



For immediate release

2025 Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators awarded to Tristan Sauer

Guelph, ON – April 4, 2025 – The Art Gallery of Guelph (AGG) is pleased to announce that Tristan Sauer has been awarded the 2025 Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators. His project, *Soft Internet Theory*, has been selected as the winning submission and will be presented at the Art Gallery of Guelph from September 18, 2025 – January 4, 2026.

Created in 2012, the annual prize is awarded to a Canadian curator or curatorial team under 30 with the goal to support a resilient, sustainable, and inclusive arts sector in Canada. Each year, the Middlebrook Prize recognizes and demonstrates the vital role of artistic expression in an era of ongoing and unprecedented economic, political, environmental, and social upheaval. This year’s jury was composed of Charles Campbell (independent artist, writer, and curator), Erin Szikora (Curator of Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of Guelph), and Pan Wendt (Curator, Confederation Centre Art Gallery).

The “dead internet theory,” according to Sauer, “is an observation—one that the internet, the cornerstone for human connection, a replacement for the town square, the secret meeting spots, back alleys and bars, is now void of life. Gone are the unrestricted voices of the masses, replaced by white noise from bots and AI-generated images.”

Soft Internet Theory confronts the threat artificial intelligence poses to cyberspace by calling attention back to the handmade and the human heartbeat that once gave the internet its revolutionary potential. Rejecting the idea of the “dead internet”, the exhibition revises narratives of fear, artifice, and anxiety with interactive sculpture, installation, and textile works “that humanize technology, seek empathy in the digital, and create poetry in the CMD line.”

“Sauer did much more than just use the work of artists to illustrate a curator’s idea; the choice of works both embodied and opened up the theme,” stated Wendt. “Sauer’s proposal is forward thinking and timely”, notes Szikora. “The nuance and expertise he brings to this topic as both a curator and new media artist illuminates challenging realities that no longer feel avoidable. My congratulations!”



Tristan Sauer. Photo: Anthony Gebrehiwot.

Curator Biography

Tristan Sauer is a New Media Artist and Curator critically interested in technology and capitalism, viewing their relationship as a potential modern-day Pandora’s box. His work explores the intersections between our digital and physical worlds, and how an inside-out look at internet culture and our response to “capitalist horrors within our comprehension” can reveal more about the human condition. Working with mediums such as wearable technology, electronic sculpture, and net-art, Sauer explores these topics through an afro-futurist lens, imagining and critiquing the outcomes of our relationships with technology on our future.

A graduate of the New Media program at Toronto Metropolitan University, Sauer has presented locally at the Plumb, Meridian Art Centre, Gallery 1313, Whippersnapper Gallery, Lansdowne Station, with The Artist Project, and Nuit Blanche. He has curated for Long Winter, Symbiocene Gallery, REEL Asian Film Festival, Xpace Cultural Centre, Ed Video Media Arts Centre, and C Magazine.

About the Middlebrook Prize

Founded in 2012, the Middlebrook Prize is a national prize awarded annually to foster social innovation and curatorial excellence in Canada while encouraging creative inquiry and public engagement. Selected by a jury of arts professionals, each winner is a curator or curatorial team under 30 who receives an honorarium as well as curatorial mentorship in the development of an exhibition. The Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators is made possible through the support of the Centre Wellington Community Foundation Middlebrook Social Innovation Fund, the Guelph Community Foundation Musagetes Fund, and through private donations. For more information about the Middlebrook Prize and the cohort of past winners, please visit middlebrookprize.ca.

Media Contact

Sophie Dernovsek, Digital Content and Programs Associate
sdernovsek@artgalleryofguelph.ca | 519-837-0010



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