

ROXY PAINE

PRESS HIGHLIGHTS

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY



ROXY PAINE Farewell Transmission

Hovey Brock

June 1, 2017

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY | MAY 2 - JULY 1, 2017

Roxy Paine's first show of his sculptures at Paul Kasmin spans two adjacent spaces in Chelsea. The 293 10th Avenue space has two mordantly funny dioramas and a very disturbing installation of a burnt-out forest floor. The 297 10th Avenue space has eight of his signature Dendroids, stainless steel imitation tree constructions. A sculptor for the Anthropocene for sure, Paine's sardonic take on the accelerating turmoil of man-made entropy takes a new twist in the dioramas by extending that sense of chaos to the realm of interpersonal relations. Paine seems to imply in *Farewell Transmission* that the social disruptions that result from attempts to control human behavior, as presented in the dioramas, are of a piece with the anthropogenic disruptions that result from misguided attempts to control nature, an idea very much in evidence in the latest set of Dendroids. In Paine's world, the personal is political is ecological.



Roxy Paine, *After the Flood*, 2017, stainless steel. 41 3/4 × 55 5/8 × 25 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery.
Photo: Christopher Stach.

Proof that reality will always outpace paranoia, *experiment*, 2015, is a diorama whose subject matter refers to a CIA project, which lasted from the 50s to the 70s. As part of the CIA's thoroughly unethical research into hallucinogenic warfare, prostitutes would dose unwitting johns with LSD, and

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then take them back to bedrooms equipped with one-way mirrors that concealed observation rooms. Built into the gallery wall, the diorama divides front to back in two parts, both unpopulated. The first part is the observation room behind the mirror, all in grey, equipped with a table, chairs, a telephone, a file cabinet, a toilet, and what incongruously appear to be wine glasses. The second part is the bedroom, all in dark yellow, with a disheveled king-sized bed, a door to a bathroom, a knocked-over chair, and someone's pants on the floor. We can only infer that it was rough night for the john. Lacking the traditional glass front, the diorama yet shows considerable craftsmanship, with foreshortened furniture and other objects to mask the shallowness of the space. We have entered a Museum of Unnatural History, where the toxic biome of covert state power is on show.



Roxy Paine, *Experiment*, 2015. Steel, maple, fluorescent lamps, acrylic prismatic light diffusers, aluminum and oil paint.
96 3/8 × 106 3/8 × 71 3/8 inches.

Coming at poisoned interpersonal ecologies from a different angle, *Meeting*, 2015 shows a large office space with a circle of chairs, evidently the setting for a twelve-step recovery group. A whiteboard on the right wall has inscriptions about “captives,” “fugitives,” “unpromising hero,” “child rescued,” and numerous references to “demon” under various contexts: all labels suggesting a psychic habitat of dependency, persecution, guilt, and alienation. There are no people in this diorama either, although the presence of soft drinks and the inevitable coffee urn on a table against the left wall creates an air of something happening just off-stage, not unlike the unsettled bedroom in *experiment*. Paine, of course, is giving us room to insert our own narratives, as dark as experience and imagination will allow, into each tableau.

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Roxy Paine, *Desolation Row*, 2016. Fiberglass, polyester clear resin, ash, earth, rubber, wax, epoxy, light emitting diodes, oil paint, stainless steel, aluminum and wood. 108 × 163 1/2 × 97 1/2 inches.

Across the street, Paine's latest Dendroids move away from the social to make allusions to psychology, physiology, the climate, and other complex systems in the natural world. These works all share conceptual mappings that entail branching structures, but the scale of reference can shift dramatically. *Neuron Flower Tree*, 2016, is a naturalistic representation of this type of cell, with its axon as the trunk and the dendrites for the branches. *After the Flood*, 2016, shows a tree with an electric pole, clothing, and other detritus left behind from a surge of high water—a clear reference to the disturbances of the water cycle caused by climate change. On a more whimsical note, *Mental State no. 5*, 2017, and *Coil (Mental State no. 4)*, 2017, attempt the absurd task of illustrating what moods look like: perhaps the pimples and uneven bulges of *no. 5* refer to irritation, while *no. 4*, with its teetering loops, suggests an obsessive thought being turned over and over again in the mind. Here as with the dioramas, Paine depicts patterns of cause and effect, often with deteriorating outcomes, which assert themselves from both subjective and objective perspectives.

