

BEDFORD CREATIVE ARTS PRESENTS

J.E.S.S.

(JUST EXAMINING
SYSTEMIC
STEREOTYPES)

Artists: Fergus Laidlaw & Arnab Chakravarty



BEDFORD ARTS
CREATIVE

ABOUT J.E.S.S.

J.E.S.S. is an interactive installation that sparks curiosity and invites playful, hands-on exploration of how AI models interpret people. Situated within our Community Portrait exhibition exploring photography's evolution, the installation invites viewers to interact with nostalgic tools — a hybrid of a projector and a scanner. Participants select photographs of the local community taken by human photographers and feed them into the machine.

The AI image-to-text model translates the visuals into words. It displays them on a monitor for visitors to read. This collection of disconnected phrases and isolated terms then serves as a prompt for an AI text-to-image model to try to recreate the photograph. This step-by-step conversion process—image to text to image—reveals stark contrasts between human and machine perception. It invites participants to examine the AI's interpretation closely, exposing biases and stereotypes in its language. As viewers observe this process across various photographs, they begin to see how AI describes images and how its language choices shape the look and expression of its creations. The installation encourages viewers to reflect on this transformation and share their thoughts using pen and paper.

In our current cultural and media landscape, where AI tools like ChatGPT, DALL-E, and others are being used more frequently to represent our ideas, dreams and aspirations, J.E.S.S. prompts viewers to engage in a critical examination of the production process behind these images. By highlighting the differences between human-created and AI-generated imagery, the installation challenges us to question the role of AI in visual representation and to demand more thoughtful and responsible use of these powerful technologies.

COMMUNITY PORTRAIT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Bedford Creative Arts (BCA) partnered with Fujifilm UK to provide participants, through artist-led workshops, the opportunity to produce individual portraits to create a Community Portrait of the town. We worked with local photographers to take portraits of people within our local community not often seen in portraiture. We ran workshops in schools, community settings, Bedford College and The Higgins Bedford using the latest FujiFilm cameras as well as traditional and historic photography techniques, producing over 1,000 photographs.

The exhibition features a selection of 200 portraits of Bedford locals. It explores the history of photography from 1840s glass-plate techniques, through to current digital techniques, and onwards towards to a potential future involving AI. It showcases the Bedford community through their own portraits, whilst inviting the viewer to reflect on the art of image-making through the decades and beyond.

This project is delivered in partnership with The Higgins Bedford and is sponsored by Fujifilm UK alongside support from Arts Council England, The Wixamtree Trust and The Steel Charitable Trust.





The Community Portrait exhibition is a reflection on photography's value as an artform as we enter a future where anyone can take a photo, but it is open to manipulation through technology.

AMI AUBREY

PROGRAMME PRODUCER, Bedford Creative Arts

Exhibition Information

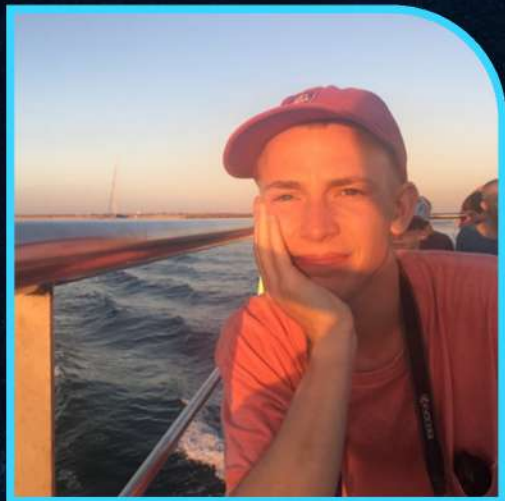
COMMUNITY PORTRAIT EXHIBITION

28 September 2024 - 23 February 2025

Sir William Harpur Gallery
The Higgins Bedford
Castle Lane,
Bedford, MK40 3XD

Free entry

The Team



FERGUS LAIDLAW
AI ARTIST

Fergus is an artist and creative technologist who seeks to explore the natural world through technological means. For the last few years he's been preoccupied with using generative AI as a reflective lens through which to view the world humans have built.



ARNAB CHAKRAVARTY
AI ARTIST

Arnab is an interdisciplinary artist working with physical and digital affordances of technology that we take for granted to create new reconfigurations between humans, machines and the latent space in-between. His work has involved designing apps, systems and services, to programming interactive installations, objects, and immersive theatrical productions.



AMI AUBREY
PRODUCER

Ami is BCA's Programme Producer and artistic lead – devising our strategic programme with artists and communities. Ami has a passion for engaging communities. Her background includes working in film and she has a specialism in producing innovative digital projects.



There is a lot of hype around AI – everyone is talking about it. It's like the Wild West, we don't have set standards. People should question what they are seeing, and be aware of the whole problematic nature of it. This is the future we're heading towards, so let's be a bit more critical and informed about it.

ARNAB CHAKRAVARTY

AI ARTIST, J.E.S.S.

INSTALLATION TECHNICAL FORMAT

Technical Specifications

- Requirements:
 - Wall Space: Minimum 2m x 2m flat surface for projection.
 - Power Supply: Standard UK plug (230V).
 - iPad: Provided by the exhibitor for user interaction and photo capture.
- Built-In Features:
 - Fully self-contained system, including hardware and projection setup.
 - Integrated software for seamless operation and real-time user feedback.
- Installation:
 - Plug-and-play; no additional assembly required.
 - Position projector 2–3m from the wall for optimal projection.
- User Interaction:
 - Visitors use the iPad to take pictures, which are fed directly into the installation.
 - Dynamic visual output reacts to user input in real time.
- Optional extras:
 - A new GPU could be provided for faster generation times (current generation time is about 90s)

Thank You

As a registered charity, we really do appreciate all the support received from our partners and funders, which helps us keep doing what we do - creating art for, with, and inspired by communities.



If you are an individual that values our work and would like to make a one-off or regular donation, or you are a business looking to partner with us or commission us, please contact us.

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Charity No: 1119555