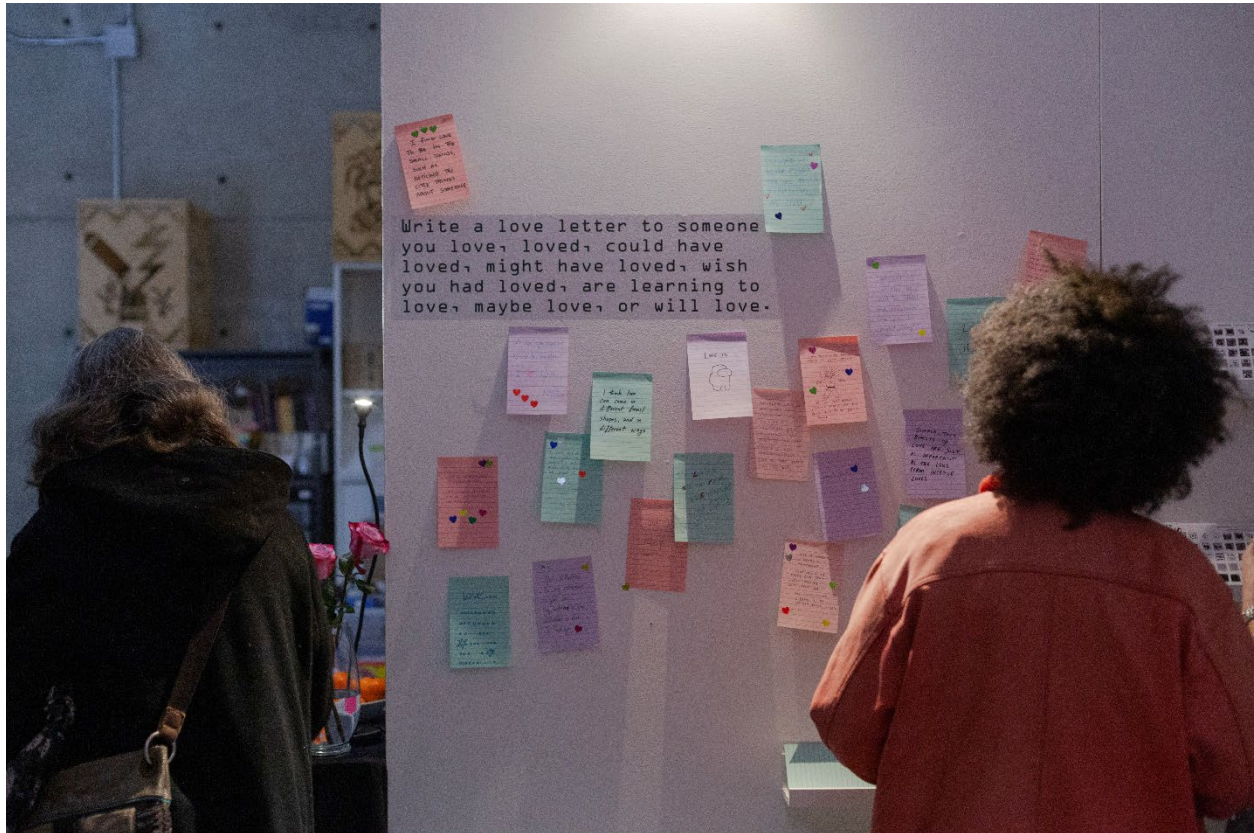


# All watched over by machines of loving grace

by Gladys Lou

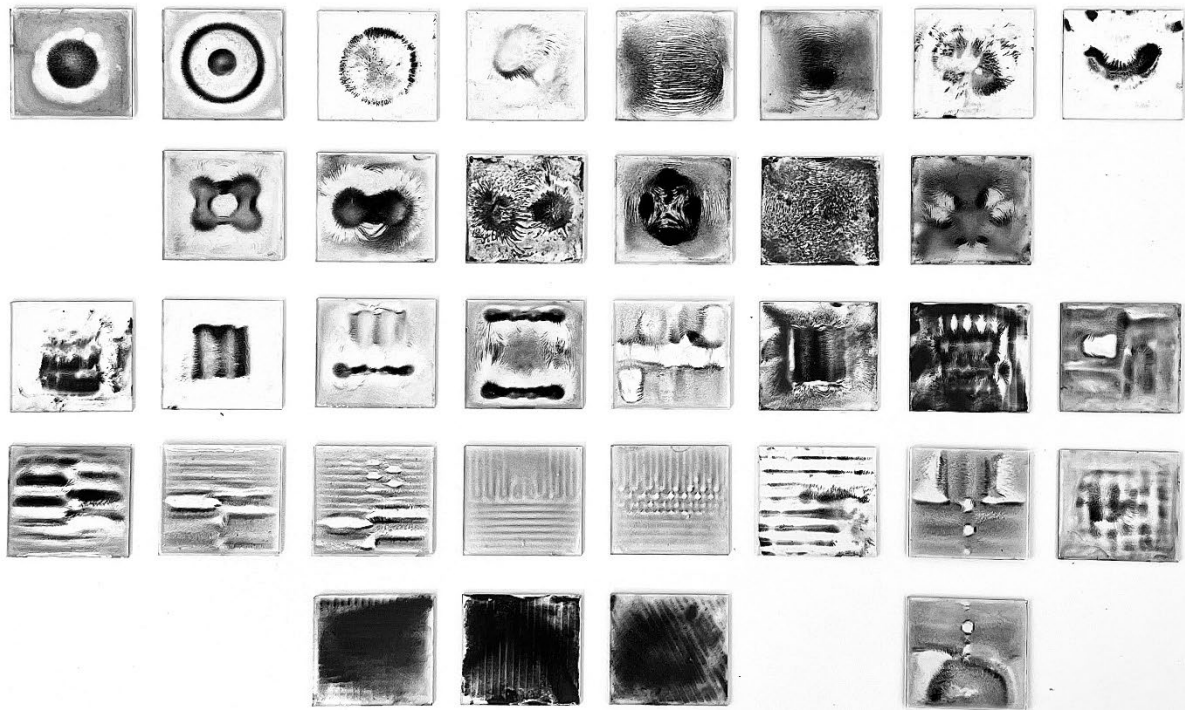


Documentation of Love Letter Writing Activity as part of exhibition programming. Photo by Natalie Logan courtesy of InterAccess.

*All watched over by machines of loving grace* explores how human-computer interaction has transformed the meaning of love and romance in the digital age. Curated by Gladys Lou, the exhibition considers ways that technology facilitates searching for love and liberates non-heteronormative identities by enabling representation of self beyond the binaries. The exhibition title is inspired by Richard Brautigan's 1967 poem that describes a utopian future where humans and machines live in harmony. Are machines capable of understanding emotions, or are they projecting human feelings? The exhibition asks the audience what makes love real: the lovers, the loved, or the medium by which love is conveyed. Working across magnetic art, kinetic sculpture, web art, interactive sensors, and thermal installation, artists Chia Amisola, Yoshe Li, Callum Schuster, Zuyva Sevilla, and Derek Toomes consider the evolving shapes and forms that

intimate relationships can take in the virtual sphere. The selected works contemplate attraction and repulsion, communication codes, conflict, warmth, presence, and intimacy within online platforms. Together, the featured artworks redefine what it means to love and be loved in the contemporary age and explore new modes of bonding that transcend the boundaries of the physical and virtual worlds.