Back in the other building, the installation *Desolation Row*, 2016, seamlessly braids the rest of the themes in this show around its through line of systemic dysfunction. In a darkened room, a platform against the wall has charred logs, parts of which are still glowing embers, strewn across a blackened ground. It is an image that functions on many levels: the personal (burn out), the social/political (scorched earth policies), and, of course, the ecological. This broad metaphorical summation homes in on a prevalent foreboding at the beginning of 21st century that Western civilization, at least as embodied in this country, has reached a stage of no return. While Paine could not have envisaged the rise of Trump when he executed *Desolation Row*, the year 2016 was already registering a

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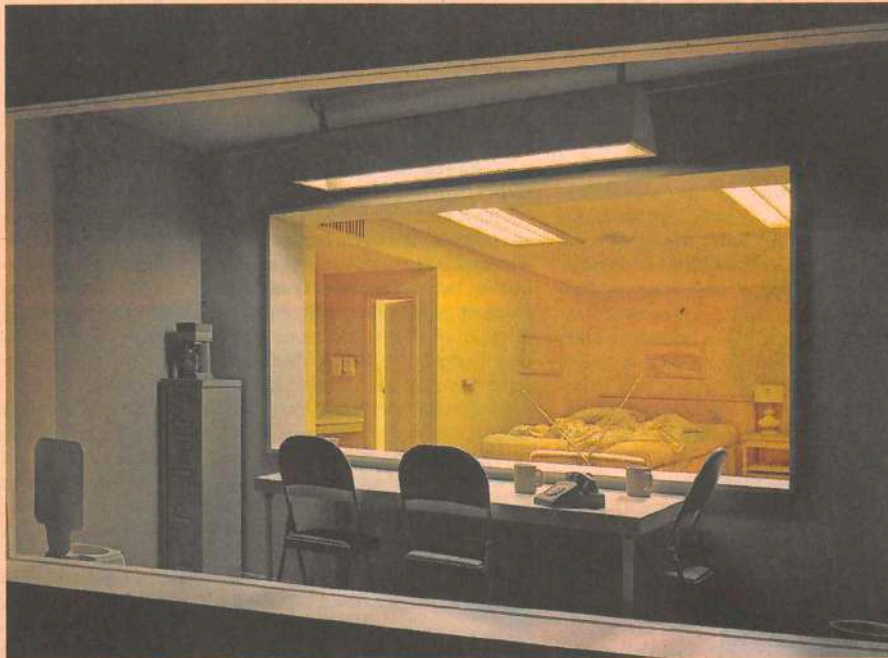
number of alarming trends: CO2 going past 400 parts per million, the complete paralysis of our political system, entrenched drone warfare, a seemingly unbridgeable gap between elites--political, financial, and cultural--and everyone else, and so forth. Trump is but the latest, albeit most unnerving, symptom of a system about to run out of oxygen, and many dread, while others hope, his appearance will only hasten its collapse. The slogan on both the extreme right and left of this country is now "Burn it all down." Cassandra-like, *Desolation Row* rings out like a cry from the heart that we are well on our way to doing so.

<http://brooklynrail.org/2017/06/artseen/Roxy-Paine-Farewell-Transmission>

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FINANCIAL TIMES

May 6 – 7, 2017



SNAPSHOT

'experiment, 2015' by Roxy Paine

Dioramas tend to be the stuff of natural history museums, but American sculptor Roxy Paine has adapted the form to his own ends.

Paine's dioramas are large — generally measuring between two and three metres in each dimension — and he uses tricks of perspective to make them seem life-size.

His "experiment, 2015" (shown above) depicts the setting of a 1950s-70s CIA surveillance program examining the effects of LSD. It is a diorama of a diorama. The crumpled sheets, the door left ajar and the empty observation desk all add up to lend it an eerie, meticulous stillness.

Two of Paine's dioramas are now being shown as part of *Farewell Transmission*, an exhibition of his work at Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York.

Tom Graham

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THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

May 8, 2017

Roxy Paine's surreal dioramas go on view at Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York City

Zach Edelson



Roxy Paine, *Meeting*, 2016. Birch, maple, epoxy, apoxie, fluorescent lights, acrylic prismatic light diffusers, enamel, lacquer, oil paint, damar varnish, paper, steel and stainless steel. 97 1/2 x 58 1/2 x 130 1/4 inches. (Photo by: Christopher Stach / Paul Kasmin Gallery © Roxy Paine, courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery)

Roxy Paine's surreal dioramas go on view at Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York City

New York-based artist Roxy Paine has two series of artworks—both distinct and striking—on display at Paul Kasmin Gallery in Chelsea.

The first are the “Dendroids,” the latest iteration of a long-running group of all-stainless steel sculptures that meditate on how the industrial transforms into the natural. These gleaming artworks feature man-made objects, human organs, and other abstract forms seamlessly melded with trees. But the exhibition's other trio of works—the “Dioramas,” titled *experiment*, *Meeting*, and *Desolation Row*—are even more surreal and provocative.

