The computer was once human. Workers hired to perform calculations - predominantly women - bore this title until more sophisticated information technologies inherited it, giving rise to the computer as machine we understand today. The exhibition at **indigo+madder** borrows its name from Katherine Hayles' text, which explores this shifting anthropological and machinic relation. The 'semantic shock' [1] of the sentence, 'my mother was a computer', functions because it rattles our ideas of kinship and creation, hinting at a 'postbiological' [2] future. Sayal-Bennet's selection of works leans into this displacement, and all the pieces explore the machine, or digital program, as collaborator - the resulting art emerges from this in-between space, tentative, and indicative of its dichotomous origin.

Several of the artists explore this relation by turning their bodies into machine mimics. Lazlo von Dhonanyi designs his paintings in Rhino software and then uses tape and stencils to paint layers until the design is translated into a physical format - he operates like a human printer, in a process self described as 'technological mimesis'. As a result, inconsistencies in plane and depth are produced, giving the illusion of a peeling image pasted over itself, with bits from the past (or future?) clinging on. This process of translation references the exhibition's broader theme of analogue and digital dialects. As in Hayles' text, the works explore a reality where new languages are constantly emerging, proliferating, and fading into obsolescence. There are brief, tender moments of overlap - von Dhonanyi runs his finished paintings through an image-to-text AI to name them. This nestlike cable cluster has been aptly dubbed 'A Bunch of Wires'.

Another machine mimic, Emily Kraus 'works inside a human-painting machine comprised of a canvas loop stretched over a metal cubic scaffold. As the canvas passes through the machine, she holds the memory of surrounding marks to inform her application of paint.' [3] The process results in massive technicolor canvases, almost as if a gargantuan prismatic printer jammed. Sayal-Bennet tells me many visitors have been surprised the works are plain pigment on canvas, because when photographed and seen on social media they look like digital renders. The only thing that gives away their materiality are the trace veins that trickle through, bits of bare canvas created by the fabric scrunching over itself when run through Kraus' mechanism, emerging as fault lines, or fractures, when the canvas is stretched at the end of the process. Also playing with language, Coorfield-Moore weaves immense glitchy mnemonic images. Referencing one of the earliest machines - the binary punchcard loom - he paints directly onto the threads before weaving them, and lets the winding of the loom distort the image. Running the dyed wires through the machine produces a 'fizzy heat', where the shivering and childlike marks carry the trace of his hand as well as the technology which assisted him.
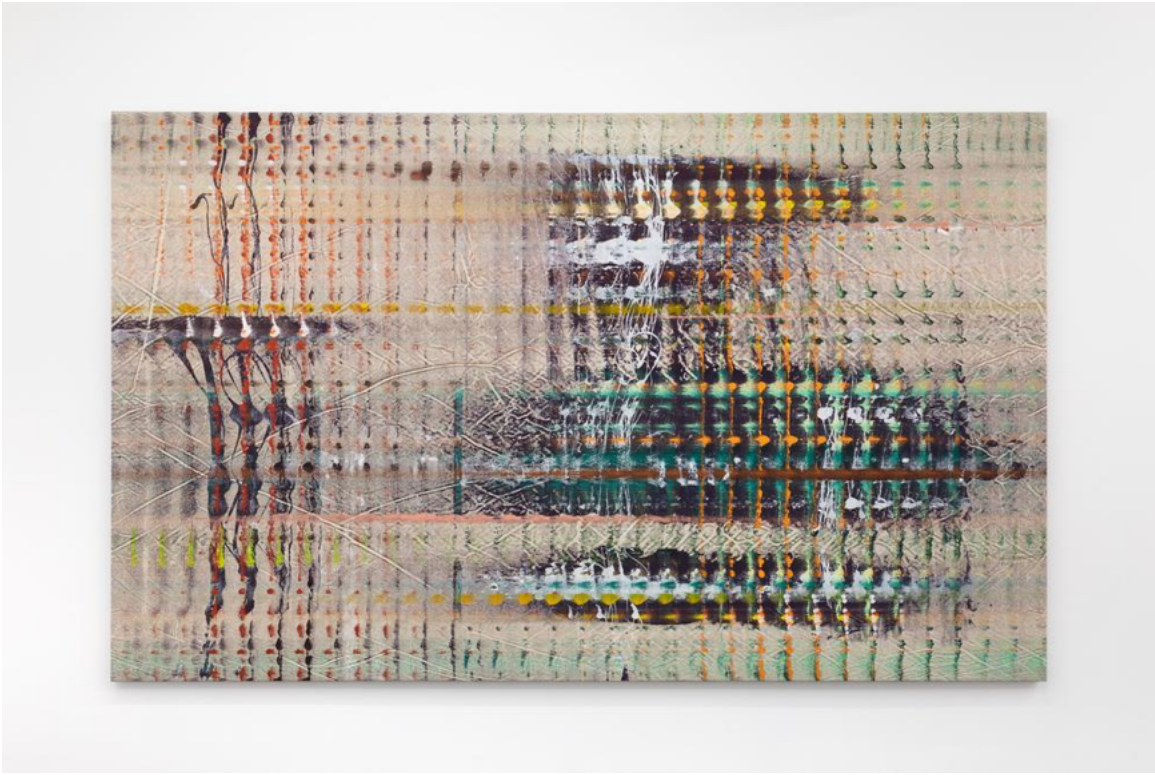
This warp-edness which runs through the exhibition not only parallels bodies and soft/hardwares, but also calls to mind fictional distortions of linear time [4]. Zajko's *Threadbearer* is an ambiguous terracotta structure, which calls to mind a variety of ancient machinery brought to a standstill. It could be the abacus of a forgotten culture, or a weaver, or some kind of game - the sieve and irregular metal and thread spools feel found and playful, it could be a playground pastime as easily as a device for labour. It could have been made a millennium ago, or last year. All of these works, despite their mechanical leaning, engage in this kind of play - a lightness of potentiality brought about by the rethinking of material. William Darrell's hypnotic sculpture is the embodiment of this. *The Salamander's Cauldron* houses a mummified newt which endlessly spins round a pink and yellow fungal bloom. The 3D printed petals are perched and animated atop a craggy trunk, who's form also follows the rotation of reptile and plant. The work is a reference to the occult myth of salamanders being born from flames, invulnerable to fire. Darrell's newt, clearly dead, revives this tale in light of the rapidly shifting climate of the present day. Merging new tech and old fable to critique the present, while still retaining an element of lightness and beauty is no easy feat, but, in a charming ode to Darell's life growing up on a farm, the newt triumphs.