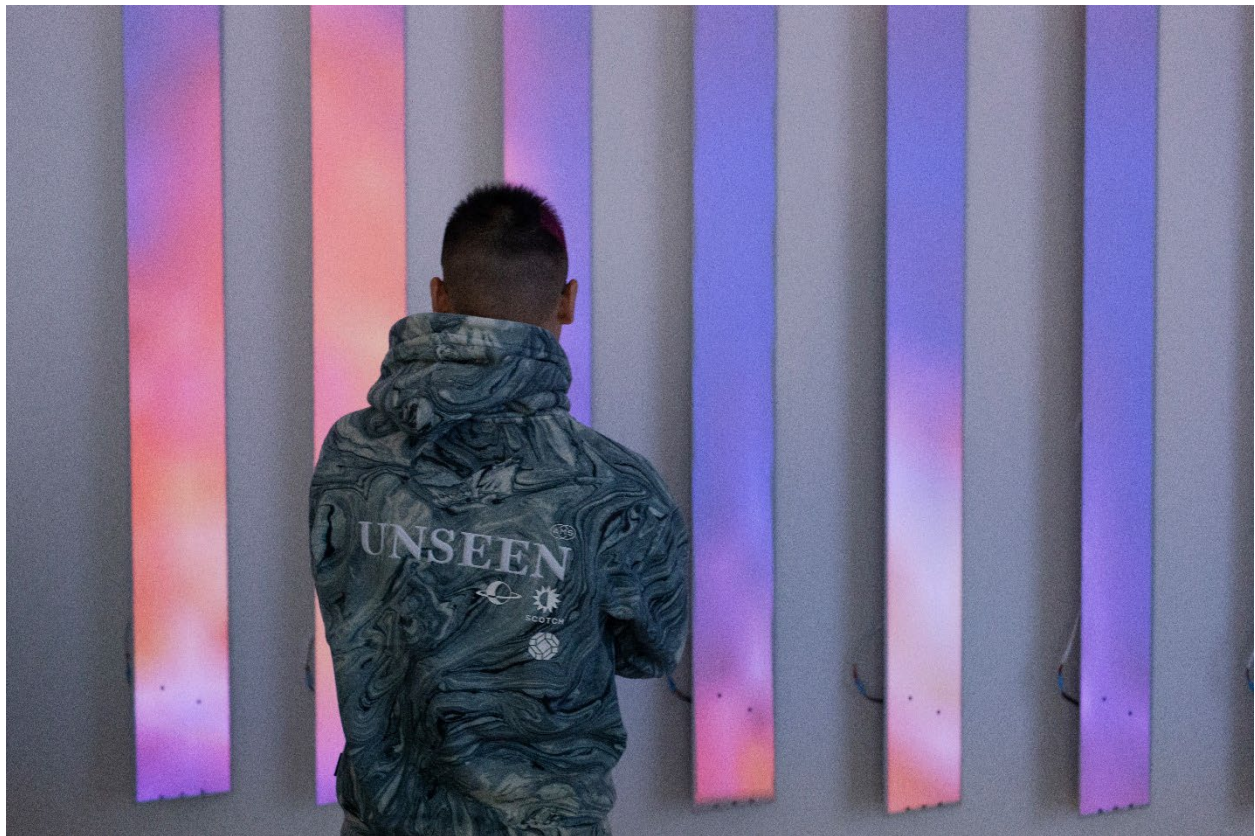
Technology changes the way individuals understand love, a universal experience that remains amorphous and mysterious to most. Is love a feeling, a choice, an admiration, a commitment, a curse, or a blessing? With the emergence of tools such as deep fake, AI-image generator, and Chat-GPT, individuals face the challenges of identifying *true* and *accurate* information amongst massive data networks and anonymous identities. From romantic to platonic relationships to self-love, as innocent as a crush and as complex as partnership, this exhibition explores how technology connects us when the boundaries between public and private, and virtual and real, become increasingly fluid. *All watched over by machines of loving grace* is a love letter dedicated to all the people that we love, loved, could have loved, might have loved, wish we had loved, are learning to love, maybe love, and will love.



Scanned view from *Ferrodolia\* MFS.23 (Magnetic Field Studies 2023)* by Callum Schuster. Photo courtesy of the artist.

*Ferrodolia\* MFS.23 (Magnetic Field Studies 2023)* by Callum Schuster is a series of 80 magnetized iron dust on 35mm glass slides. The black powder splatters in random orders like star dusts, constellations, and celestial bodies. “Ferro-” is a root word from *Ferrum*, meaning iron in Latin, while “-dolia” refers to Pareidolia, a psychological phenomenon in which the mind responds to a visual or auditory stimulus – perceiving a familiar pattern where none exists. *Ferrodolia* captures the process of attraction and repulsion between magnets and iron dust, while metaphorically alluding to the invisible forces that draw lovers closer and drive them apart, as well as the longing and nostalgia between encounter and departure. By changing the distance and placement of magnets and the quantity of iron dust, Schuster creates patterns with varying density and intensity that illustrate the journey of a relationship where lovers learn to build better synchronicity. The monochrome pattern continues to evolve. When one thinks they’ve recognized a similar pattern, the maze shifts, resembling the constant navigation through familiar

and unfamiliar, visible and invisible, certainty and uncertainty. Iron is a base element in life that exists in blood, food, sun, and building structures, while magnetism is used from compasses to MRIs and the Aurora Borealis. Referencing chemical bonding and polarities, Schuster marries natural forces with human emotions, generating a unique equation on the theory of attraction that binds strangers together at the right time and place.



Detail view from *Sink 12* by Zuyva Sevilla. Photo by Natalie Logan courtesy of InterAccess.

*Sink 12* by Zuyva Sevilla is a thermal installation that explores heat as both a material and an active process. The work captures the viewer's body temperature and transfers it onto the artwork through a chromatic display. Visitors are invited to touch the steel sheets and feel the temperature gradient across the material. By facilitating energy transfer between the viewers and their surroundings, Sevilla's work utilizes technology as a medium to share warmth and closeness between organic and inorganic bodies. It enables presence and physical proximity beyond time and space. This exchange of energy documents the traces we leave behind during physical and virtual encounters. It reflects on the way technology transforms the ephemeral

presence of bodies into heat energy that circulates eternally, like the memory of loved ones that endures after we cease to exist in the physical world.