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Roxy Paine, *experiment*, 2015. Steel, maple, fluorescent lamps, acrylic prismatic light diffusers, aluminum and oil paint. 96 3/8 x 106 3/8 x 7.1 3/8 inches. (Photo by: Christopher Stach / Paul Kasmin Gallery © Roxy Paine, courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery)

experiment portrays one of the CIA's "MKUltra" experiments, which lasted from the 1950s to 70s and had scientists observe the effects of LSD on subjects, sometimes without their permission and coupled with various forms psychological manipulation and torture. No photographs of these experiments exist, but Paine has crafted a vision here. He situates the viewer in front of an MKUltra experiment, with a CIA observation room looking onto a testing area (a generic, hotel-like bedroom and bathroom). The former is dark gray, the latter all yellow. Most remarkably, an incredibly acute forced perspective compresses the two small rooms together. From a certain angle, the vanishing point and scale are flawless, but any slight movement reveals the extreme compression of the observation room furniture. No glass separates the viewer from the two spaces, but the yellow hotel room feels miles away. The collapse of visual perception in *experiment*, combined with its subject matter, forces the viewer to confront paradoxes of perception, reality, and control, all to very chilling effect.

Meeting is far more ghostly. It depicts the windowless meeting room of a twelve-step substance abuse program; the diorama features models of generic office furniture and bright white fluorescent lighting. As with *experiment*, the forced perspective is flawless, but the diorama's eye-level placement and realistic coloring heighten its strangeness. From afar, with its harsh fluorescent illumination, the room appears photo-realistic. But as the diorama pulls you closer, rough and unfamiliar textures appear on the floor and chairs. As you approach the far corners, it appears as though the scene has been put under a fisheye lens. Unlike *Meeting*, there are no shadows. All these effects make *experiment* pass from surreality to almost nightmare.

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Roxy Paine, *Desolation Row*, 2016. Fiberglass, polyester clear resin, ash, earth, rubber, wax, epoxy, light emitting diodes, oil paint, stainless steel, aluminum and wood. 108 x 163 1/2 x 97 1/2 inches. (Photo by: Christopher Stach / Paul Kasmin Gallery © Roxy Paine, courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery)

The last diorama is *Desolation Row*, which depicts a smoldering landscape of blackened earth and burnt trees, still glowing with orange light. There's no use of forced perspective here—at least, none that I could see, though the diorama's farther trees do shrink in scale. *Desolation Row* evokes a cycle of growth and destruction, as well as themes of control, man, and nature that run throughout all the exhibition's artworks.

Architects will certainly appreciate the care taken with these dioramas; Paine's attention to detail and perspective is remarkable. However, while architectural models aim to explain, elucidate, and convince, these do the opposite—they disturb, provoke, and question.

The show—titled *Farewell Transmission*—is on view at Paul Kasmin Gallery at 293 & 297 Tenth Avenue, New York City.

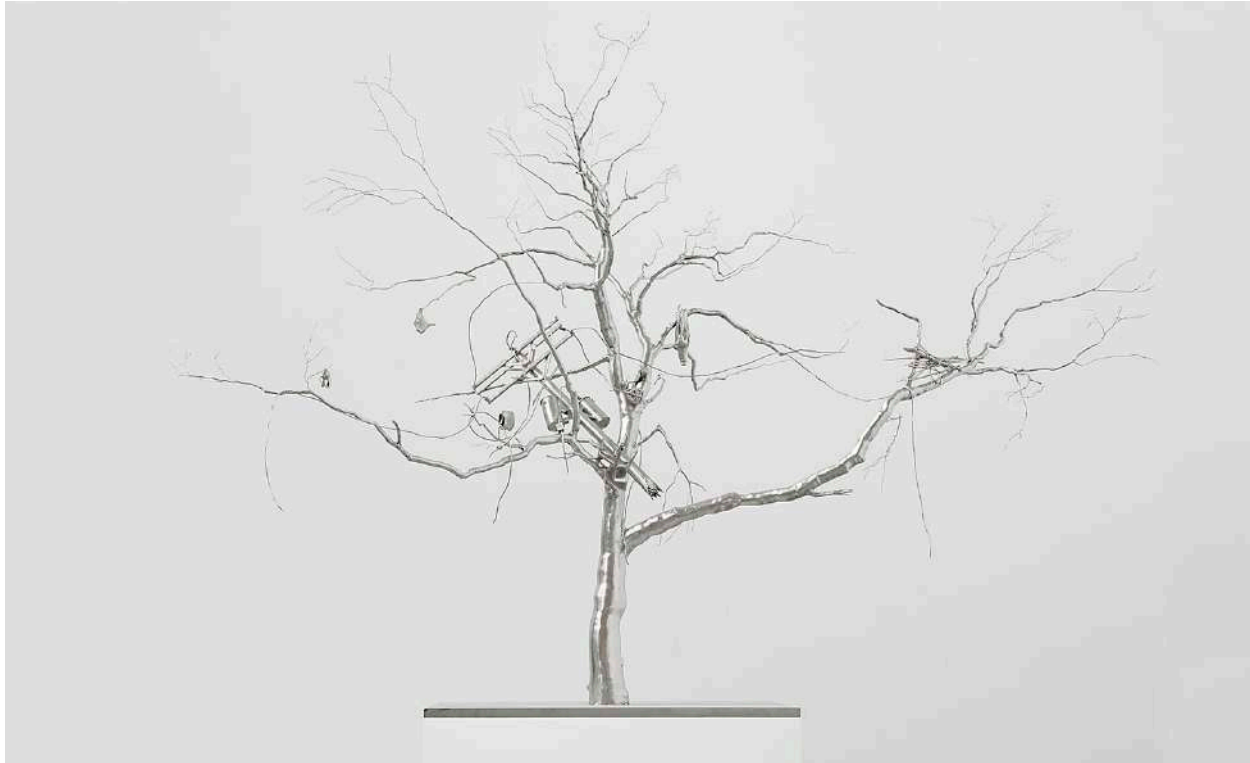
<https://archpaper.com/2017/05/roxy-paine-dioramas-paul-kasmin-gallery/#gallery-0-slide-2>

