

Art as Pure Game: Play it Seriously
by Mara Goldwyn

AUTOMATA A CAPPELLA

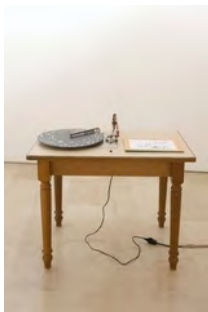
Group Exhibition

Galerie Mario Mazzoli

Potsdamer Strasse 132, 10783 Berlin,

Germany

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Truth is, lately, *art gets me down*. Or at least what it feels like it's become in Berlin.

Admittedly, I'm not a player. My email address might ring a bell for some art PR people or gallerists around town, but we don't actually know each other. I've also got some artist acquaintances—in addition to being one myself in quiet desperation—but none of them are “full disclosure: my *dearest, closest* friend.”

I shy away from openings and find myself privately snorting at snarky “art actions” that make cynical insider commentary on the state of the art world. There's just so much self-referential, narcissistic/parasitic party art. S-RN/PPA for short. Or post-hipster/BFA, materially-unskilled obscure-history-trawling concept-“curation” (P-H/BFAM-UO-H-TC-”C”), you know?

But then, you ask, if I'm so damn bitter, why do I keep hanging around?



I got my answer today when I stopped by the “Automata a capella” exhibition at Galerie Mario Mazzoli. Venturing into a second-floor apartment on Potsdamerstr. where the gallery is housed, I encountered a series of kinetic-sonic sculptures that *actually made me smile*.

I know, I know, art has to be more than just “neat.” It shouldn't placate the critical mind of the art-goer by making her quote “happy.” But what can I say? It was just pure joy to look at—and listen to—this stuff.



For example, *Automatic* (2011) by Jens Hicel, a “pneumatic” sculpture. It apparently uses compressed gas and a whole lot of junk complicatedly tubed and wired together to make a humanoid figure that “breathes” and knocks a hockey stick against the floor. I was thinking about words to write about the piece, about automation and pressure and the elements that differentiate the human from the machine but... the system of movement was so complex and ultimately preposterous, I just laughed—and enjoyed laughing. Meanwhile, *Chaise Gourmand* (2011) by Daniel Depoutot, has a rotating slab of wood that gnaws into a hole in a chair back that, with the whirring of the motor repurposed from who-knows-what, makes a numbing, rubbing, sort of sexual sound. And *Ghost* (2009) by Lorenzo Scotto di Luzio, is a contraption based on a record player that, when you press “Start,” draws a little figure.

These works made me think about the sort of people I like to be around. The ones that say things like, “if I attached a sewing machine motor to a record-machine crank, cut out some bits of sole from some old shoes to connect them to an artificial arm that dumps paint at regularly-spaced intervals...” etc. etc. Exciting art, for me, is “what would happen if?” Not... “what would they think if?” Art that envisions other, impossible or very distantly possible, dimensions; art that has its original sketch in a dream.



So... what would happen if you built a machine out of bronze that rubbed cotton over the rim of two water-filled wine glasses that empty and fill themselves? What kind of sound would it make? *Interference Machine* (2011) by Kristoffer Myskj produces a meditative high-drone, and it’s a pleasure to look at, too; intricate and elegant, it moves with old-world quality clockwork.



The real show stopper at “Automata a capella,” though, is *Nocturno* (2011) by Edgardo Rudnitzky. Even before entering the room where the work is housed, there is the smell of candle wax and the intermittent sound of plucked strings. Inside the darkened room, there are a series of wooden sculptures—or rather, instruments—rigged with springs and magnets. At aleatory intervals, the heat from candles set off a reaction in the springs that hits a mallet against a string. The strings on the instruments are all tuned differently, so the result is a completely randomly composed symphony played without humans, without electricity and without a computer.

The statement for the exhibition describes art as a “pure game” that is “played very seriously.” As you might imagine, I like this assessment. Art-making and art-going can be *fun*; that doesn’t mean it has to be flippant.

Let the games begin.

~**Mara Goldwyn**, an artist and writer living in Berlin.

(Images: **Lorenzo Scotto di Luzio**; **Daniel Depoutut**, *Chaise Gourmand*, 2011; **Krisstoffor Myskja**, *Interference Machine*, 2011; **Edgardo Rudnitzky**, *Nocturno*, 2011; Courtesy of Galerie Mario Mazzoli)

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