

Fig.

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Fig. 8.
Tyler Coburn
Robots Building Robots

July 8–30, 2023

Opening reception will be held on Saturday, July 8 from 17:00–19:00

Fig. is pleased to announce *Robots Building Robots*, a solo exhibition by New York-based artist Tyler Coburn on view from July 8–30, 2023. The exhibition features work from the past decade exploring automation, sabotage, and robot surrogacy.

Robots Building Robots began as an inquiry into “lights out” manufacturing, a type of automated production so named for the lack of need for regular human supervision. During a trip to Taiwan in July 2013, Coburn visited a science park in Tainan where the Japanese robotics company FANUC was rumored to be building a lights out factory. On a long walk through the park’s grounds, speaking extemporaneously into an audio recorder, the artist considered literary and philosophical speculations on labor, mechanic intelligence, and the “automatic factory.” His travelogue was published by CCA Glasgow.

Ten years later, for his first-ever visit to Japan, Coburn returned to this project by making a second travelogue in Oshino, where FANUC has its headquarters—including some lights out facilities. Just as he did in Tainan, Coburn walked around the site. He also visited other places in the area that resonate with the subject, such as a museum of automated musical instruments. Copies of both travelogues appear at Fig. on a rug that approximates FANUC yellow. Charm bracelets extend from the ceiling and attach to each book.

In the decade between these travelogues, Coburn had three sabots (clogs) 3D printed in lights out conditions at one of the most automated factories in the United States. One is on view at Fig. The word “sabotage” is said to derive from the acts of sabot-wearing workers during the Industrial Revolution. By replicating this shoe in a factory where few human workers are present, the artist asks us to consider both the history of sabotage and its possibilities in our age of increasing automation.

Most recently, lights out production has become a metaphoric device for Coburn to reflect on the creative and waged labor of the artist, and the role robot surrogacy might play in negotiating their respective demands. In collaboration with Siqi Zhu, he made *Taka* (2023), a robot surrogate of Takayuki Kubota, an artist and teacher who also runs Fig. Fig. primarily functions as an exhibiting space while also serving as Taka’s studio and home. On the days when Taka teaches, the gallery lights stay off, and this robot does studio work in his place: monitoring particulate matter imperceptible to the human eye, transforming the data, and sharing what results with Taka on a private web interface. During gallery hours, the robot “sleeps” in his futon.

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Tyler Coburn was born in 1983 in the United States and lives and works in New York. He received a BA in Comparative Literature from Yale University and an MFA in Art from the University of Southern California. He also served as a fellow in the Whitney Independent Study Program from 2014-2015. Coburn's work has been presented at numerous venues including Centre Pompidou, Paris; Bergen Kunsthall; Hayward Gallery, London; Para Site, Hong Kong; and Kunstverein Munich. He is the author of four books: *I'm that angel* (2012); *Robots Building Robots* (2013), published by CCA Glasgow; *Richard Roe* (2019), published by Sternberg Press; and *Solitary* (2022), co-published by Sternberg Press and Art Sonje Center. His texts have appeared in *e-flux* journal, *Frieze*, *Dis*, *Mousse*, *ArtReview*, *LEAP*, and *Rhizome*.