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Wallpaper*

May 5, 2017

Roxy Paine explores nature, folklore and geometry in his latest exhibition

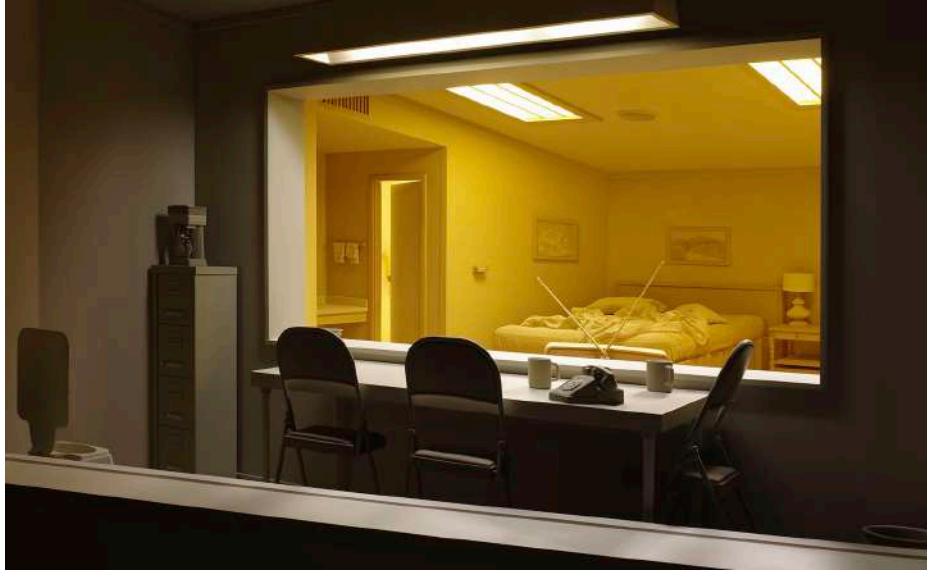


By Olivia Martin

Embers glow and flicker amid the hyperrealistic charred polyester resin and fiberglass trees, the light intentionally dim. It's as if you have stumbled upon a suspended moment in time; a forest is hazy in the distance. Within seconds, artist Roxy Paine captivates with his new work *Desolation Row* on view as part of his two-venue exhibition at New York's Paul Kasmin Gallery.

A semi-hybrid between Paine's tree-like Dendroid series and his dioramas, *Desolation Row* condenses a half-mile viewpoint of a burned down forest into seven feet. 'I've always been interested in our relationship to nature — how it affects us and how we obsessively alter nature and seek to control it,' Paine says. 'To me it's a very melancholy piece. It's dealing with the aftermath. Is this fire manmade? Is it because of how we have altered the planet? Is it just a natural fire?'

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Much of Paine's work evoke questions of whether something *is* or *is not*. His latest series of Dendroids, for example, resemble silver tree sculptures, but study many dendritic forms, such as the branching human vascular and digestive systems and neuron structures. Many of his Dendroids illustrate the connectedness of human and nature – at times literally – such as in *After the Flood*, in which a tree is entangled with manmade detritus after a natural disaster.

