

La Machina

Artists, Engineers, and Craftsmen: A New Age in Art



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**La Machina: Modern Art, Engineering, and Performance**

The group La Machine was founded by Francois Delarozier early in the 1990’s as a group of engineers, artists, and performers who make large industrial pieces for use in many performances. As such, they are a great example of the powerful reach of modern art, as it returns, in part, to its roots with Da Vinci, seeing engineering and craftsmanship as an equally artistic endeavor to performance art. Then, by installing many of their pieces, such as la princessa in large cities and tourist areas the group attempts to reinvent the image surrounding these cities and attractions. Franquois said, “We want to fill people with wonder and have them look at their cities differently.”.

Some of the most famous pieces/ performances by La Machina include the performance surrounding La Princessa, which began in Liverpool, London and included the transversal of the city as onlookers watched. La Princessa “began her journey clinging to the side of Concourse House next to Lime St Station. She was then removed by scientists to the Echo Arena, where she awoke. She moved to Albert Dock and proceeded to the Cunard Building. She then made her way to the Queensway Tunnel, via Water Street, Castle Street, Lord Street and Ranelagh Place. In the finale the spider disappeared down the entrance to the Queensway Tunnel, never to be seen again.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Another influential art exhibit created by La Machine is Nantes, a huge elephant was created as part of the performance which was made to commemorate Jules Verne at his death. The original performance took place in Amiens and was meant to embody the whimsy of Jules Verne’s story of a time-traveling sultan.

La Machine also produced Long Ma, a giant mechanical horse-dragon with its original performance in Isle De Nantes. It was originally commissioned for the 50th anniversary of France’s trade with China. After touring, it was also then given as a gift to China to further increase those trade relations. [[2]](#footnote-2)

Finally, some of the last pieces created for the Order of Intelligent Machines are part of a collection of machines made to look like floating gardens. The main one appeared at the color festival in Bahaus Germany and is called Aeroflora II. As stated by Inhabit, “Aeroflorale II is also part of a botanical expedition that collects crops and plant life from around the world with the aim of developing [alternative sources of energy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_energy) – a feasible plan considering that [researchers have developed potato-powered batteries](http://inhabitat.com/researchers-develop-potato-powered-batteries/) and other plant-based energy solutions.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Beyond the sculptural pieces created, La Machina also extended their performance art to include a musical component. La Symphony Mecanique was a live musical performance created with classical musicians and machines that created rhythmic sound made by La Machina. La Symphony Mecanique included a written score and was originally performed for the public in an open-air venue.

La Machina’s singular installment is named the Isle De Nantes, which is located in Nantes France and is a permanent museum of La Machine’s work. Many of La Machine’s works appear after their performances here, or pieces for projects in the works will be on exhibit. For example, many of the creatures that appeared on the merry-go-round created by La Machina were first put on display in the museum. Of course, the museum does eliminate the theatrical performance component of La Machina’s works, which in turn means that the art loses its sense of experience. [[4]](#footnote-4)

The work of La Machina goes to truly utilize the advances in not only the artistic field, but also in engineering, craftsmanship, and mechanics. They bring an element of craftsmanship back to mechanical design and a sense of purpose back to artistic creations. Following in the ideals of Da Vinci, craftsmanship, and engineering are celebrated alongside art and performance. Many of the large machines are created from hand-crafted wooden pieces laid over their mechanical portions and driven by several members of La Machina, each operating separate components of the creature. Overall, the pieces have been likened to steampunk works, which is considered a rather kitsch movement as it has become a highly consumer style. I would argue that La Machine is actually far from kitsh, as it moves away from the mass-production usually associated with engineering, bringing it into a realm of whimsy and individualism that has been increasing in popularity among craftsmen. For example, the Liguana Niguel art show for 2014 showcased many pieces of hand-crafted furniture that also embodied this movement away from mass-production and back to craft.

Beyond even this though, La Machina included the performance element into many of their works, making these creatures components of a much larger production. In many ways, these experiences are actually the culmination of their work as they move to reinvent the cities they perform in.

For the performance, I went to see Charles Atlas speak about his lifetime work with film, beginning with his pioneering many film practices used today in regards to recording dance in this medium. Indeed after seeing his piece which featured dancers performing in an airport, I was almost immediately reminded of a film directed by David LaChapelle and danced by Sergio Polunin to Hozier’s Take Me to Church, which indeed appeared to use many of the techniques Charles Atlas had developed.

After this time though, he became involved with live performance art, like many of his colleges, and began to work with live video editing to create a form of collage involving unscripted performances by complete strangers that he edited on the fly. These types of performances travelled to several museums, collecting unique events along the way due to the individuals who came to involve themselves. This work seemed typical of a lot of the performance art of the time that was becoming popular, but also appeared to have some roots in the beginnings of glitch art, which I found interesting.

He ended speaking about a rather interesting piece that had appeared in New York rather recently. It was merely a well-cut film of a Drag Queen termed Ms. Bunny speaking candidly to the camera. There was a lot of irony in this piece as she pleads for certain government reforms while dressed in her usual clothing and make-up which is reminiscent of the 80’s, including a massive wig of curls bobbing on her head as she dances to disco music.

# Bibliography

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1. "La Machine." La Machine. Accessed May 11, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Long Ma: La Machine’s Massive Fire-Breathing Dragon." All That Is Interesting. September 5, 2014. Accessed May 11, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "Aeroflorale II: La Machine Erects an Animated Hanging Garden Inspired by Da Vinci." Inhabitat Sustainable Design Innovation Eco Architecture Green Building Aeroflorale II La Machine Erects an Animated Hanging Garden Inspired by Da Vinci Comments. Accessed May 11, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "Presentation." - The Artistic Project. Accessed May 11, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)