

Dorian Gaudin

I still hope one day to have a deep conversation with the chair I am sitting on!

Dorian Gaudin makes kinetic installations that combine performance, sculpture and cinema, and that are imbued with dark humour. As he says, My works function like a mirror of human behaviour towards technology.

Words: Muriel Zagha

Engineeringó the mechanics left visible in the finished piecesó plays a profound part in the Paris born, New York based Gaudin's practice. But this is no art of trickery or illusion; rather, it confronts the viewer, sometimes to disturbing effect, with animated objects stripped of their functionality and intent on exploring their personal way of moving.

How do you go about making art? For my installations I play around rescaling and fragmenting objects, trying to forget about meaning by looking only at shapes. A steak might become a mechanical part (*Pierre & Renee*, 2014) or a corrugated plate a landscape (*Untitled*, 2012). But those 3D collages usually take off when I add the time dimension. While I laboriously try to physically make it work, in return the object struggles to be what I made it. I believe the reconstructing wall (*Untitled*, 2012) creates empathy because of its stubbornness despite inevitable failures.

I may not trigger empathy myself but I carry a similar obstinacy when figuring out ways to engineer the mechanism in the face of my technical incompetence. My obstinacy reflects the wall's stubbornness. I also like to combine cinema and theatre techniques. The set for the film *Primetime* (2015) became the sculpture *Aging Beauty* (2015). For *Primetime* I made a mechanical set conveying the illusion of a seascape with a heavy swell. When filming was finished I reused this set, minus the trompe l'oeil, as a kind of abstract sculpture.





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How much of an impact did growing up as the son of a choreographer have on you as an artist? I admit I have a soft spot for movement and I did study animation before switching to art. My mother was a dancer and my father a choreographer. They never forced me into dancing but I did take a few dance lessons. That is when I realized talent isn't necessarily hereditary! A strong memory I've kept from my upbringing was being able to stand behind the scenes: this particular point of view where you simultaneously see the show and how it is made fascinates me. My solo show at the Palais de Tokyo (*Rites and Aftermath*, 2017) was constructed like a theatre, a stage peopled with animated sculptures suggesting a banquet where all the guests have left. It recalled a social ritual like that of Jean Rouch's *Ma tres Fous*, the Banana Boat scene in Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice* or a family Christmas dinner. When my installations are active, accomplishing or figuring out their moves, I like to think they are dancing for themselves in some kind of trance.

Is the growth of artificial intelligence an area of interest to you? I believe my pieces are complete once they appear to be self-motivated. And in a very superstitious way, I project feelings onto all kinds of objects or shapes. Through my work, I try to assign temperaments to sculptures using low-tech technology. I want people to feel empathy for my pieces. My point of interest is not so much the technology itself but

how we relate to it. My works function like a mirror of human behaviour towards technology. Each one shapes the other. And in defiance of countless flop conversations with Cleverbot I still hope one day to have a deep conversation with the chair I am sitting on.

What materials do you like to work with and why? Materials that will retain energy like springs. Tension and release offer endless mechanical possibilities and let the objects talk for themselves. When I first started using aluminium, it was because I needed a light but resistant material (for the skin of a 6x10 foot rolling cylinder for *Missing You*). I then discovered how the sheets would behave when bent and anodized, which led to the series *This Should Be*. Distorting the aluminium sheet feels like distorting the fade with the Photoshop finger tool but in real life! *Solo Show* followed in 2017, a performance where I smashed a huge guitar from the inside. Even though I was the one activating the piece, I was not the protagonist, I was not visible, the guitar was. I wanted to point out how the act of destroying could add value to an object, like when people use a broken glass image for their iPhone background display.

Your art often comes across as uncanny as unexpectedly animated objects often do and sometimes as downright aggressive. Is this a tension you enjoy creating? The most dangerous installation I have made was probably *Second Offense* in 2016. A 10-foot high panel stood up and free-fell at random times in a rather small gallery space. My piece, with its intricate engineering, was in dialogue with Gianni Motti's works in which he claimed responsibility for some earthquakes in the 1990s. For a performance I put together in New York (*Board Robots*, 2015), I built a balcony for the public to see the show. At one point sprinklers fixed to the ceiling were meant to rain fresh plaster over the whole set of sculptures, turning it white, but I lost control of one sprinkler long enough to soak the trapped public! That was not meant to happen but does show the potential danger of my works.

Dorian Gaudin will be one of the artists participating in Singing Stones, the Palais de Tokyo's first US show, which coincides with Expo Chicago and runs until 29 October.



PHOTOS: AUR LIEN MOLE



Previous pages
Portrait by Justin Meekel

Opposite page
This Should Be a Speedbump, 2016
Anodized aluminium, rivets, steel,
concrete, screws
160 × 127 × 30 cm

This page
Rites and Aftermath
Palais de Tokyo, Paris,
3 Feb - 8 May 2017
Installation shots