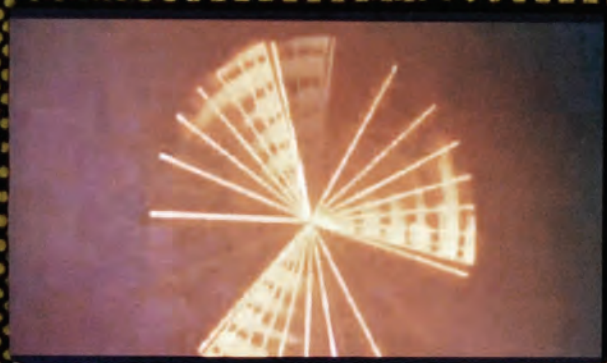


**QUT** Art Museum



20 August to 29 October 2017

# Machination

Cake Industries (Jesse Stevens & Dean Petersen)





1.



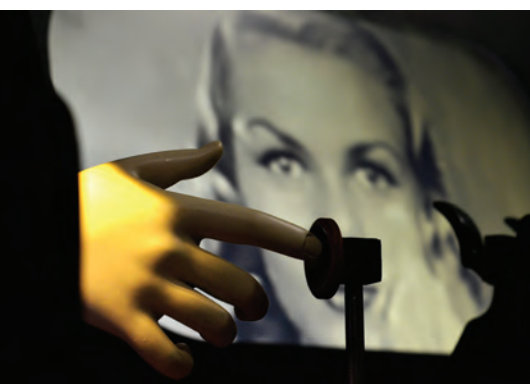
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## Machination

The title that the artists have taken for this exhibition, *Machination*, works in perfect synch with the art itself—readable as both a play on words and an exposé. Living in what has been called ‘the second machine age’ we are constantly engaged with and beholden to machines and machine intelligence. We entrust machines with our physical, emotional and economic well being. Technology in all its manifestations is a ubiquitous part of our daily lives. There are times when we are keenly aware of this saturation and others when we simply accept its silent presence. In the moments that we choose to perceive the presence of technology, we may think about how it works, muse about its history, what it means, where it comes from and who we are within it – or we may just sense it and consider its wonder.

Well into the first quarter of this new century, we have seen dramatic technological changes and the emergence of new cultural forms, practices and understandings developing as a result of technology. We rely on machines to

facilitate interactions within our professional and personal lives. We also inhabit digital spaces and networks overseen by machines to define, author and project our presence and subjectivity. *Machination* presents us with a collection of machines, built by Cake Industries, each one exposing a critical truth about our individual and collective relationships to machines, technology and the digital worlds that have become ubiquitous within our daily lives. The works in this exhibition invite us to interrogate the circulation of ideology, action and the mediation of subjectivity through technology, as well as our own agency within this process.

Cake Industries’ artistic practice draws on technologies and processes derived from professional theatre and sound production as well as the DIY methods and techniques of the contemporary maker movement. Over many years Cake Industries have been combining and refining these forms within their own unique imaginary. One which has been

inspired by broken animatronics, the writing of Philip K. Dick and the cynical optimism that binds the collective dystopic futures of 20th century science fiction writing and cinema. Another critical component informing their work is early art making and exploration that examines the intersection of human bodies and machine based technologies such as those found in the work of STELARC and Jim Whiting. Transposing their technological practices through such an imaginary, Cake Industries' current work reflects and engages the rhizomatic potential of its technological foundations, while also pursuing the more linear, overarching narratives and conditions that are firmly located in the history of late modernism.

Cake Industries most recent body of work investigates the ubiquity of machines and digital technology and likewise the implications and complexity of the systems which drive them, both physically and ideologically. Critical to this approach is the revelation of how things work. Process quite frequently presents as subject. A pair of autonomous legs that walk using a pulley system from a nineteenth century patent for a steam powered man. An Edwardian era automaton stripped back and transposed to reflect both the physical elements of its origin as well as the efficiency necessitated by its new temporality. Elevating the time honoured process of tinkering, the method of taking something apart to see how it works, Cake Industries provide access to explore beyond the exterior of the machine into the process and systems which bring forth its action and by extension its perceived value.

Confluent to this investigation of process is the tactic of shifting time to affect a concurrent shift in perspective, creating a distance that can be simultaneously both absurd and critical. Playing with time and our perceptions of progress Cake Industries are continuously repurposing obsolete appliances and methods to reference and explore contemporary relationships with technology. Echoes of technological fads and fascinations, reaching back hundreds of years into the present day, reverberating and hinting that perhaps this is not such a new phenomenon. Through these shifts in time and perspective, anachronistic technologies animate the sociological implications of late

modern capitalism simultaneously revealing both the beauty of their inner workings and the insidious nature of their ideological underpinnings.