Paine's dioramas, *experiment* and *Meeting*, express this tension between man and nature from another angle. In *experiment* – a fictional scene of the true CIA experiment MKUltra, during which the CIA drugged unsuspecting people with LSD and hallucinogens – the viewer is positioned in front of a hidden surveillance room behind a two-way mirror that faces an empty bedroom. This perspective is heightened by the absence of people in the work, forcing the viewer to place oneself into the scene.

Meeting, which is intended to convey a community space where a substance support group could gather, uses the circular form as its anchor. 'This idea of the circle of chairs and circular geometry is such an ancient one,' Paine says. 'But then it is in this airless, window-less space with fluorescent lights.' He underscores this relationship between the old and new by writing entries from a dictionary of folklore motifs on the whiteboard, emphasizing the stories we tell repeatedly across time and cultures.

Although purposely kept separated to preserve their discrete narratives, *Desolation*, the Dendroids, and the dioramas all offer different perspectives of humanity. 'Humans generally think they are so apart from animals and nature,' explains Paine. 'We build these elaborate encasements around our instincts and disguise them, but ultimately we'll be determined by our primitive brains.'

<http://www.wallpaper.com/art/roxy-paines-latest-works-examine-our-relationship-to-nature#zORkJCbS3xDiFgsy.99>

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artnet®

Art Guides

Beyond the Fairs: Your Go-to Guide to Openings and Events During
Frieze Week 2017

Can you see them all?

Sarbani Ghosh & **Sarah Cascone**, April 30, 2017



12. “Roxy Paine: Farewell Transmission” at Paul Kasmin Gallery

This two-venue show of recent sculpture by Roxy Paine focuses on the clash of humans and nature. The pieces combine, distort, and confound our dualistic view of the natural and the inorganic. “Farewell Transmission” expresses anxieties about how humanity has impacted the environment, and worries about machines that strive to order and control nature.

Address: 293 & 297 10th Avenue

Time: Opening reception, 6 p.m.–8 p.m.; Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

On view through July 1st.

<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/go-to-guide-to-frieze-week-2017-923855>

Aesthetica

Social Definition

June 7, 2017



The distorted forms created by sculptor Roxy Paine (b. 1966) embody the clash between human and natural worlds. The recurring motif of an industrialised tree, for example, fuses manmade materials such as epoxy, steel and polymer, which reveal and examine the complex and unresolved interplay between the forces of chaos and attempts at control, as well as the intersection between organic life and fabricated interpretation. Paul Kasmin Gallery's, New York, Farewell Transmission is a two-venue showcase of recent sculptures by Paine, spanning the spaces at 293 and 297 Tenth Avenue. Two distinct series are on show – Dioramas and Dendroids – each of which expresses anxieties about the human impact on our habitat and the mechanised tools we employ to impose order and control, often resulting in disordered and unpredictable outcomes. Roxy Paine: Farewell Transmission runs until 1 July. For more information: www.paulkasmingallery.com

