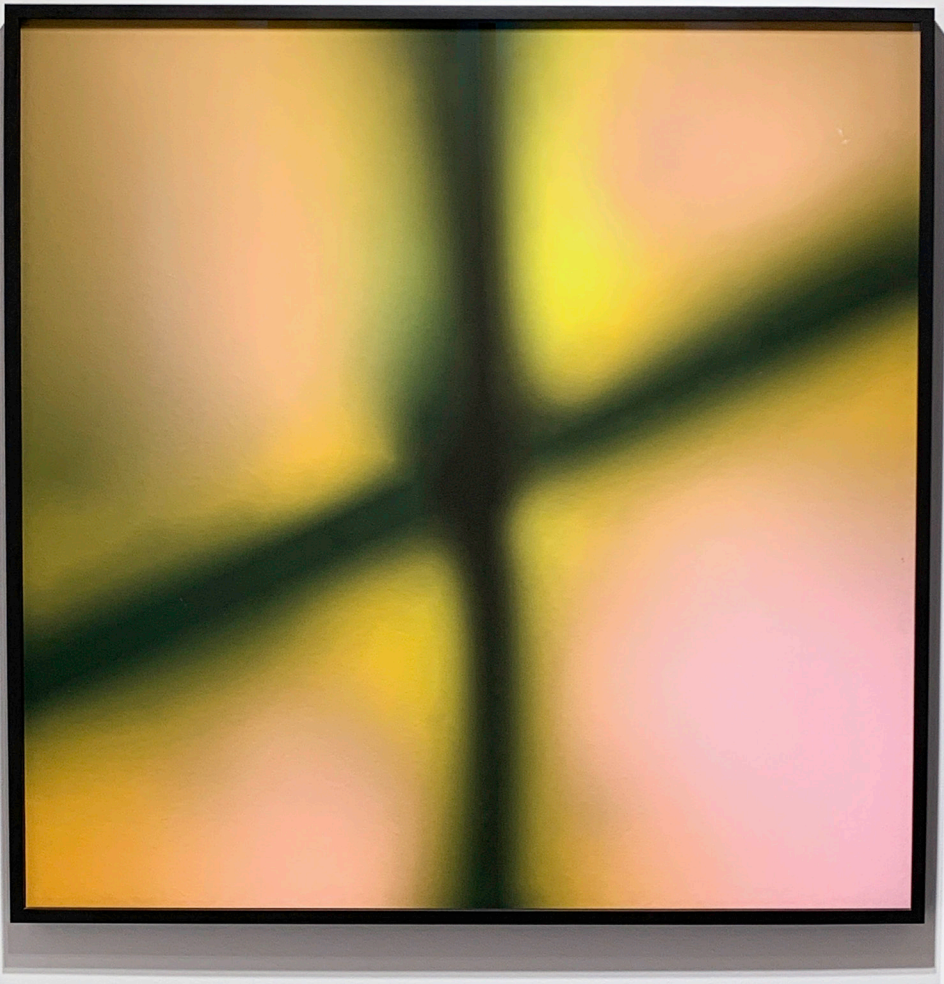Latcham Art Centre Presents

Continuous Memory
Max Lupo & José Andrés Mora

Friday, October 20 - Wednesday, December 6, 2023

As soon as
you can.

Continuous Memory
Max Lupo ⅋ José Andrés Mora

Max Lupo and José Andrés Mora explore the power and playfulness of words using technology. Mora's videos and prints open up conversations about memory, cultural hybridity, and assimilation while highlighting the intimacy of language. Lupo reprograms obsolete devices, like typewriters and rotary phones, to reveal personal stories and machine-made wisdom. Taken together, the works in *Continuous Memory* ask us to consider what is required to give meaning to language, and how that meaning can change as our relationships to words shift.

What we make of it

Max Lupo is a multimedia artist who builds artworks using vintage or outdated technology, which reveal interesting uses of language and computer programming. José Andrés Mora is a Venezuelan-Canadian artist who works with different media to create text-based video installations and, recently, digital drawings. For *Continuous Memory*, the two artists bring their practices together, putting language and technology at the forefront. Using video, robotic writing, vector drawings, and vintage devices to share stories of place, poetic memories and machine-made wisdoms, these works ask us to consider what is needed to find meaning in language, and how those meanings can shift over time.

