

CCA Wattis Institute
for Contemporary Arts
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CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts Announces "Mechanisms," a Major Group Exhibition Featuring 20 International Artists

On view October 12, 2017, through February 24, 2018

Artists: Zarouhie Abdalian, Terry Atkinson, Lutz Bacher, Eva Barto, Neil Beloufa, Patricia L. Boyd, Jay DeFeo, Trisha Donnelly, Harun Farocki, Richard Hamilton, Aaron Flint Jamison, Jacob Kassay, Garry Neill Kennedy, Louise Lawler, Park McArthur, Jean-Luc Moulène, Pope.L, Charlotte Posenenske, Cameron Rowland, and Danh Vo.

Curated by Anthony Huberman, "Mechanisms" is an exhibition about mechanisms, in the many senses of the word. A mechanism can be a tool, a machine, a circuit, but it can also be a function, a system, or an administrative infrastructure-- it exists somewhere between an object and a concept. The artists in this exhibition make, disrupt, or invent mechanisms, and complicate how they determine the way we live every day.

These artists contest a world where social, political, and economic demands reward efficiency, speed, and productivity. Their works test existing systems with inefficient machines, impossible tools, wasted time, and elaborate protocols that misalign outputs from their inputs.

In its broadest sense, a mechanism is a tool, a term that reaches back in time to include wheels, hammers, and knives. More specific would be to say that it is a machine, and yet the term already sounds obsolete: it evokes heavy and greasy machinery, not the smooth surfaces of digital interfaces and the weightlessness of cloud computing.

Far more abstract are the smaller machines that lie within the machine-- the settings. They hint at a future built and determined not by objects but by systems, parameters, interfaces, protocols, and logistics. These types of mechanisms are as much like methods as they are like machines, in the sense that they control behavior and flow. They mark a switch from a thing to the way we manage priorities between things. They imply an age that comes after the machine, when tools have become settings.

The artists in this exhibition manipulate and contaminate this vocabulary. They imagine mechanisms that strip machines down until they are just tools; mechanisms that push the settings until they break the methods; mechanisms that ask tools to behave like settings; or mechanisms that track behaviors until they become objects. Faced with flexible, invisible, and invincible global networks, these artists don't design new devices as much as they readjust parameters, rewrite rules, and insert delinquent trajectories. By forcing purpose and necessity to contend with waste and dysfunction, they propose artworks as acts of "misengineering."

"Mechanisms" builds on the exhibitions that precede it: Pontus Hultén's seminal MoMA exhibition "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age" (1968, which traveled to SFMOMA), Jack Burnham's "Software" (1970) at the Jewish Museum, Harald Szeemann's "The Bachelor Machines / Le Macchine Celibi" (1975) at Kunsthalle Bern, or Massimiliano Gioni's more recent "Ghosts in the Machine" (2012) at the New Museum. Today, the futures forecasted by these exhibitions have not only become true but have become common-- lives and bodies are now run and regulated by technology. The machine, however, has made its way into our socioeconomic and political bloodstream to such an extent that it has fallen out of view. "Mechanisms" reflects on the nature of a contemporary condition where objects are no longer distinct from infrastructure and where hardware has merged with software.

A second and expanded version of the exhibition opens at the Secession in Vienna in summer 2018.

"Mechanisms"

Opening reception: Thursday, October 12, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Location: 360 Kansas Street (between 16th and 17th), San Francisco

Gallery hours: Tues. - Fri., noon - 7 p.m.; Sat., noon - 5 p.m.

Admission: Free

Information: 415.355.9673 or visit wattis.org