

the way a smile fades [2018]
marcus jackson

for violin, car jack, and performer[s]

score

install a violin inside a frame, with a car jack alongside it
ensure that as the car jack is wound, it will crush the violin
wind the car jack one full revolution daily

programme note

It is not possible to unequivocally state where a smile ends, and a lack thereof begins: it does not happen all at once. But it's gradual dissipation is an inevitability, if incongruent with our analogue emotional experience. In our attempts to track these various facial positions and their inscribed emotional signification, the awkwardness of the task becomes apparent—our awareness in this task forces our failure.

In *Haptic sensation and instrumental transgression*, Pedro Rebelo describes the relationship between a performer and their instrument as erotic. He posits that the human-instrument relationship is defined by it's inevitable discontinuity, and the impossible desire to attain one-ness, or transgress the intersubjective 'gulf'. Stephen Davies argues that the reason we can hardly bare violence on instruments is that society offers them honorary humanity. I argue that this fact—this humanization of the musical object—is a hangover from the historical importance placed on being culturally learned. It is a fetish for the historic, a cultural relic we cannot relinquish. It has become necessary to avoid the historically-cliché/ passé—to emancipate the instrument from its historicization. Here, the instrument is allowed to become anything but itself, devoid of need for a performer, unable to be heard from behind the glass.

The way a smile fades relies on repeat engagement of the audience. The work begs the stranger to form a relationship with the instrument, and when there is a relationship, there is a desire to track the incongruences between the memory and the reality. Within this empathy, the hostility of the work is undercut. This, ultimately, serves as a metaphor for every situation in life ended too soon, each relationship whose gradual slip was unwanted, yet unstoppable.

This work was performed in MEANWHILE Gallery, Wellington,
New Zealand by the gallery attendants on 7–29 July, 2018.

My sincerest thanks go to the gallery, and to everyone who
engaged with the work, positively or otherwise.

<https://www.meanwhilegallery.com/the-way-a-smile-fades>

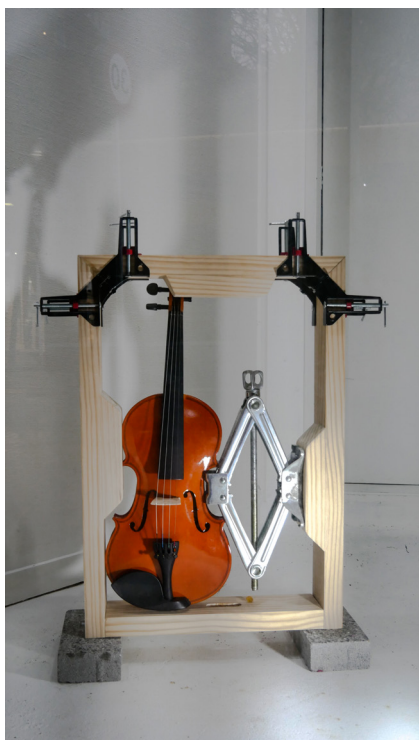


Image credit: MEANWHILE Gallery