

The Mechanism Within

Humana Ex Machina: Kinetic Commentaries on the Nature of Being

Kinetic sculpture is an extension of the stationary object, unlike traditional sculpture, kinetic art refuses to lie flat on the walls or sit quietly for contemplation. Instead it focuses our attention on the interpretation of movement and the flow of perceptual continuity. Originating during the Dada movement (1916-1923), kinetic art has its roots in modern technology and was championed in the 1950s and 1960s by artists Marcel Duchamp, Jean Tinguely, George Rickey, and Alexander Calder. Kinetics has found a contemporary and regenerative voice through artists who push scale, animation, and perspective while sustaining the rich traditions of performance, chance, and experimentation.

During the advancement of modern technology, kinetic sculptors have developed the genre with newfound materials and media. The definition of movement in twentieth-century art was first expanded by the constructivists, who incorporated the mechanical or random movement of one or more parts in their work, often implemented in a large three-dimensional space as installation art. Morphing from heavy steel additions, the expression of motion in art has been refined through the use of dynamic light projections, water, sound, electronics, electromagnets, and complex motorization. Contemporary kinetic art involves numerous elements that communicate to define qualities of human behavior and emotion.

Humana Ex Machina: Kinetic Commentaries on the Nature of Being presents, for the first time in Southern California, work by four of the most influential artists producing contemporary kinetic sculpture today. Gregory Barsamian, Arthur Ganson, Jim Jenkins, and Bernie Lubell all use kinetic sculpture to comment on the paradoxes of human nature. Employing a variety of materials and devices including metal pistons, pulleys, wires, wheels, and eighteenth-century rotors fused with delicate wooden machinery, these sculptors create mesmerizing animated objects that reflect and simulate human characteristics. The title *Humana Ex Machina* literally translates as human from the machine and was taken from *deus ex machina*, a literary and theatrical term referring to an unlikely resolution of a tangled plot. This term comes from the practice in ancient Greek and Roman plays of the lowering a divine character from the top of the stage to set things straight in an often improbable resolution. Kinetic sculpture, by its very nature, entails theatre, as the viewer experiences each piece as a miniature play—impetus, crisis, and resolution all being part of the encounter—yet the sculptures in this

exhibition confront the viewer using a simulacrum, suggesting that it is man who must define and untangle his or her own destiny. This exhibition itself us a stage, utilizing lighting and sound components to display the performances and granting each member of the audience an opportunity to reflect upon his or her own character while moving about the space.

The creation of visual illusion in kinetic sculpture relies on audience participation. The sculpture in this exhibition especially demands our attention because it shares our space and exhibits reactive qualities similar to our own. Viewers might get lost in emotion as they witness the soft caress of a feather to a violin, empathize with a tiny yellow chair circling in meditation, or feel the isolation of surrounding darkness to a heart-beating drum. The confrontation of *Yes*, *No*, or *Maybe-Not*, are guides toward the consequences of a special predestination. As birds fly in peaceful coordination, let us examine our own internal biology as our lungs breathes and our hearts beat a calculated rhythm in tune with nature. In this exhibition space, a path is designated before us, and as participants each of us completes the collaboration between two similar beings, one human and the other machine, who relate in a contemporary cultural experience.

Kinetic art is a challenge to many institutions. Adequate space and appropriate infrastructure are required to experience kinetic art. These works combine light, sound, and other devices that need constant monitoring, and machines may short-circuit unpredictably or simply wear out. Yet through the language of movement, kinetic art proposes new ways of understanding the physical world in terms of motion, space, and time. This sculpture summons us into its space and alters our perception. As a new environment materializes along the way, a mechanism is conjured within us to encourage our dialogue with human nature.

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Begovich Art Gallery, (Main Art Gallery)

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