Detail view from *Poetic Fighting* by Yoshe Li. Photo by Natalie Logan courtesy of InterAccess.

*Poetic Fighting* by Yoshe Li is an interactive installation of relational conflicts and arguments. The work is made of two hand-knitted controllers built with force sensors, connected to speakers and a projected image of a three-dimensional head modelled after the artist. The harder the users squeeze the controllers, the lower the pitch the louder the sound, and the more distorted the head becomes. Twisting and bending, the oscillating waves of bumps and calluses on the head visualize the chaotic state of mind and raging voices echoing in one's head during confrontations. The cacophonous sound, generated by a Juno-60 synthesizer, mimics the tone of screaming and yelling during verbal arguments. At the same time, the pressing motion on the soft, woollen controllers resembles clenching fists or squeezing on a stress ball. Inspired by an argument between the artist and her partner, the work reflects on the power dynamics at play between lovers during conflicts. The work is a poetic statement on priority and control in

relationships, serving as a form of stress relief. Li invites the users to experience different types of confrontations and dissonance without the risk of damaging their real-life relationships. She reminds the users that the goal is not to win or prove one's point but to listen to distinct perspectives and build a shared understanding.



Installation view from *Whispers in Code* by Derek Toomes. Photo by Natalie Logan courtesy of InterAccess.

Derek Toomes' *Whispers in Code* is a series of three wall-mounted kinetic sculptures that explore alternative modes of language and communication facilitated by technology. Small vibration motors from cell phones in each ear-shaped sculpture translate love sonnets composed from the text messages between the artist and his partner. Encrypted in Morse code, each sculpture conveys messages through different tones and rhythms – akin to whispered secrets between distant lovers. Morse code resembles the rhythmic heartbeat between lovers, colliding together through technology. Informed by phenomenology, where presence gives meaning, Toomes believes that intimacy develops from his slow process of studying, sculpting, and modelling his partner's, friends', and his own ears in 3D spaces. He encourages visitors to come

close to the work and take their time to decipher the chains of dialogue. The complex decoding process and hand-made quality of his work contradict mass production and critique the way media dictates society's understanding and perception of intimacy. When the three ears vibrate at the same time, their rhythms become difficult to differentiate, like the dialogues amongst a crowd, reflecting the complexities that machines induce by making simple messages abstract and challenging to decode. Through resonance and reverberation, Toomes shows us the possibility of exchanging feelings and communicating through codes. His work shows that technology can be a poetic bridge between the physical and digital worlds, forming a channel to communicate love.



Screenshot from *When We Love* by Chia Amisola. Photo courtesy of the artist.

*When We Love* by Chia Amisola is a browser-based dating simulator that explores technology's love, labour, and liberation through systems, poems, and archives. Amisola reimagines websites as a platform for placemaking – a gathering space that cultivates love and community. Inspired by the artist's experience of repressive queer love in the Philippines, Amisola's (web)site-specific art encourages intimacy without proximity, kindling sparks through

virtual stargazing and cloud watching. Users can select their own adventure by searching through web urls, clicking pop-up windows as web poetry, and self-reflecting through introspective protocol forms. Interspersed through domains and woven together as a dating experience, the websites provide a sense of agency and autonomy through the things users make, unmake, and feel. Amisola's work can be experienced individually and collectively – completed in a single-session or continuing for an infinite duration. Amisola's websites are as unfinished, continuous, and expanding as the internet – they are ambient art that breaks the convention of normative assumptions on the internet and intimacy, making digital platforms fun, playful, attentive, and full of love.

While relationships may end and exhibitions may not last forever, the artworks in the show extend beyond their lifespans. They live on as browser history and cache data, just like the memories of loved ones embedded, enmeshed, and savoured in our hearts. Below are the QR codes that link to Chia Amisola's virtual stargazing and cloud-watching simulators, where you can draw a cloud and make a wish on a star. The artists and curator invite you to continue contributing to our conversation and let our love live on by sharing care and belonging in the digital world.



*All watched over by machines of loving grace* ran from November 8 – December 9, 2023 at InterAccess in Toronto, ON.

Link to more photos of the exhibition and artworks: <https://www.gladyslou.com/all-watched-over-by-machines-of-loving-grace.html>