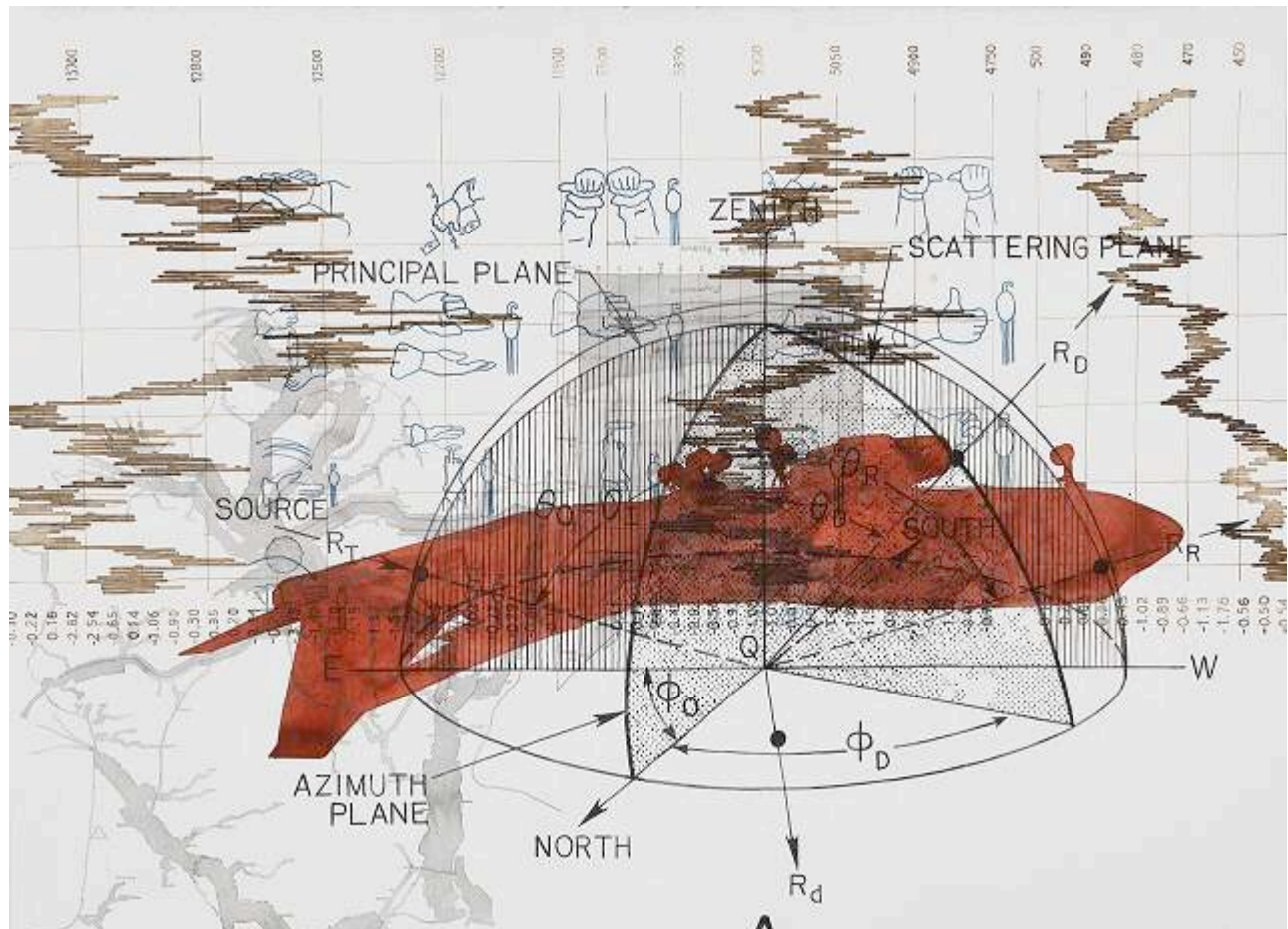
Credits:

1. Roxy Paine, experiment, 2015. Courtesy of Paul Kasmin Gallery. © Roxy Paine.

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BLOUINARTINFO

Datebook: 'Roxy Paine: Thermoplastic Flux' at the Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York
September 2, 2016



"Salt Almanac," 2013; ink on paper, 29 3/4 x 40 1/2 in. (Courtesy: Paul Kasmin Gallery).

"Thermoplastic Flux," an exhibition of drawings by renowned sculptor Roxy Paine will be put on view at the Paul Kasmin Gallery, 297 Tenth Avenue, New York, from September 15 through October 22, 2016. The display will highlight Paine's drawings as a substantial and distinctive facet of his all-embracing and varied opus.

Curated by writer and curator, Judith Goldman, the exhibition demonstrates layering of imagery, vacillating from the diagrammatic to the topographic, to the pixelated. The drawings being exhibited reconnoiter the leitmotifs of containment, regulation, boundaries and mapping, and portray Paine's adroitness as corporeal and compelling in equal measure as a draftsman.

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sculpture

Roxy Paine-Dendroids, Replicants, and Sculpture Machines

10/16 – October Issue



Maelstrom, 2009. Stainless steel, 22 x 140 x 50 ft.

Roxy Paine has won considerable attention from the art world for various bodies of work, including stainless steel tree forms (dendroids); arrangements of psychedelic and poisonous mushrooms, as well as artificially made, weedchoked gardens (replicants); and machines that make drawings, paintings, and sculptures. His sensibility focuses on an aesthetic in which the artificial becomes a reality based on natural forms, but which, in turn, allows itself to be copied or created anew as a cultural artifact. Sometimes the forms are compellingly exact, as in the case of the dendroids and mushroom fields; and some- times the work is outstandingly ersatz, as in the excrement-like, layered forms extruded by Paine's computer-run machinery.

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SANTA FE ✦ NEW MEXICAN

Art Review: "SITE 20 Years/20 Shows"

05/19/2016

SITE Santa Fe is celebrating its 20-year anniversary by inviting back artists who have exhibited at the space in the past. *SITE 20 Years/20 Shows: Spring*, the first in a series of yearlong exhibits, is designed to incorporate the museum's history in a show that's more intimate than the broad-ranging biennial that premiered last summer. To those ends, SITE has selected relatively recent pieces from seven artists in order to highlight shifts in their works' focus since the venue last featured them. The artists in question are Roxy Paine, Deborah Grant, Jessica Stockholder, Rose B. Simpson, collaborators Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley, and Gregory Crewdson, who is showing an older but rarely seen series of photographs.

