

Art and the Machine



Art and the Machine

I love the idea that a person can be overcome with the need to create, as if it is something other than themselves that drives them to the act of making. These artists take this idea further creating machines that draw, copy and paint. It harks back to the industrial revolution where man became obsessed with beautiful cogs, mechanical reproduction and robotics. Like mad scientists these artists create machines to drive their vision. Here Joseph L. Griffiths, Michael Landy, Tom Foulsham and Max Hattler explain from their perspective.

SWW

Max Hattler

Aanaatt references Moholy-Nagy, Bauhaus and early Constructivism. As a result, the analogue approach seemed most appropriate. The ever-changing arrangement and movement of objects in the film develop their own internal logic: like a magical machine; an abstract modernist revolution; a futurist cityscape in flux.

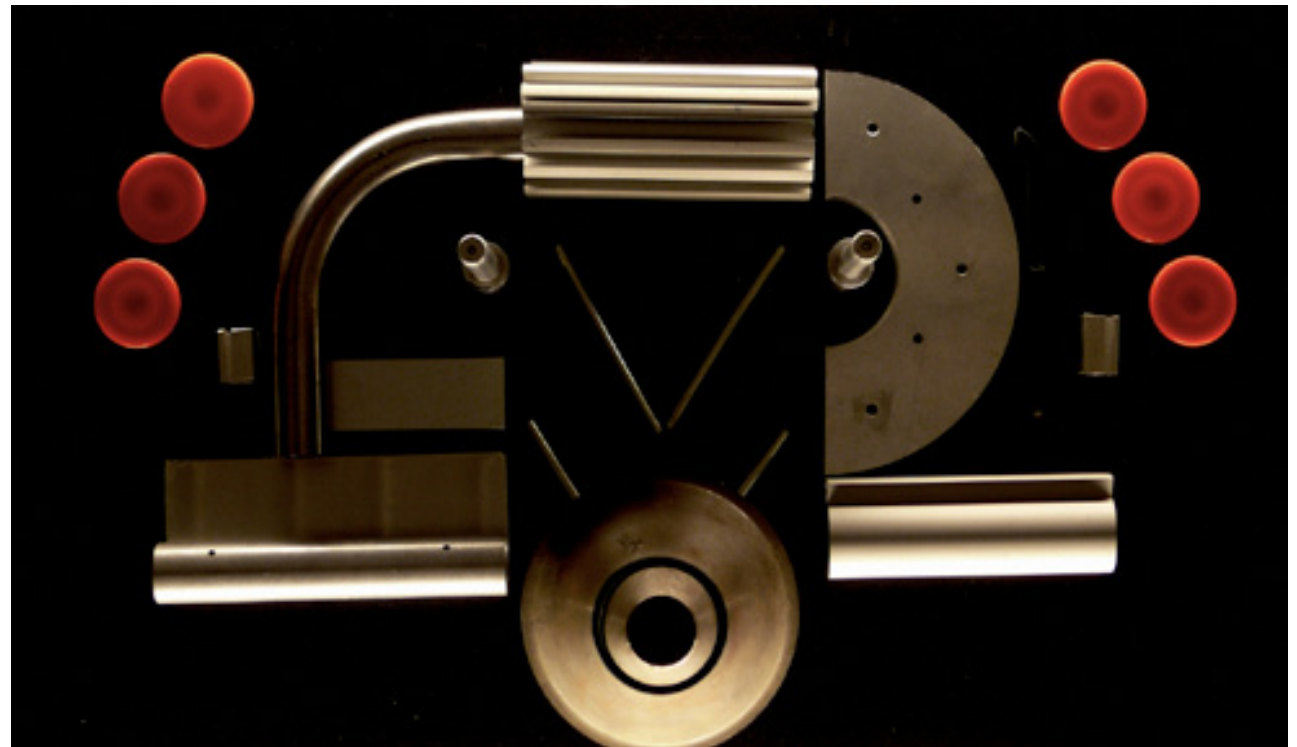
Aanaatt responds to a certain type of recent film-work that integrates live-action with 3D computer-generated animations of basic, shape-shifting geometric shapes. I wanted to see if I could achieve a similar kind of 'magic' with old-school tools,

without actually using anything digital. I think knowing that there's no digital tampering makes what is on screen almost more magical.

I don't see Aanaatt as completely different from what I've done before, though I do try new techniques with different projects. This is partly because I get bored with doing the same thing all the time and partly because a specific film might

require its unique approach. I'm not dogmatic about digital or analogue, I try to use whatever's best suited. What I do tend to do is limit myself in certain ways with each project, and then try to explore within those limitations as much as I can.

