours a day. As we laud (or
blame) automation and outsourcing
for the “deindustrialization” of the
global North, factory farming and the
agriculture industry still wield
immense power over rural
communities in Canada and the US¹.

On the north wall hangs Grand Eternity. Layering charcoal, acrylics, oils,
laser engraved surfaces, and inset media players, Alfred Muszynski builds
a cacophony of images that both blend together and resist each other.

Muszynski’s use of found and AI-generated source images belies the
thought and care that are characteristic of his work – far from random,
the vignettes form a mind-map of Muszynski’s musings on the complex
relationships between technology and mortality. He contemplates the
necropolitics of labour, of valuing and
devaluing, aligning infographics and
memes with religious iconography.

Atop a plinth sits an outdated computer, on which plays Workflow, Jensen
Leonard’s exploration of the relationship of capitalist accelerationism to
Blackness². Set against a backdrop of industrial landscapes – warehouses,
factories, server banks – all noticeably empty of people, an animated
Halloween mask of Michael Jackson speaks in a grinding, computer-generated
monotone. Shot through with surrealism, Jensen’s writing straddles the line
between poetic, comedic, and religious. He examines the clear role of slavery
– of human-as-commodity, not just producer of commodity – as the backbone
of contemporary capitalist industry. So much of the hidden work of automation
is done by underpaid, disenfranchised and often imprisoned labourers, who
companies fight tooth and nail to keep underpaying, disenfranchising, and
imprisoning³ – the lure of automation finds its hook in the simple fact that
slavery is morally abhorrent but capitally desirable.

The image of forward-moving,
effortlessly accelerating automation
relies on sociopolitical structures of
othering to maintain its charade. It
seems most timely now in conversations
around AI, robotics, and algorithms, but
these obfuscations have played a vital
role in technological advancement for
centuries. In the same way that a
magician will invite you to look inside a

hat to see that it’s empty before pulling a rabbit out of it, the faces of a new
technology use the guise of automation to draw attention away from the
human labourers behind the scenes.
The artists and works in this
exhibition remark on the ways that
we all participate in automation,
from both sides of the curtain; we
exploit and are exploited, we are
alienated from our own labour and we
forget the humanity of the driver
delivering our UberEats order.
Examining our relationships to labour
automation opens space for
solidarity, for valuing human
well-being over output⁴ – the
automat is nothing new, but neither
is our collective resistance to its
charms.

¹ Alex Blanchette’s Porkopolis: American
Animality, Standardized Life, and the Factory
Farm.

² Drawing on Aria Dean’s Notes on Blacceleration.

³ Gemma Newlands’ Lifting the Curtain: Strategic
visibility of human labour in AI as a Service and
Astra Taylor’s The Automation Charade.

⁴ Bits in the Machine, a zine from Creative
Action in Tech.