José Andrés Mora is a Venezuelan-Canadian interdisciplinary artist. He has exhibited work across Canada in Art Metropole, Art Toronto, Maison de la Culture NDG, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Nuit Blanche, Struts Gallery, Nocturne, and others exhibition spaces. Mora attended the Nova Scotia College of Arts and Design (BFA, 2012), the University of Guelph (MFA, 2020) and is currently completing a Bachelors of Computer Engineering at Concordia University. He lives in Montreal, QC.

Furqan Mohamed is a writer, educator, and arts worker from Toronto. Her writing has appeared in Maisonneuve, FASHION, The Local, and C Mag. She served as the Guest Curator for the 2025 Mayworks Festival of Working People & the Arts, exploring fear, bodies, work, and labour justice. She hosts the literary reading series, “Who’s Afriad?” currently in residence at the Tranzac. Furqan is occupied by poetry, culture, knowledge-sharing, and abolition. She will be telling her kids about you.

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The Work of Being Understood

Translation, Technology, and Entropy in José Andrés Mora’s Practice

Essay by Furqan Mohamed

Inter/Access

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As a poet and writer, I have remained concerned with how language changes when it moves between contexts, how the subtleties of culture and memory transform language; words, phrases, each time they are recalled and said aloud. Language, I find, sometimes to be unstable — firm and constructive — and at the same time, through migration and assimilation, made fragile. And when technology enters the mix, this instability is made even more apparent.

José Andrés Mora's work treats this unsteadiness not as a problem to be overcome, rather, the unsteadiness becomes the material condition through which meaning is produced. Technology is no longer simply the tool or medium; it has its own kind of language requiring translation and therefore comes with limitations and possibilities for misunderstanding. Mora embraces this breakdown, allowing for moments of digital production to meet the physical and for visible images to become a record of the systems that produce them.

In *Truth's Entropy*, Mora constructs some of the structures that support the technology itself. Over our virtual meeting, in between knowing laughter, and his hands outstretched, he attempts to demonstrate to me the scale of the structures. Partly a practical decision, shaped by financial constraints, but also an important, conceptual one. The handmade and physical act as a hard, tangible foil to the ephemeral, dreamy, and Matrix-like quality of digital projection.

Technology, in our shared public spaces, can appear both inherent and weightless, and Mora gives it a body. The poems operate in the same manner, in tandem with the physical structures. *Rogue Lament* turns the ordinary act of searching for a Wi-Fi connection into an encounter with language. Utilizing a modified commercial router, and our collective habit of reaching for the Wi-Fi wherever we go, lines of poetry appear as network names. This work requires no traditional gallery infrastructure and can exist within the habits of everyday public space — a library or café. Technology, here, becomes infrastructure, memory, and social behaviour, all at once.

The installation *Retold* uses two projectors mounted on a custom-built rotating plinth. The exhibition's anchor features projections that move around the surrounding gallery walls as the plinth turns. The text remains dynamic, its movement determining how we read and receive it. Experienced in projection mapping, Mora explains how the physical distance between the projectors and the walls causes the speed of the animation to change, creating a bodily, "breathing rhythm" as he describes, the pace of the language expanding, moving, and contracting in relationship to the architecture of the space.

That relationship, between the eyes and the body, what you see and where you are when you see it, affects language, too. Mora describes writing as a context-specific medium and describes an interest in what happens when language is removed from the environment in which it originally made sense. Once out of place, words can become fragmented, degraded, and ambiguous, and then when delivered digitally, they become that way twice-over — the digital image, the projection, like a sentence or memory, is never entirely fixed.

Mora considers aloud how a painting can, in its own way, continue to persist without constant external intervention, unlike digital and electronic works that require energy to remain fully operational. These works are vulnerable to failures, corruption, and obsolescence. This tragic irony, he describes, is within the attempt to counter entropy and preserve something perfectly to the point where it undergoes a process of change, maintenance, and change again. This manipulates any reading, encouraging us to slow down. Technological displays are so often associated with acceleration and convenience; it's our reading that becomes a necessary interruption, and part of the piece.

Mora's personal experience of language and migration comes through here. Immigrating to Vancouver from Venezuela, he learned to navigate English-speaking environments, working to avoid stereotypes and prejudices. Mora recalls his youthful desire not to stand out, putting great effort into mastering English as a means of surviving the every-day, and gaining control over his surroundings, which then developed into an appreciation for reading and writing. Language is simultaneously a site of belonging and a site of alienation.

Mora's current context as a Spanish speaker living in Quebec introduces another layer of linguistic instability. It is at this point in our conversation I find myself asking a question I pose to kin and fellow artists who speak and live with more than just English — "is your internal monologue, the voice in your head that recounts while you're working, or on the subway, or having dinner, in English?" I came to a realization years ago, working with preschool age children, who outwardly verbalize their internal monologue naturally, that my own, for the most part, is in Somali. Mora indulges my question, telling me that his is in English, and that his Spanish became a bridge for learning French. Interestingly, he has discovered that when returning from French, he defaults to Spanish, the resulting linguistic collisions demonstrating that language cannot remain untouched or isolated. Language overlaps, interferes, and carries traces.

These experiences are blessedly not unique to Mora, who looks for the least unique aspects of his own experience, honouring the ordinary and mundane in order to highlight points of connection between others. Mora's practice encourages us to ask what happens when systems designed to transmit information begin to reveal themselves as unstable. Projections change speed, a memory loses a detail, a word in one language interferes with another, in a gallery, the outline of a body in front of a projector causes a line to bleed, a digital file degrades. What survives when information moves, is remembered, and transformed? Any attempt at permanence is not the answer. Instead, Mora's work suggests that meaning exists within and through a continued negotiation. Like waves, language, memory, and identity are alive because they are unstable, their fragility the condition through which we reflect and make meaning, over and over again.