In a past career at a library makerspace, Max Lupo held the position of "Tinkerer," where one of his responsibilities was to help people troubleshoot and build their creative projects. Knowing this about Max, and his love for making vintage devices do new and wonderful things, seeing rotary telephones and old slide viewers in Latcham makes a lot of sense. His *Mansfield Reporter* is an 8mm slide viewer, originally designed to magnify film for easy editing. Max removed the device's insides and replaced them with a tiny computer and digital screen. When activated, the *Mansfield* displays

new sentences by combining different words from the collections of English playwright and poet William Shakespeare, American novelist Gertrude Stein, and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. It uses a freely available bit of computer code, called Markov Chaining, to spit out statements like the following:

Our Love Was My Decay

Some phrases are funny. Others are nonsense. Others read like generic platitudes, but every so often a phrase appears that could be thought of as philosophical, poetic, or meaningful. Here is the magic of the *Mansfield*: it does a wonderful job of pointing out how eager humans are to make meaning from randomness, and additionally, how eager we are to trust information we get from Artificial Intelligence (AI) despite the seemingly random way it creates sentences. Since Markov Chaining makes new sentences by rearranging human-made words, it can generate phrases that mimic human language, and sometimes even retain the original authors' writing styles, which can help us to attribute meaning. The way Markov Chaining functions reveals even more about the random process used by Max's device.

The form of Markov Chaining used in the *Mansfield* looks at a whole body of language, and then strings together words based on the probability of their sequence. ChatGPT, an AI chatbot, uses a more

complex, but ultimately similar code to produce seemingly credible information like magic. However, ChatGPT doesn't know what facts are: just like the *Mansfield*, it only knows what the next word might be in the sentence it's building.[1] For Max's work at Latcham, the results are fascinating because they reveal how deep meaning and silliness can be drawn from the same process.

Acting as sister-pieces to other versions of the *Mansfield Reporter*, several of Max's *Platitudes for the Future* hang on the back wall of the gallery. Each holds a unique saying generated by a *Mansfield*, but this time the device used an index of commonplace platitudes, remixed using the collected writings of Karl Marx, and the others listed above as source texts.[2]

Every choice comes with bitter agony.

Love is a trial of your dreams.

Any fool can make you curse your life.

Platitudes are phrases offered during a profound occasion; though they may sound comforting or insightful, they often lack insight or meaning. When we choke in a job interview, well-meaning friends comfort us with "everything happens for a reason." What differentiates Max's *Platitudes* from others is the experienced voices of the authors that bleed through, which more accurately address

Image: Max Lupo, *Mansfield Reporter*, 2015, Vintage 8mm slide viewer and mini computer, 12" x 8.5" x 6.5". Courtesy of the artist.

brood
and
regret
and
think
and
listen
and
touch
and dissolve
the chemistry
bonding
memory

the weight of the situation where a platitude might be used.[3] This, combined with the robotic precision with which they were drawn, and their measured place within an art gallery, work to elevate how viewers would engage with a generic platitude. The result is a roundabout way of making a clichéd statement more poetic and appropriately weighty.

<p align="center">***</p>

A fading memory is an increasingly meaningful and valuable thing. As details of memories shift or fade with time, the meaning of what can be recalled becomes exceedingly significant. Where Max draws on texts from other people, José Andrés Mora's works largely draw on incredibly personal narratives that feel internal and intimate. In the context of memories, what meaning do words hold when they slowly fail to articulate what we feel? In José's framed pieces, he attempts to visualize and articulate memories of his home in Caracas, Venezuela, using digital vector gradients and poetry. Both image and text seem dependant on each other in these works, as if what is being remembered can only be hinted at with words. These works cannot provide (or refuse to provide) any direct or singular focal point. Instead, they showcase a kind of beautiful desperation through language and renderings of light, to attempt to recall a memory in full detail. These tasks, which are alluded to by José's poems, may be impossible to accomplish: "...touch and dissolve the chemistry bonding memory to the present."[4]

These ideas continue in his three-channel video, *Time and Light* (2022), which is installed in the corner of the gallery, mimicking the L-shaped kitchen featured on the screens. As the piece begins, a closeup view of curtains, cabinets, and tiles is overlaid with the words, "turned light into time." As the video zooms out, it expands

to show a fuller view of the kitchen; the words expand as well, to reveal a description of memories fading, like light slowly bleaching text on paper. Throughout the video's eight-minute run, the text expands and contracts, but the full poetic verse is never seen altogether on the screen. Instead, we're offered fragments. In a way, viewers face the same challenge that José faces: over time, parts of memories remain vivid, like the feeling of warm kitchen light, but others come slowly in fragments, if at all. Language helps describe the challenging relationship of celebrating what is remembered, and the upset when cherished memories start to morph or change. In *Time and Light*, and in his printed works, José asks us to consider our relationship to home, and what we will do when memories of those places begin to fade.

