SASHA STILES

## 24 FEBRUARY — 18 MARCH 2023

OPENING RECEPTION

THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY, 6 — 8PM

PRESS PREVIEW AND OPENING RECEPTION IN PRESENCE OF THE ARTIST

In her essay *Towards A Poetics of Artificial Superintelligence*, the writer, editor, and curator Nora N. Khan attempts to chart a linguistic course through the future movements and mutations of artificial intelligence (AI) systems. She argues that to fully come to terms with what is coming, we need a new nonanthropocentric language for AI : novel metaphors for grappling with the planetary–scale changes that it will surely bring. To this end, she suggests an expanded poetics for conceptualizing AI that ranges from describing it as a 'star system,' to 'search party' and 'hurricane', suggesting a force that is cosmic, awe–inspiring, wildly unpredictable, and collaborative – perhaps all at once. Speaking to this need for a poetic reorientation of AI in her own way, the poet, artist, and AI researcher Sasha Stiles merges the long–lasting worldmaking processes of poetry with new AI–powered language tools to produce new linguistic worlds.

B1NARY ODES at Annka Kultys Gallery, Stiles' first solo show in the UK, spans the gallery's irl space, East London, and its newly augured virtual reality gallery, Annka Kultys Phygital. Within these joint presentations, viewers encounter the multimedia array of language play that constitutes Stiles' groundbreaking practice. Understanding poetry as a technological vessel or carrier bag for the broad spectrum of human experience across time and space, the artist entangles multiple formats and resource materials – from original poetry to classical aphorism, AI–generated text, handcrafted words, and binary code – to weave multidimensional worlds rooted in storytelling. In *B1NARY ODES*, poetry becomes code, and vice versa – scaffolding a multi–authored cultural feedback loop in which ancient narratives are reconfigured as affective linguistic landscapes, capable of reorienting us towards an increasingly posthuman future.

Within the physical exhibition space, small–scale drawings rendered with ink and pencil on paper and larger acrylic canvas paintings reveal Stiles' ongoing experiments in translating epic poetry into binary code. The series of canvases forming *Ancient Binary* (2019), rendered with oil, acrylic, pencil, spray paint and chalk, recast classical poems including *The Odyssey* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* into binary code. Scrubbed–out zeroes and ones characterize the canvases of *Ancient Binary : :*
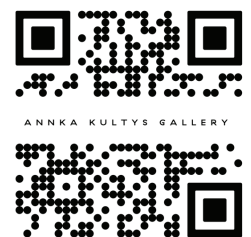
ANNKA KULTYS GALLERY

"*I tell you someone will remember us in the future*" (*After Sappho*), *Ancient Binary :* "*Poema pictura loquens*", and *Ancient Binary : "Pictura poems silens*". Reminiscent of overused chalkboards, their surfaces crack and disintegrate under the weight of a seemingly infinite history of storytelling, appearing like ancient artifacts of their own right. *Song of Illium* (2020) is host to a more futuristic retelling : its zeroes and ones are rendered in silvery spray paint across weighted lines of code that at first seem machine generated, until further observation of the stencil reveals the idiosyncratic logic of a human touch.

In Stiles' ongoing series *Cursive Binary* (2020–), a collection of twelve canvases, drawings, and ink on paper works, the hand of the artist becomes more apparent. As any reputable graphologist would tell you, the human psyche roosts in cursive : the eubillence of a loop or the slant of an interconnected word becomes an entry point into personal worlds that reveal the inner workings of their author. Here, binary code becomes exuberant, almost silly, reaffirmed with work titles such as *Cursive Binary : "I'm data's girl"* (2021) and *Cursive Binary : "Cogito ergo sumthing"* (2021). These titles reflect a kind of postinternet irony or cultural meme, serving as affective data map of our communal consciousness, from primordial campfire storytelling to the all-consuming Twitter brain.