In the lobby, monitors play a series of performance pieces by various artists who have participated in SITE events over the years. The wallpaper in the lobby names every artist SITE has worked with during the last two decades: more than 600 of them, in over 80 shows and nine biennials.

Roxy Paine's *Second Nature*, a solo show serving as a mid-career survey, opened at SITE in 2003. Paine's works shown in *20 Years/20 Shows* underscore his current practice of constructing dioramas from materials such as wood, metal, glass, light bulbs, and enamel; to date, he has finished four. *Drawing for Control Room Diorama*, offers visitors a two-dimensional look at the artist's plan for a large-scale piece. The diorama featured in the show is *bastard octopus*, Paine's arresting vision of a sports arena: a white room that is empty of spectators. Viewers are presented with a number of perceptual dilemmas, not the least of which involves matters of perspective. The diorama is an illusory space, about 13 feet long at its deepest point. Within that space — designed to appear larger than it is — are a wrestling ring, rows of seats and stadium platforms, television monitors, and a bank of eight lights. The objective, distanced view provided is at odds with the raw experience of watching a live match but isn't dissimilar to watching one on TV. Here, in a museum environment, the observer is yet another step removed. Dioramas, common enough in natural history museums, encapsulate an environment in an enclosed, artistically conceived space. The quiet, monochromatic piece stands in contrast to the bustling, noisy environment of a live match. Paine was inspired by the French philosopher Roland Barthes, who wrote about the wrestling match as a staged spectacle. Here, the pristine room suggests that the match has ended, its patrons long gone, or is soon to begin. Perhaps there is deeper symbolism here, with the match occurring in the minds of viewers as they wrestle with ideas.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

A False Sense of Security and Vivid Views of the World

09/12/14



For a while now, "amazing" has been the art world's inflated, all-purpose substitute for the words "good" and "interesting." Although the works of very few artists actually qualify for the adjective, the most recent pieces by Roxy Paine (b.1966) do. A couple of decades ago, Mr. Paine exhibited a machine that flung blank placards across a gallery. From there, he progressed to cast-resin renditions of psychotropic mushrooms, stainless-steel trees (one in a Whitney Biennial, another in the roof garden of the Metropolitan Museum of Art), and sculptures of wooden machines made via computer modeling along with carving by hand.

The featured work in Mr. Paine's current exhibition is "Checkpoint" (2014). At first glance it appears to be a life-size replication of an airport-security checkpoint made out of an eerily monochromatic

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wood. Set behind a huge window, the installation includes trays for shoes, belts and laptops, a baggage scanner and even a wastebasket. Instead, Mr. Paine has cleverly squished the "real" 80-foot depth of a security checkpoint to about a quarter of that by making his objects and the space between them smaller and distorted (rectangles become trapezoids, circles ovals, and so on) as they recede in space.

There's a downside, however, to Mr. Paine's intricate adroitness. "Checkpoint," along with his free-standing, similarly ghostly sculptures of fictional machines, evoke the nonaesthetic experience of wonder one gets in a wax museum without offering any compensatory, passionate social comment. His pieces twist our arm with their obsessive workmanship, saying mostly, "Be impressed." Even so, Mr. Paine's new work is, yes, amazing.

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Roxy Paine with Will Corwin
09/04/14

Will Corwin has spent the last three years ferreting out Roxy Paine in his various habitats—upstate in Delhi, New York, and in his Long Island City and Maspeth studios—watching the progress of various works of art and attempting to develop a taxonomy of the various strains and tropes into which his ideas fall. Together in numerous discussions the artist and his interlocutor have sifted through the strata of meaning that the artist has laid down over time. Paine’s works oscillate between the overwhelmingly familiar and the disarmingly foreign. On the one hand he presents things exactly as they are, and stands back to enjoy the inherent impossibility in a field of perfectly replicated *Psilocybe cubensis* mushrooms sprouting from a wooden gallery floor, while on the other hand he reconfigures the fundamental definitions of what we think we know and then conjures up objects—or even better—has robots make them in front of us—and labels them “painting” or “sculpture,” forcing the viewer to reconfigure their perception of what those things really are.



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

Will Corwin (Rail): “Checkpoint” is the centerpiece of your current exhibition *Denuded Lens* at Marianne Boesky, [September 4 through October 18, 2014]. It presents a security installation in what we might guess is an airport; an 80-foot gauntlet of X-ray machines, full-body scanners, and even plastic tubs for shoes and laptops is meticulously rendered in wood and skewed to fit the 18 feet of a stage-set-like constructed perspective. “Checkpoint” is a diorama, but it’s a fraught one. Instead of aiming to educate the viewer about the unknown, it demands

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introspection. What is your history with the “media” of dioramas? What was the first diorama you ever came in contact with?

