

Reflexologies is a collaborative work by artists Robin Watkins and Nina Canell, consisting of a machine repeatedly pressing a rubber ball

A pneumatic fatigue machine and a synthetic rubber sphere,  
exhibited

A fatigue machine and a rubber sphere

An exhibited sphere machine thing

A synthetic rubber sphere is a consumer product with many possible uses, none of them seemingly more or less obvious than any other, I would say, but then again, I, just like everyone else, say so many things that often appear not to be necessarily wrong, but rarely it's opposite either

In either case, a pneumatic fatigue machine on the other hand, on the hand other than that of a synthetic rubber sphere that is, is a machine produced with the sole purpose of testing the life length of products, including, but not limited to, synthetic rubber spheres with seemingly unclear use

Which is actually fairly irrelevant in this case, the possible uses, for the machine tests not really the function of objects, but their longevity

Not exactly use, function, but time, durability

It does so through applying pressure on them, over and over again, thereby testing their endurance

It is nothing less than a time machine, the fatigue machine, for every time it compresses a thing in space, it also compresses time, teleporting consumer products of the future, not yet on the market, to the dissection table of the present, squeezing their future life lengths into shorter, more manageable durations

It foresees the object's inevitable death, for it's sole function is the providing of sufficient data for deciding, and indeed limiting and shortening the lifespan of a future object, of any consumer object, of any product, a life always lived on "borrowed time", if you will, as it were, and it actually is, or was, and so it goes

The work by Watkins and Canell invokes not the image of a premature death, however, but rather that of something breathing

Two objects breathing together, if you will

Without the rubber sphere, the fatigue machine would not appear to breathe, only perhaps grasp for breath, an already dead piece of machinery trapped in a useless movement

And the rubber sphere would also not in itself make the viewer think about breathing

It needs the rhythmic sequencing of a machine to add an appearance of the passing of time onto its otherwise purely spatial appearance

Appearances, as I believe we all know, can be deceiving

Art works incorporating found objects generally exhibit not only the original function of these objects, but also often behave like something similar to the opposite of their opposite, while being slightly out of focus, and often a bit clumsy and off topic, in a charming, romantic and/or arrogant kind of way

Reflexologies specifically, however differently it otherwise functions from its found components, shares with the original fatigue machine a strong emphasis on the passing of time

It is a sculpture in, of, and to a certain extent also about time

Like all other sculptures, one could claim

For Reflexologies, just like any other sculpture, is clearly defined by its materials, and their inevitable deterioration

And since it also incorporates an existing consumer product and even the fatigue machine designed to be able to decide the length of its all-too short life, it is also strongly related to another, much faster deterioration

To the fast disintegration and decline, both cultural and physical, of the category of assembled materials grouped together as “consumer products”, a category which the work is fundamentally dependent upon, at least metaphorically

The same is not the case for the consumer products grouped together into the category of sculptures

They generally live their all-too short lives completely independent of whether they are incorporated into art works or not

Still, it would perhaps not be too far of a stretch to claim that

consumer products too are a form of ephemeral sculptures in their own right, temporary constellations of materials, participatory sculptures for the consumer to engage with, as if following a form of relational aesthetics even more shallow and populist than its art world equivalent

A populist relation where the customer is always right, as the saying goes, but right only within a framework already set up for him or her

And just as in contemporary populist politics, arranged so as to appear as “of the people” but always set up not even for, but really against them, this is a framework where the customer is always on the losing side

Is always shortchanged

Is framed through fatigue tests

Is framed by fatigue

Is quite literally framed, as in inside a frame, with little to no power to break out of it

Is quite literally fatigued, with little to no energy left to change the constellation

Not the constellation of the artwork, stupid

But of the constellation first of the frame, and then of everything else surrounding it

E

Ve

Ry

Thing

Things that fall from the sky, and things that don't fall from the sky

Things that defy gravity, and things that at least to the naked eye don't

Things with longer duration in time, and things with shorter, at least from the point from which you observe them, or, as it is sometimes called, your “vantage point”, a point not only in space, but clearly also in time

Things that defy logic and things that don't defy logic, and things that don't seem to defy logic but actually do, at least just a little bit, and then stops defying it again

Constellations of things looking like a chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table, and things that don't look like a chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table, even if that might in fact be what they are, more or less

Things that behave like the opposite of their own opposite but also slightly out of focus, a bit clumsy and off topic, in a charming and/or arrogant kind of way

Things that are cool

Things that aren't cool

Things that aren't particularly cool but behave as if they were, cool, which they aren't, at least not from where the observer stands, and the observer then walks around the thing to see if it was only the viewpoint which was wrong, if the thing is actually cool while the observer is not, but seen from the back nothing changes, nothing at all, not really, the observer could just have stayed where he or she was in the first place, could just have stayed there and used their energy on something more worthwhile, but the observer, alas, didn't

The thing with sculptures is that you can generally walk around them, and when you do, sometimes they just behave the same, and sometimes they change completely, and that doesn't necessarily have anything at all to do with the so called quality of the sculpture, and here I don't mean their material quality but their quality as a work, as an art work, it just has to do with whether the work changes when you walk around it or not, or not really, or just a little bit, and this little bit is generally nothing to write home about so you don't, which was probably a good thing, when you come to think about it

And then it's the thing with things that are exhibited and things that are not exhibited

Things falling into the second category, things that are not exhibited, are very rare these days

Almost everything is exhibited, or so it seems, or so they are presented, the things, as if they were exhibited, even if they are in fact

not, not really, but most of the time they are, and many times it's difficult to tell the difference, and if you can't tell the difference, then what's the difference anyway, it all looks somewhat the same, now doesn't it

But sometimes, just sometimes, sometimes when it comes to not exhibited things and sometimes when it comes to exhibited things, actually exhibited things, the feedback loop is of a slightly different kind

Only metaphorically different, perhaps, perhaps not more than metaphorically, if I may use such an outdated term, but that wouldn't be too bad when you think about it, now would it

There are worse ways to spend your days than as a metaphor

Even if the metaphor is outdated, flawed, a bit clumsy and off topic, romantic and/or arrogant and without much leverage or influence outside of its frame, as it were

I believe there are

Worse ways I believe there are

I don't believe in much, but this I believe in, and I don't think I'm alone

Not this time

This time is different

If only ever so slightly

This time the pressure is applied in a slightly, just slightly different way, but this slight difference seems to change everything

This slightly different way of touching

Different way of doing

Different ways of breathing

Ways of spending your days

Bad ways of spending your days

Good good days

Days of spending your ways

Day

After day

After day

And in a way, sculpture can be filed under endurance art

Under durational art

Like so many other things

Like things that are metaphorically different for a short period in time, until they, inevitably, are not, again

Like things that look like other things but aren't, and things that don't look like other things but, in fact, are almost identical to them, to other things, more or less, generally with more focus on more than on less, but not all the time

Like things that have been, things that are, things that in all likelihood will be, and things that not in all but at least in some likelihood exist right now

Like things that exist as prototypes for products but not yet as products

Like products that could be seen as prototypes for something else entirely, not for products at all, but for something following the logic of another language

Like language, both generally and particularly

Like writing, in images, symbols, signs, objects, words and gestures, to name but a few

Like talking

Like all the talk talk

Like speech, in all or at least most of its forms, or even more

And most definitely, possibly the most durational of all arts, like speeches at openings

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Text by Henning Lundkvist

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