Bookending the works on paper and canvas in the gallery are two large monitors presenting Stiles' digital video works, *B1NARY ODE* (2022), and her *Fragment* (2022) series. Since 2018, Stiles has collaborated with Technelegy, the artist's AI poet alter-ego and custom text generator rooted in OpenAI's now-infamous large language model, GPT–3. Across both projects, the kaleidoscopic, polyphonic potential of language AIs comes into fruition. *B1NARY ODE,* a generative "token word" project made in collaboration with Technelegy and Kris Bones, is rooted in *ORAL B1NARY,* a long-form generative project in collaboration with artist Nathaniel Stern. The work offers a poetic homage to multiplicity and the many worlds that bleed between the zeroes and ones. Within the *Fragment* series, composed of *Cursive Binary : Fragment 1, Cursive Binary : Fragment 2, and Cursive Binary : Fragment 3,* Stiles' scribbled cursive binary resurfaces, this time soaked in chroma key green. The videos zoom in hypnotically on each apparition; after a while, the mind seems to hallucinate flickers and pulses in the script, as if replicating the boot sequence of a vintage computer coming to life. Each *Fragment* video will be sold as an NFT (ed. 100) on the Tezos blockchain, and can be purchased directly in the gallery.

Finally, in the virtual white cube space of Annka Kultys Phygital, the artist presents a poetic triptych, a collaborative poem rendered in glowing RGB neon. *There are as many ways to be human* (2022) was written by Stiles in partnership with Technelegy; the three-verse poem, drawn from Stiles' own poetry as well as GPT–3's expansive neural net, considers language as a tool for more-than-human survivial : "poetry is a way of thinking up how to thwart extinction." Presented across three walls of the virtual gallery, the poem's mantra recalls that of Octavia Butler's *Parables* series : "the only lasting truth is change."

In *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,* the speculative fiction author and poet Ursula K. Le Guin argues that storytelling is humanity's original and most meaningful technology. Le Guin's short text highlights the generative power of storytelling as a cultural carrier bag that locates us within a shared present while simultaneously reorienting us towards possible futures. Like a ritual, the story is born anew every time it is retold, imprinting its changes upon us, the listeners. Likewise, the generative technologies of AI–powered language models can be understood as a similar approach to narrative world–making. When approached sensitively and with care, the latent space of human–AI collaboration can lend itself to a more–than–human intelligence.

Understanding these ideas through the lens of postcolonial worlding theorist Gayatri Spivak, who argues that whoever wields language also creates (and destroys) worlds, we can consider the work of Stiles, who is of Kalmyk descent, as a decolonial approach to emergent AI technologies, which bear traces of older colonial power structures. Through her expanded collaborations with AI language models as well as her interest in reorienting binary code as a generative poetics for new forms of storytelling, Stiles' work rejects the primacy of the human, while opening up new shared worlds in the process. *B1NARY ⊙DES* offers an window into this powerful practice, which is as generous as it is generative. Stiles' exhibition encourages us to listen deeply and read between the lines, in order to storytell a future that exists somewhere between the space of zeros and ones.

BIOGRAPHY

Sasha Stiles a first-generation Kalmyk-American poet, artist and AI researcher working at the intersection of text and technology. Stiles' work considers what it means to be human in an increasingly posthuman era, while exploring the future possibilities of more-than-human storytelling through language and image.

Stiles has been recognized as a leading figure in the emergent fields of generative literature and language art. Her work merges poetry, art, code, web3, and AI-generated art, coupled with moving image, painting, and drawing, to create dynamic multimedia projects that speculate on poetry as code, and code as poetry. By working across space and time – combining the first human records of oral storytelling with collaborative human-AI writing processes – Stiles expands poetry's potential as a world-making practice. By bringing a multilayered, polyphonic intelligence to binary code, Stiles opens up the possibility for a more-than-human poetics.

Since 2018, Stiles has been collaborating with Technelegy, the artist's "AI alter ego" and custom text generation model powered by OpenAI's AI-powered large language model, GPT-3. By training her alter ego on her own poetry as well as the billions of parameters making up the neural network architecture of GPT-3, Stiles sits at the forefront of a truly collaborative and expanded human-machine creative practice. In 2021, Stiles published the poetry collection Technelegy (Black Spring Press Gtoup), which has been called an "instant techno classic".
Stils has also been named "perhaps the leading blockchain poet" by Right Click Save, as well as one of the top 10 NFT artists to watch in 2023.

Stiles has exhibited her work internationally including Kunsthalle Zurich, Annka Kultys Gallery, SuperRare Gallery, CHRISTIE'S, and Art Basel Miami Beach. Stiles has also given talks at events and institutions including Art Basel (Switzerland), the Brooklyn Museum, SXSW, Digilogue Istanbul, Parsons The New School, NFT NYC and NFT London. Stiles is also co-founder of theVERSEverse, an acclaimed crypto literary collective that works toward an expanded understanding of poetry as art, code, and limitless language.

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Opening Hours : Wednesday through Saturday, 12 — 6pm