At the heart of these critical explorations is, of course, our own ongoing relationship with technology and machines. Cake Industries continuously implicate themselves within the discourse of their practice. Replications and representations of the artists' physical likenesses can be found embedded throughout the exhibition. Their faces, features and limbs are implanted within their machine creations, eliciting a sense of animatism; the notion that particular kinds of ongoing interactions with objects can imbue the objects with traces of our selves, including our fears, values and beliefs. Shining a light on the egos, ambitions and emotions which foreground and propel these systems under scrutiny. Likewise, reflecting on our own participation and complicity in these very same systems. The artists' bodies, in this way, acting as surrogates complicate our criticisms; ultimately implicating the human values and voices that power 'the systems' that these works seek to explore and expose.

Engaging with the work of Cake Industries, we are invited to enter into an exchange. On the surface that exchange, manifested through motion, interaction and humour, feels playful, spontaneous, at times even celebratory. After a moment, however, there is a shift; the joke lands, the party ends. The shiny surface is pulled back revealing the levers, the pulleys, the pistons propelling the machine. From that revelation follows a subsequent interrogation. What is driving this machine? Is this progress? If so, at what cost? And to whose benefit? Beneath the surface there is a stark criticism of the machinery that drives late modern capitalism and its implications on our negotiation and representation of subjectivity within a space that is seemingly both private and public simultaneously. Cake Industries invite us to explore, experiment and play with our relationship to technology as we trace not only the history and presence of such machines in contemporary life but also attempt to unravel our connections to intelligent, autonomous technologies and the mythology of our current 'machine age'.

*Text by Nicole Hurtubise*

# Machination

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Recently we began to detach from the world.

As a couple, as well as an artist collaboration, we've found ourselves gradually pulling away from mainstream culture, and making our own private world. A couple of years back we even moved from the increasingly compressed Melbourne to a country area so we could find a quiet space to create. The effect has been a new perspective on our society and the way people exist in it. We've found in this silence a strange observation platform to recognize what we have all become, and it's quite bleak.

Much like a page from a Philip K Dick paperback, our world has caged-in the populace, and put them in a fantasy land where absolutely nothing is real anymore. Add to this an addiction to devices that demand our attention day and night, and you have nothing short of a waking nightmare. Our jobs are fake, our meals aren't food, and our realities are controlled by market forces. Nothing actually matters.

As artists newly removed from this reality, we found ourselves building dark visions of the present, using historical forms. In "Machination" we see the embodiment of this new direction, firstly in 2016's "It's Nice To Be Alive", reflecting the madness and utter uselessness of fitting in in the 21st century through work, rest, and play. Presented as a 6 minute piece of mechanical theatre, we adopt 1950s atomic-age aesthetics to present sequential scenes depicting our daily absurdity.

These new waters proved darkly seductive, and we continued to develop a healthy preoccupation with this mixture of contemporary observations and mid 20th century aesthetics. Post WWII was a disturbing time in history, in which governments, companies, and the general public found solace from the horrors of war in fabricating an existence that didn't naturally evolve. Suburbia, matching wives, Johnson accounts, TV, non perishable foods, and little Timmy growing up to wear a suit, all mixed together to create a western insanity that accelerated our rush towards self-annihilation. Following this legacy, we can now all watch videos of cats as we slowly decompose on a flat pack couch.

As with our mechanical sculptures, human bodies are simply biological machines that in time wear and fail. There is something we find romantic and energising about this, the idea that through finding our happiness, exploring the world, we eventually lose our ability to access it, and surrender ourselves to inexistence.

There is beauty to be found in almost every dark corner of this world, which is where our work now appears to mostly inhabit. We could be overwhelmed, we could give up, we could become sub-assistant managers of a management company that services the management sector, but much like the Dance of Zalongo, we'd much prefer to gleefully dance ourselves off the cliff face into the abyss.

*Cake Industries (Jesse Stevens & Dean Petersen)*

## IMAGE CAPTIONS

*It's Nice To Be Alive (detail)*, 2016  
CAKE INDUSTRIES (Jesse Stevens & Dean Petersen)  
Cover, image 1, 3, 6 and 9

*King – Voyages series (detail)*, 2017  
CAKE INDUSTRIES (Jesse Stevens & Dean Petersen)  
Image 2 and 8

*Likeness (detail)*, 2017  
CAKE INDUSTRIES (Jesse Stevens & Dean Petersen)  
Image 5

*Personal Space*, 2016  
CAKE INDUSTRIES (Jesse Stevens & Dean Petersen)  
Image 4

*Scenic – Voyages series*, 2017  
CAKE INDUSTRIES (Jesse Stevens & Dean Petersen)  
Image 7

Images courtesy of the artists.



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#machination

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