

Open Windows

October 27–

November 20, 2021

Art
Museum

Works by

Zach Blas, Vida Beyer, Ronnie Clarke,
B Wijshijer

Curated by Talia Golland

This exhibition is produced as part of
the requirements for the MVS degree in
Curatorial Studies at the John H. Daniels
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Design, University of Toronto.

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2021 MVS Curatorial Studies Projects

Alternative Convention:
Top Value Television's *Four More Years*
Curated by Eli Kerr
September 8–October 9, 2021
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

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Open Windows

The four artists included in the exhibition *Open Windows* consider the intrinsic metaphors and variant connotations of the personal desktop interface. Their work originates in or reconstructs this digital location, materially and spatially reconfiguring familiar parameters. These staged and conditional externalizations of personal digital space gesture to queer theoretical constructions of privacy, temporality, and desire.

Ronnie Clarke's video installation *Bliss (image)* derives its title and visual anchor from the iconic default background of the now-defunct Windows XP operating system. It constructs a new dimensionality that augments Clarke's engagement with the pictured landscape and its contextual associations as nostalgic desktop. The pristine expanse of rolling hills and cloud-wisped skies feels simulacral, while also prompting recollection of now-distant encounters with screen-space. Throughout the video's hypnotic duration, flickering glitches rupture the landscape, revealing fleeting textual messages and lines of code. Overlapping windows appear and disappear, featuring moving images of the artist's body, fragments of a physical performance dematerialized. A meandering cursor documents another kind of gestural movement. The mirage-like shimmer of the projection invites attention to the large and hybrid structure of a curtain-draped stage that sustains it. Its emptiness creates a kind of temporal displacement akin to what José Muñoz describes as "a moment of potentiality":¹ the

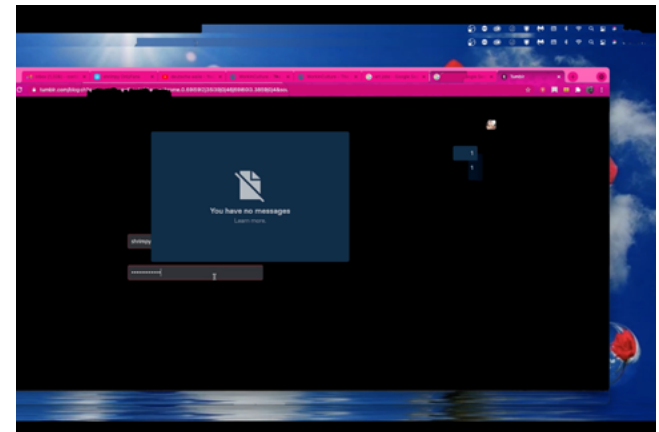
implication of past and future performances remembered, anticipated, and imagined.

B Wijshijer's three-channel installation */Users/shrimpychip/desktop/ddesktop* is projected onto leaning panels of varying sizes, each recalling the tilt of a scaled-up laptop screen. The largest projection features screen-recordings of Wijshijer's desktop, culled and collaged through rapid-paced editing and the removal of visual information with luma keys and roto-scoping. The scattered remnants include captcha checks, suggested text, and algorithmic advertising, implying the digital self's existence within broader structures. A smaller screen isolates the movements of their cursor—parsable details appearing only in selective flashes as the arrow points and clicks. The third video, shot from behind their desk chair, has been similarly manipulated. Wijshijer periodically looks over their shoulder to meet the camera's voyeuristic gaze, a backward glance at once implying paranoid self-surveillance and a coy admission of their own performance. Having spent several weeks documenting their digital activities, Wijshijer's editing strategies and an opaque logic of omission and inclusion dramatically constrain access to this archive. The breach of privacy they've enabled is consensual and highly mediated, but boundary crossing nonetheless.

In *Excerpt from Night Moves*, Vida Beyer displays a selection from an ongoing body of work that explores the dynamics of mediated queer desire. Each image in this

Cover: Ronnie Clarke, *Spotlight*, 2018. Performance documentation. Photo by Yuula Benivolski, 2018.

