

Tender Machines

Our temporal soft bodies are tender in relation to machines. Our ability to experience a range of human emotions, humor, and creativity also separate us from their singular calculating logic. What occurs when technology is employed to convey the multifaceted aspects of humanity, such as its intricate complexities, irrational yearnings, and abstract concepts? Many of the works in *Tender Machines* employ vintage objects, analog technology, and nostalgic items expressing a tendency toward sentimentality and reminiscing of the past, evoking tender memories, experiences, and ideas.

This collection of work aims to take us back to the naivety and innocence of technology and the innovation and play involved in inventing and tinkering. It prompts an inclination to engage and participate, transcending the act of mere observation and arousing a sense of curiosity. Throughout history, automata have manifested from our innate yearning to witness the imitation of life, marking the genesis of our earliest machines. Nevertheless, in our modern era dominated by digital realms, the virtual world has taken precedence over our physical reality. Through play and lightheartedness, *Tender Machines* revitalizes the importance of physicality and materiality, which is often unconsciously detached or disengaged from our digital existence, while highlighting our emotional and tender predispositions.

As a child, Bill Nelson delighted in constructing mechanical devices in his grandfather's workshop, and these enchanting recollections inspire his artwork to this day. "The Pilot" references a memory of learning to fold paper airplanes with his grandfather. Nelson is also a collector and tinkerer attracted to the stories that live within objects. He reconstructs them to create new narratives or build upon their fantastical history. In "Love Me Tender," Bill acquired the bear from the Suelynn Gustafson estate, the late owner of the former Flossy McGrews. The vintage bear taxidermy piece originates from a natural history sensitivity and is thought to be from the 1930s. As a reflection of our historically troubled relationship with wildlife and our extractive capitalistic mentality, the mechanical base of the piece can be viewed as referencing the industrial revolution as a threshold for increased extinctions. As Elvis croons, 'Love me tender' viewers are prompted to consider the somber collision of nature and industry. "I've always been interested in humans' indefatigable desire to express dominion over animals, landscape, borders, rivers... heck, the natural world at large," says Bill.

Alex Branch also utilizes found pieces and vintage objects in her art, which is often interactive and mechanical. "When I work with found objects in the present day, they carry with them a residue of a life lived. It's not possible to know exactly where the objects have been or who interacted with them, but the fullness and richness of their experience resonates." Her multipurpose pieces possess a surreal and

antiquated essence, reminiscent of something one might encounter in a dream or a fairytale. Often leaving the mechanical elements of the work exposed, one is left to marvel at the beauty of the working components. Branch's wearable "Bandolier" is created from a salvaged fire hose and mini music boxes that play eerily out of sync appropriately, serenading Fernando Orellana's works self-described as techno-effigies for the dead.

Orellana's "His Butter" and "Her Child of Prague" feature sentimental objects acquired from estate sales of deceased individuals. They are designed to be used posthumously; they monitor and interpret fluctuations in temperature, infrared, and electromagnetic fields around the objects and are only activated to perform when all of the sensors are triggered in a particular way. "Inspired by paranormal research, spiritualism, and ghost folklore, these machines continuously search for the dead, attempting to allow the departed continued use of their worldly possessions," explains Orellana. Again, we see references to sentimentality through the loving care of a nostalgic and beloved toy and a cherished religious artifact. Orellana's other works, created in the spirit of play, are based on automation and generative concepts, taking inspiration from mid-century modern aesthetics.

Utilizing a mix of technologies in "Circuit Training," LA Samuelson sifts through memory, language, and labor to generate an experimental approach to relating to self and others. Their dance background offers a unique bodily perspective within the exhibition, as they merge video, multiplayer cassette tape loops, "lifting with one's legs," and cardboard into an installation. "It is an attempt to recirculate human intimacy, effort, and interiority through connection with analog and digital technologies, making new bodies out of where they touch," explains Samuelson.

Experimental machinations remain an extension of our desires and demonstrate how we use technology to fulfill quirky human needs. These curious machines aim to achieve creative and tender objectives, merging our complex human inclinations with mechanical logic. Artists attempt and perform mechanical prose through an assemblage of interactivity, performance, and ingenuity, some of which draw inspiration from automata and early robots. From enabling the departed to interact with beloved earthly objects to a paddle boat operating as a music box and a crooning bear, acknowledging our troubled history with wildlife, the exhibition speaks to our innate human need for experimentation, play, and discourse with technology.