With Aanaatt those limitations were a fixed camera angle, analogue only - no digital effects or post-production (apart from using a digital stills camera



and digitally stabilizing the image due to a shaky tripod). I also limited the movement, shapes and colours of the objects used. In another film those might be different constraints, such as using only digital or certain colours, shapes and mirroring - or certain conceptual considerations.

Abstraction runs throughout all my work. Rather than fully explicated storytelling I was always more interested in oblique narratives: creating atmospheres or points of departure that might trigger a thought or feeling. Abstraction, especially when drifting along the edges of figurative representation, enables this sort of open-endedness that engages the viewer in a different way.

In a world over-saturated by the same media images, I have this theory: it is on the edges of abstraction that we can make and negotiate new meanings. As a result, my practice contemplates microcosms, moments, and atmospheres. Close-ups are used as reflections of the big picture; the reflections are an aesthetic representation of politics, science, spirituality and contemporary culture.

I also create links between sound and music, both in terms of my own trajectory - making electronic music throughout my teens - and being introduced to filmmaking via the route of non-linear, computer-based sound-editing and music sequencing. In terms of abstraction, music can be seen as the most abstract of arts, which works primarily on the level



of creating mood or atmosphere over clear narrative. As a result, my work heavily relies on sound and tries to explore this relationship between sound, music and the moving image. Incidentally, Aanaatt won the Visual Music Award 2010.

My most recent work SHIFT is a cinematic interpretation of a New Age idea: the purported dimensional shift⁹ that is supposed to happen in

2012. We face a transition from our current, comfortable 4-dimensional existence into a fifth dimension. SHIFT portrays this mythical 5th dimension through abstracted science fiction themes and explored through colour, movement and shape.

I used a very low-tech approach to visualise higher planes and unearthliness, taking into account that

*Shift at Tenderpixel photos:
Tenderpixel*

the concepts of different dimensions (such as a fifth dimension) heightens awareness when attempting to process or predict the end of the world. Suspension of disbelief - like small objects being pushed around on black cardboard background - became an inter-dimensional machine. At times this 'machine' acts as a proto-robotic transformer, otherworldly gateway or planetary constellation...

Art can serve to enable engagement with these concepts... But it's also just fun exploration and trickery; playfulness is important, not to be taken too seriously.

SHIFT premiered as a solo exhibition at Tenderpixel gallery in London, complemented by two further works allowing an extension into more of a spatial experience. The film, which was produced by the amazing Animate Projects, and was premiering on C4RandomActs on Mon 23 April. It can be viewed online on randomacts.channel4.com straight afterwards for 30 days. Following that, it will be online animateprojects.org and also on vimeo.com/maxhattler.

TOM FOULSHAM

I love motion and don't often keep still. I like to see the physical expression of a movement combined with inanimate objects interacting with each other. Adopting mechanics is a way to express my ideas and I feel fluent in this medium.

The Wiggle Table is a collision of these analogue methods and digital applications. The analogue is the manual act of a person drawing with a pen



on paper, which is very visible. The digital aspect is concurrent: There is lots of programming and computing going on underneath controlling machine vibrations. These are either being created by a person typing on the keyboard or by stories being grabbed off of the internet.

Computer-controlled vibrations disturb the drawing, weaving words into the drawn lines. Digital and human actions are simultaneously integrated into a final drawing. I find the act of drawing and having this process unexpectedly interrupted in front of your eyes fascinating.

I don't see this as a reinterpretation of manual labour to counter a reliance on technology. I use the technology I need to create the experience I wish for. While I like incorporating a hands on approach to my installations I don't categorise digital artwork in opposition to this.

I do, however, think physical engagement creates a strong connection with the work and allows the user to experience and create their own ideas about what's going on.

Tom Foulsham graduated from the Royal College of Art with an MA in Design Products. Tom has worked in the practices of Thomas Heatherwick and Ron Arad. His one-off work installations have been included in the exhibition at the V&A Minnie Weisz Studio, London, Marsden Woo Gallery Project Space tomfoulsham.co.uk

Joseph L. Griffiths

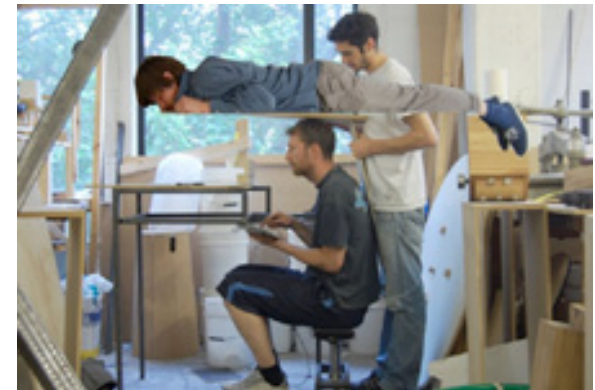
I think we often have to look backwards to go forwards. While technology affords us new ways of doing things that may be faster and cheaper than traditional or hand-made methods, they are not always better. In some cases our advances are genuine. I try to avoid reducing the infinite skills, materials, methods and folkloric connections between craft and culture to a simplistic kind of nostalgia. The important thing is for us all to realise when the old-fashioned method may in fact work best.