Interlocution is José's earliest work in the exhibition, made during his undergraduate studies at NSCAD University. In a document that accompanies this work, the artist describes how the video was developed during a two-month period filled with many projects exploring the idea of self-perception in situations of
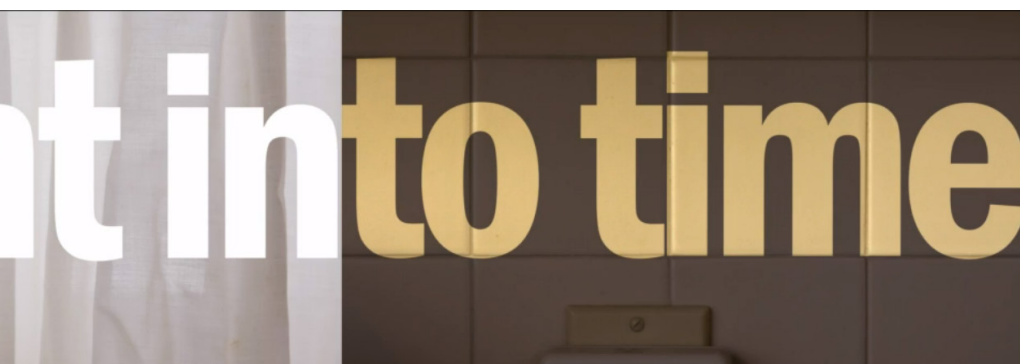
Image: José Andrés Mora, Still from *Light and Time,* 2022, Video synchronization on 3 LCD monitors, 8 minutes, 31 seconds. Courtesy of the artist. Collection of NSCAD University.

being overheard: "During those same weeks, I was recording myself reading labels from food products that I took from my pantry; I was reading the French part of the labels, but using my native Spanish rules of pronunciation. In this process, a similar interruption to the one in *Interlocution* happens; my interpretation of language is put into comparison to expectations that come from established rules for communication."[5] What are the implications of being overheard when your voice naturally discloses part of your identity? And when you catch yourself being overheard, how does the meaning of your words shift? *Interlocution* is a video that shows several Halifax students speaking directly to the camera, to an undisclosed interviewer. As it begins, the first student speaks about their experience during an art school critique. It's not until the second interview begins that viewers discover something strange happening: with time, it's clear that the voice of the first person is also the voice of every other interviewee. The artist has swapped in his voice for all others. As José navigates the different speech patterns and accents of his friends, it's hard to ignore the questions implied by this task.

Across the hall from Latcham, *Continuous Memory* extends into the Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library. Applied directly to a blue wall near the Library's entrance is José's *Please Get Back to Me*, a digital drawing transformed into vinyl for this site-specific installation. With black text on a white background, the work features twenty stacked lines, which repeat, "please get back to me as soon as possible." Each line of text is sliced horizontally and displaced ever so slightly, so that the tops and bottoms of each word only align in certain rows; some words are perfectly legible, while others might require a second look. The optical effect of displacement encourages your eyes to move over the whole piece at once; as your mind gathers the legible words from each line, it links them together to make sense of the phrase as a whole, adding movement and energy to the piece. The work alludes to the vernacular, common phrases, and netiquette often used within professional workplace settings to reference more personal ideas of longing and memory.

Footnotes

[1] May, Jonathan. "Analysis: Chatgpt Is Great at What It's Designed to Do. You're Just Using It Wrong." PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 5 Feb. 2023, www.pbs.org/newshour/science/analysis-chatgpt-is-great-at-what-its-designed-to-do-youre-just-using-it-wrong.

[2] Lupo, Max. "New Exhibition: Machine Made Wisdom." Max Lupo, Max Lupo, 16 Aug. 2021, maxlupo.com/machine-made-wisdom/.

[3] Ibid.

[4] José Andres Mora's work *Dissolve* (2022).

[5] Mora, José Andres. "Booklet Accompanying Interlocution." Self-Published, 2012. Quoted from a document accompanying the artwork *Interlocution*, 2012, created by José Andres Mora, from the collection of NSCAD University.

Max Lupo is a multimedia artist who constructs odd inventions. His work strives to find meaning in process, value in translation, and creativity in discarded or incongruous things. In 2017, Lupo graduated from OCADU's Interdisciplinary Art, Media and Design program with an MFA. He has had solo exhibitions at Georgian College's Campus Gallery (Barrie, ON), and at gallery VERSO (Toronto, ON). He works as an educator at Georgian College and is the Community Librarian for the Innisfil ideaLAB & Library.

Image courtesy of José Andrés Mora.

José Andrés Mora is a Venezuelan-Canadian artist based in Toronto. He is the recipient of numerous grants and recognitions. In 2023, his work was acquired by the Canada Council Art Bank. He holds an MFA from the University of Guelph (2020) and a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Arts and Design (2012). Mora has exhibited across Canada and abroad, including TAP Artspsace (Montréal, 2023), Art Metropole (Toronto, 2021), Birch Contemporary (Toronto, 2019), Dalhousie Art Gallery (Halifax, 2020), Nuit Blanche (Toronto, 2014), and NoteOn (Berlin, 2013).

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ART CENTRE

Latcham Art Centre inspires the community to engage with visual art through exhibitions of contemporary art and education programs including classes, workshops, artist talks and tours. It is funded by donations, sponsorships, membership and fundraising events as well as annual grants from the municipality of Whitchurch-Stouffville.