

HARRISON PEARCE

Maladapted

February 9 – March 23, 2019

We are outnumbered. Amidst a network of kinetic objects, Harrison Pearce lets us peer into strange relationships. Rigid industrial materials frame organic forms, bulbous and infant sized, simultaneously cradling and stimulating them. A burst of noise, and suddenly something moves. While attempting to locate the unseen event, a viola da gamba soothes us with a quiet drone. Suddenly, a sharp staccato of solenoids provoke the egg-like blobs, who jiggle furiously. What have we walked in on?

Pearce designs mechanical systems. A strand of his interests lie in two parallel histories: the evolution of the living body and the shifting metaphors that interpret that evolution. Pearce, who transitioned from painting to sculpture via analytic philosophy, stages the history of this inquiry as a curious probing — jarring, rhythmic and at times dramatically oppressive.

MALADAPTED is both the title of Pearce's solo show and the ethos of his sculptural practice. The term, borrowed from analytic philosopher Timothy Williamson, describes the process by which thought attempts to make sense of the real; an endeavor destined to fail, given that epistemic procedures are only capable of creating maladapted representation of reality, useful, but always changing and incomplete. In the context of sculpture, this logic becomes an opportunity for assemblages, encounters between the properties of contrasting materials, and the deployment of a spirit of ad-hoc customization. Both conceptual and material, maladaptation draws a contingent portrait of human cognition.

Composed of twin coils, the largest object in the room represents a fornix. In the brain, the fornix (named after the latin word for arch) links the hippocampus, the center of memory, to the amygdala, an area responsible for regulating emotions. During the preparatory research for the work, Pearce became captivated by the fact that the available scientific models of the organ diverge significantly from one another. His scaled-up version, commemorates another iteration in this process of approximation, a symbolic interpretation of consciousness, the bridge between memory and emotion, self-hood and identity.

Because Pearce's work is fascinated with the machinery of perception and affect in the embodied mind, his philosophical curiosity leads him to examine the mechanics of the attention economy. Pearce is keenly aware of the various emotional triggers provoked by our daily interactions with smart phones: short feedback loops, real-time updates, endless scrolling; impatience and anxiety when content fails to load, and the dopamine release when, seconds later, it finally does. Our devices encourage our tendency towards individualism, and yet our behaviors are statistically homogenized by opaque algorithms. This disjunct produces an anxiety: are machine minds incapable of understanding us? Or more precisely, understanding me?

Who are we to this multi-nodal body? Pearce's decentralized organism uses air as the lifeblood of its circulatory system, it breathes and exhales, expressing its mechanical thingness. A composition for viola da gamba, performed and recorded on site by Liam Byrne, lends the work a voice, a reflexive score, resulting from the feedback between machine and musician. The emotional range suggested by the use of a polyvalent stringed instrument seems to indicate that the sculpture might have drives, but although we may ascribe it inner states, (e.g., needs and desires etc.) the automaton appears quite indifferent to our presence. Headless, like slime mold, the alien plays itself, repeating a sequence of triggered events, and yet we find that we empathize with it, recognizing some of its behaviors — they are oddly human.

Jasmin Blasco. Los Angeles, February 2019.

Harrison Pearce is a British artist living and working in London. His practice combines disciplines and materials ranging from sculpture, drawing and printmaking to engineering and sound design. Since graduating from the MA course at City and Guilds of London Art School in 2016 he has gone on to exhibit in museums and galleries alongside international artists and has developed major works for both private and public collections.

This exhibition was organized in collaboration with London based curator Louis Blanc-Francard.