Physically, it's unmediated: you start with materials and transform them. In many cases we can all reconfigure the objects around us into new tools, entities or artworks.

In making things, especially functional things for yourself or your home, you not only gain satisfaction, but a very intelligent, detailed and specific kind of problem solving which can only be learnt by doing. I think we are becoming too separated from this kind of intelligence and common-sense approach. The drawing machines I made sought to reconnect people with the conundrum of technology, and the satisfaction of doing.

My practise is based in drawing. I often make very intense and detailed works with a kind of 'machined' and photographic finish. I felt that the more 'competent' they became, the more I was emulating image-making machines, printers, cameras, and all kinds of media devices which we use to flatten the world into pictures. The first drawing machine was an attempt to reverse this

Tom Foulsham



Birdcage Tom Foulsham
Wiggle Table Tom Foulsham
House B Brian Wharton

phenomenon, making a machine that would generate unpredictable and human results.

Man and machine have always had a complex relationship in art, as in life. New technologies have always been seen to threaten or out-mode traditional arts practices. In everyday life, we have become increasingly dependent on technologies, which are to most of us indecipherably complicated machines. Whole teams of technicians are required to fix them.

The Drawing Machine lays all the basic elements of a machine. It's power source, mechanism, and output are bare for the audience to trace. The audience is complicit in making the work. Without the audience to power it the piece would lie still and defunct. Minimal control is given to participants, only the pedal speed and handlebar angles have the ability to impact the outcome. This limitation captured some of the tensions we experience with technology day-to-day, they seem to have minds of their own.

My process was one of experimentation and improvisation. I had been building bicycles as a hobby and became fascinated with the very simple and elegant design of a bikes' drive-train. I started to teach myself about gearing, playing with extreme ratios to the point that things would explode and fall apart.

I had no other training in mechanics, so there was a period of problem solving and testing. I always knew that using an exercise bike as the power source would excite people and make it it easier for them to participate in the piece. The work was exhibited in a disused fun-parlor in Melbourne.

Jospeh L. Griffiths

It was important to me to create a work that harnessed the pure idle pleasure and escapism of this environment. After that, the materials and processes usually suggest themselves. The success of the work was seeing the participants experience that joy.

Joseph L. Griffiths is an Australian visual artist, born in Melbourne and currently based in Barwon Heads, Victoria. Joseph makes drawings and installations that explore his interests in nature, urbanism, folklore, technology, craft, and the relationship between creativity and survival. He has recently returned from 12 months living, making, learning & travelling in Europe with the support of the Australia Council for the Arts. Joseph is currently developing Shelters, a major public art installation for the 2012 Next Wave Festival, and undertaking a mentorship with artist Dylan Martorell.

Michael Landy

The objects that were collected to build my Credit Card Destroying Machine were collected on the basis of wanting to recreate a kinetic sculpture from the 60's and 70's, the distinctive element being that the end result looked like it came out of a rubbish dump.

Artists at this point in time were looking at waste left over from a relatively new consumer society. I wanted to have feeling that no one makes this type



The Drawing Machine Copyright - J.L.Griffiths 2012

of sculpture these days, that junk has its own aesthetic charm.

It's a very human machine: it's unreliable, it breaks down the whole time. Unlike life it's in a constant state of flux. When these type of sculptures originally existed there was a whole conversation about man and the machine and it's implications for society. I was genuinely appalled by how un-minimal the machine was.

I like the idea of an exchange going on with the audience: you offer something, and you get something in return. As far as I'm concerned it's pretty good deal. You get original abstract drawing in the colours of your choosing and at the same time you shred your flexible plastic friend.

You can literally see how the machine operates, the wheels moving etc. With most technology these days how it functions/operates is hidden from the viewer. The machine harps back to a time where people still fixed objects to prolong an objects life.

As a child I was intrigued about how things were constructed. Similarly, to gain greater understanding of consumerism you have to literally take it apart.



*Image Courtesy of the artist and
Thomas Dane Gallery
thomasdane.com*