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3 Dimensional Design
Mechanical Life
October 31, 2013

The exhibition “Mechanical Life” in the Anderson gallery is in some ways, very “otherworldly.” It consists of pieces from three separate artists: Tom Haney, J.shea9, and Nemo Gould, who contribute their individual talents to make up a very intriguing display. Tom works with polymer clay, wood, and sometimes fabric and motors to create detailed puppets. J.shea9 incorporates found objects into his original pieces, along with Nemo Gould who also works with found objects to create many aluminum sculptures, among other pieces. The exhibition itself displays Tom Haney’s pieces around the perimeter, as well as some of Nemo Gould’s. One of Gould’s pieces entitled “Ankle Biter” is appropriately stationed on the floor in prime ankle biting position, and the work of J.shea9 hangs from the ceiling. The exhibit is very interactive and engaging, as some of the pieces require buttons to be pushed and some even move by sensing the viewer’s presence.

The puppets made by Tom Haney are quite marvelous, with incredible detail and precise movements. Two pieces in particular that struck me were “Home” and “Out of the Darkness”. “Home” is a beautiful puppet—it is made out of wood, polymer clay, and fabric. The man wears a jacket, and uses his hands to open it up to reveal a glowing heart in his chest. I imagined that the piece may be a reflection of the phrase “Home is where the heart is.” The second piece, “Out of the Darkness,” showed a woman pulling on a string and moving three paper lanterns. The piece is made with wood, polymer clay, fabric, and an electric motor. What is so interesting about this piece is the fact that it is motion sensed. When the viewer approaches it, the woman comes to life and fills the darker scene with light from the lanterns.

Boston born artist J.shea9 creates work almost as interesting as his “art” name (unless of course his real name is J.shea9, which I doubt). The pieces being displayed in our gallery are similar in that they are all copper in color, and appear to be created in the same way. The only pieces that are different are “Reaction” and “Dog House” which are still mixed media pieces, however they are more structured than the others. “Hope” is one of the first J.shea9 works that caught my eye. This particular piece is characterized as being made with found objects. It appears to be a ship with strips of fabric as its sails. The details in the piece itself are fascinating—to attach certain pieces together, old necklace chains were used! Along with these necklace chains are a multitude of random beads and metal pieces. A second piece by J.shea9 in the exhibition is called “Dog House.” It consists of a small wooden dog house with a wooden sphere attached on the top, and thin arm-like protrusions extend from this sphere. To make it even more interesting, the dog house balances atop wooden sticks that resemble stilts. The sticks are so thin, and it is humorous to see the house balance on top of them.

The last artist, Nemo Gould, creates pieces that seek to produce “a child-like response from a jaded adult.” He takes a similar approach to fellow artist J.shea9 and works with found materials. In particular, he works with aluminum, and the pieces in the “Mechanical Life” exhibit were mostly aluminum (aside from the piece entitled “The Pollinator”). He even learns particular welding techniques, such as Tungsten Inert Gas welding, to attach the pieces together to create a unified piece of art. The first aluminum creation that struck my eye is “Ankle Biter,” partly because it is humorous and partly because it is a bit freaky. When I first glanced down onto the floor, it looked like those robotic toy dogs that were a hit when I was younger, but once I realized it had dentures in its mouth as teeth, I was taken aback! I truly believe however, that this is the point of the piece. Nemo wants the viewer to respond in a child-like way to his art, and

with the addition of the dentures, he causes shock and confusion along with comedy and laughter. And given the fact that its title is “Ankle Biter” and it is appropriately placed on the floor, it sure is funny. Another piece by Mr. Gould is “Huey,” depicting an aluminum helicopter pilot in his very own aluminum helicopter. Upon pressing the glowing red button, the helicopter rises and falls as if it is flying in midair. The childlike component to this piece, in my point of view, is the big red button. In millions of cartoons we are told to “never press the red button!” but how many kids can resist a giant red button that could possibly alter the way the world functions? When I saw the button, I was not sure if I should press it because I had no idea what would happen, but I felt giddy when I finally took the chance and I saw the helicopter start to move on its own. I am unsure if that is how the artist imagined the viewer’s response to be, but that was mine nonetheless.

The art of all three artists evokes a slight science fiction and steampunk feeling, particularly the found object pieces made by J.shea9 and Nemo Gould. Steampunk started in the early 90’s as a literary genre, where authors thought about what would have happened if the information revolution had occurred during the Victorian era. The clothing style of the steampunk movement is often the style of the Victorian-era. Many pieces that are created in steampunk fashion are made of copper, brass, or metals that are reflective of different types of machinery. Gears, nuts, and bolts are exposed to show how technology really functions at the most rudimentary level, instead of covering the parts up so that there is no thought given as to how an object works.

Today there seems to be quite a resurgence of this type of steampunk related work. We live in the age of technology, and this may play a role. Every single day there are new prototypes being created for cell phones, watches, computers, and more. Because of this, I can imagine that

there are artists who wish to focus on more of the “basics” so-to-speak, and this is where steampunk comes in. Steampunk strips machines down to their parts, instead of glorifying the shiny machine as a whole. J.shea9 creates work that focuses on the stripped down aspect of steampunk, along with using copper and brass pieces to reflect a machine-like feeling.

The media and science fiction affects this type of work as well. No matter how much we seem to know, and no matter how advanced our technology is, we always seem to be searching for a more high tech future. Science fiction movies that come out oftentimes deal with the theme of a robotic society, or a society in which humans merely exist and machines do all of the work. Nemo Gould’s aluminum pieces suggest this robotic-like idea.

These artists are great examples of what happens when technology and art are combined. Though sometimes technology receives a bad reputation from individuals, pieces like these really make up for it and are able to suggest to a viewer a new point of view.