View of the exhibition "Mechanisms," 2017–18, showing (foreground) Charlotte Posenenske's *Series D (Square Tubes)*, 1967, and (background from left) Cameron Rowland's *Constituent*, 2014, and Lutz Bacher's *Menu*, 2002, at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts.

SAN FRANCISCO

# "MECHANISMS"
## CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts
ON VIEW THROUGH FEB. 24

In the Bay Area, the relationship between art and technology is a common topic for exhibitions. Such shows often focus on artists' use of new computer programs and hardware. But rather than simply celebrate innovation qua innovation, "Mechanisms" offers broad, diverse interpretations of what machines are and how humans use and are used by them, asking whether it is possible for artists to utilize machines, or make new ones, and still question and challenge their hegemony.

Anthony Huberman, the exhibition's curator, conceived "Mechanisms" in relation to historical shows that took technology as their theme. In his catalogue essay, Huberman cites the Museum of Modern Art's 1968–69 "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age" as a crucial influence. That show, according to its press release, addressed a "crisis within technology itself, at a time when machines that imitate man's muscles are being supplanted by electronic and chemical devices that imitate the processes of the brain and nervous system." It featured historical items like Leonardo's sketches for "flying machines" alongside contemporary collaborations between artists and engineers. "Mechanisms" echoes this approach by juxtaposing historical works (such as Jay DeFeo's 1987 series of photocopied images of tissue boxes and Charlotte Posenenske's 1967 air-duct-like sheet-steel tubes) with new pieces that recognize, if not a crisis, an aporia regarding the incorporation of technology into everyday life.

Some of the works on view interpret the past through found objects. Pope.L's sculpture *Lever* (2016) consists of the bowl of a porcelain water fountain—that apparatus for hydration and, in the Jim Crow era, forceful segregation—smeared with black acrylic and oil crayon and stuck with chewing gum. On the floor below it spreads Dahn Vo's *Twenty-Two Traps* (2012), a menacing collection of old, rusted animal traps purchased at a public auction in Montana.

Other works play with the notion of "usefulness" as an immanent property of the machine. Zarouhie Abdalian's "Joints" (2016–17) are mirrored replicas of hand tools. Evoking luxury items, the "Joints" remind us that the gallery is a place where things that might have no immediate practical uses can obtain inflated value as artworks. In two 2017 works consisting of multiple reliefs, Patricia L. Boyd imprinted congealed cooking fat with components of used office items (a turntable and an Aeron chair), turning waste products into artworks. Huberman describes the tendency to make artwork that reassigns objects' purposes as applying "elaborate protocols that misalign outputs from their inputs." Cameron Rowland's *Constituent* (2014) is a literally misaligned "output": a destroyed electrical outlet.

The path through the Wattis's galleries culminates with an epic video installation by Harun Farocki. *Deep Play* (2007) features twelve channels showing different perspectives on a single sporting event: the final match of the 2006 World Cup between France and Italy. With audio and visual components ranging from real-time animated simulations of on-field events to behind-the-scenes commentary fed to on-screen reporters, *Deep Play* offers a hyperbolic representation of what most of the event's billion-plus viewers experienced as a simple two-dimensional portrayal. The inputs of such spectacles are more elaborate than we can imagine from our seats in front of the television, and, in confronting us with them, *Deep Play* impedes our view of the actual match. Here, as with much of the art in "Mechanisms," the vaunted attributes of innovation in technology (speed, efficiency, user-friendliness) are called into question—even when they work.

—Brandon Brown