Two works in the show stand separate from this playfulness, rather than mimicking, they deal in abstraction. Pruter's *The Birds (no. 125165)* is a print, slightly larger than a postcard, with two crimson polished hands hovering in front of a street. The tense knuckles and shiny talons loom ominous. Pruter uses digital methods to edit and restitch film - this particular image is part of an ongoing project where he redacts the birds from Alfred Hitchcock's film by the same name. It's a work where technology is wielded with the intent of being reductive, rather than additive. Sayal-Benett's piece is also indicative of a kind of loss. *Dioptrique* is designed in Rhino and then crafted from steel and 3D printed filaments. More of an expanded drawing than a sculpture, she investigates how programs act as sets of restrictions - 'parameters that determine possibilities of expression.' [5] Rather than being passive tools, she is interested in their agency and how their language inflects the everyday. She tells me that this investigation of limitations is a continuation of her research on the appropriation of modernist forms by fascism. A less pleasant technological warp, this appropriation of materials, forms, and structures was used to consolidate the authority of fascist groups, as they worked to redefine the built environment alongside social mentalities.
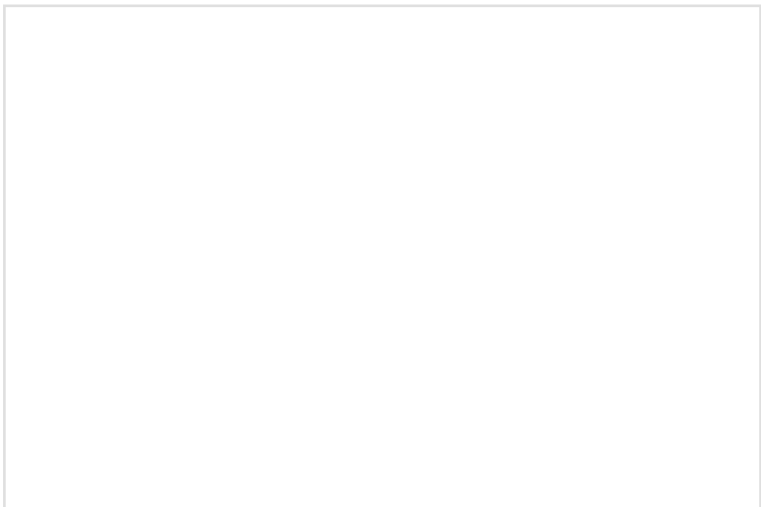
Within a small gallery space, a group of possibilities for human-machine collaboration sit together, making no cohesive claim, simply demonstrating. The show is one of the most coherent I've seen recently, mapping modes of exploration, translation, and production across different mediums and technologies. Nestled in a white and clinical basement, it's on till the 19th of November, go have a looksie x

Footnotes:

1: Katherin Hayles, *My Mother was a Computer*, 2005.
2: ibid.
3: *My Mother was a Computer* Press Release, Amba Sayal-Bennet
4: as in 'warp speed' in Star Trek, etc.
5: *My Mother was a Computer* Press Release, Amba Sayal-Bennet

More info:

https://indigoplusmadder.com/london-art-exhibitions/indigoplusmaddermymotherwasacomputer

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