Right: B Wishijer, */Users/shrimpychip/desktop/ddesktop*, 2021. Digital collage (work in progress). Courtesy of the artist.



assemblage—karaoke lyric screens, a late-night text, a webcam nude, film stills—has been extracted from its original and ephemeral digital context and solidified through meticulous material recreation. The scale of each watercolour, embroidery, and needle-point renders the traces of the artist's hand all the more visible, their monumental physicality implying a dedication of time and labour both meditative and devotional. A dusky blue rectangle painted on the gallery wall suggests a screen without pixels, providing a background for the overlapping composition of the clustered and scattered pieces. *Night Moves* juxtaposes diaristic fragments from the artist's personal life with material from external sources. Feelings perhaps otherwise inarticulable cohere by means of pre-existing cultural texts that invite recognition and identification. Together, these excerpts form a kind of affective archive, identified by scholar Ann Cvetkovich as a distinctly queer artistic strategy.² New, fluid resonances emerge, ambiguity creating a space for encounters shaped by each viewer's personal frames of reference and experiential associations.

Zach Blas's *Contra-Internet Inversion Practices* stage an encounter between queer theory and the MacBook interface that serves as both their medium and setting, speculating on digital futures beyond techno-capitalist hegemony.³ Projected sequentially in a black-box environment, each tightly choreographed performance imbues the familiar mechanics of Apple applications with a startling cinematic

force. An unseen user assembles a Text Edit manifesto from PDFs of critical theory through copying, pasting, and find-and-replacing; the Photoshop eraser tool, a Google image search and Maya 3D modelling software visualize metaphors that both gesture to and transcend the limitations of their digital site. In each screen-recording, the desktop background has been evacuated of any personal debris so as to stand in for a collective site of potential. Blank white, the grey-white checkerboard of signified transparency, and an image of starry space each evoke the boundless sublimity of the as-yet undiscovered.

Throughout *Open Windows*, past-tense traces of absent embodiment create a sense of paradoxical proximity and deceptive immediacy, partial legibilities and strategic omissions both impeding and inviting the viewer's voyeuristic impulse.⁴ From these queer modalities emerges a conception of digital space as structured by desire, both frustrated and fulfilled.

1. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 103.
2. See "Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice," in *Feeling Photography*, ed. Elspeth Brown and Thy Phu (Durham: Duke UP, 2014).
3. Initially created for the multi-media project *Contra-Internet* (2015–2019). [https://zachblas.info/works/contra-internet/]
4. For a discussion of paradoxical proximity, see Sarah Ahmed's concept of disorientation in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2006), 166; for strategic omission, see Eve Sedgwick, "Queer and Now" in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 8.

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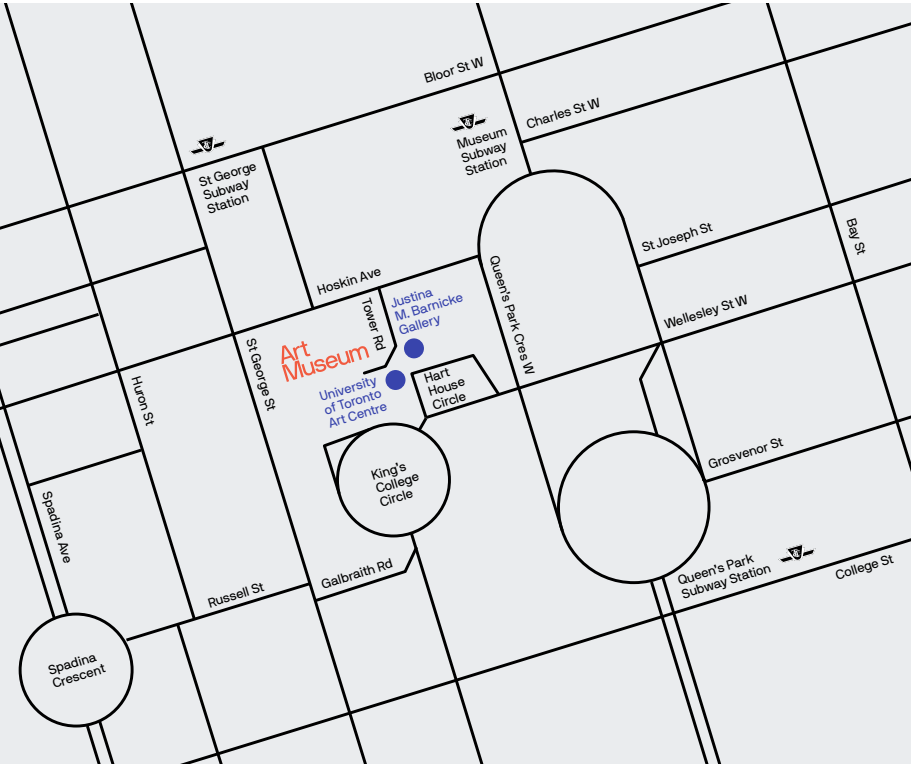
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