Roxy Paine: The first one that I can remember was a diorama in Holland, near Scheveningen, a town by the sea. They have a diorama there that’s in the round—you actually come into the center of it through a tunnel. It’s the sea, sand, and ocean, the painted backdrop is of the water and the sky. I remember the absence of a focal point. It had a gray, cloudy sky, which is typical in that area. I remember it had a starkness to it. It was unusual to me in that it was a recreation of a place that you could just step outside and see.

Rail: Was this your first interaction with hyper-banality?

Paine: [*Laughs.*] Well, maybe it was an influence on my hyper-banality.

Rail: Do you remember your impressions of it?

Paine: I’ve always been melancholy, even as a kid, so I think I felt a certain synchronicity with it, a certain harmony, even as a kid.

The other earliest dioramas I can remember are the ones at the Museum of Natural History. What really struck me was the transformative and mind-altering qualities of them, and the displacement aspects. The mechanisms of illusion are not really hidden, you just poke your head inside or at an angle and you see the lights and where the wall ends. It’s almost hallucinatory with the illusions, but the means by which these effects are achieved are easily discovered and revealed at the same time as they are functioning. I don’t often hear people talk about how mind-bending they are, but for me they create a feeling that I’m under the influence of a psychoactive event.

Rail: They are a very rudimentary form of time-travel and space travel.

Paine: Yes, and I also see them as time capsules, reflective of the scenes within as well as the concerns, preoccupations, and biases of the time in which they were made.

Rail: Looking back on some of your earlier drawings from 1994, “A Diorama for an Art Gallery,”

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“A Diorama for a Drug Dealers Apartment”—

Paine: I wish those had been fully realized at the time, and not just as drawings. I wouldn't necessarily do those specific ideas now—I think the current iterations of the dioramas I'm working with are more indicative of my thought process now, but they would have been very interesting to have done at the time.

Rail: There's a dichotomy between what you're proposing in those early drawings and what you're proposing with “Checkpoint” and what the Natural History Museum is doing with its display of, say, animals of the South African plains. The dioramas in the museum seek to educate, and you're taking this mode of educational display and using it as a kind of mirroring apparatus. Where do you position yourself between mirroring and educating?

Paine: It's definitely not educating, because I'm completely anti-education—I dropped out of high school and then dropped out of college as well, so clearly I have something against educating people.

Rail: Institutional education!

Paine: Yeah, that's more accurate. I never quite understood how to navigate through institutions, so I had to develop an auto-critical and auto-didactic approach to my work. With projects such as the specimen cases and dioramas, there is a clear employment and simultaneous translation of institutional modalities. Here, models are understood to provide knowledge and information—they are a lens to record, catalog, and display data. I am interested in these given structures as signifiers and taking those ends and folding them in on themselves. These dioramas are like folded spaces and elements in dialogue with our current episteme. Edification is still a potentiality even without education, even though there's not a clear message to be taught. Given all this, the works become suspended moments and a pause to contemplate complexities.

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Roxy Paine, "Checkpoint," 2014. Maple, aluminum, fluorescent light bulbs, acrylic prismatic light diffusers, 14' x 26' 11" x 18' 7 1/2". Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York.

Rail: Where do the complexities lie? You've stripped away the foreign-ness in this piece, stripped away the difference, but you've kept the entertainment side of it—it's the excitement of the diorama without the usual data you're used to receiving from it.

Paine: Do I entertain you? Spaces that are "facts"—a fast food restaurant, a security line, a control room—tell us something about the processes of our contemporary world: the industry of food, inspection, or control. They are architectural spaces but they are also machines, they are systems. I am interested in translation—the translation of the languages of these systems into the language of wood and the language of dioramas. By translating, I hope to create a third language, a language that has ligaments connected to the sources but existing in a tenuous equilibrium, teetering between them. There's an incompatibility and in this discordance is where the pieces actually become the questions they are asking. Questions, the right questions, are important to me because they open the mind.

Part of what I've always worked with is a seemingly factual or fact-based situation—like the "Psilocybe cubensis Field" (1997) which is psychedelic and hallucinogenic, but without any amplification or exaggeration in the form or color. It's the facts of this species: I'm limiting myself, restricting myself to that in order to create an altered state. I think of it as a banality-based psychedelia in a way.

Rail: What you're talking about is the very basis of sculpture itself: replicating or reproducing

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something that has a meaning in a base object, not recreating the meaning though something like a Greek Choros, the god-as-person in stone. By replicating the mushrooms in an epoxy polymer, you are designating them to a particular species; do you feel that by doing so you are investing the replica with a psychedelic power?

Paine: Yes, the implication is that by naming it and presenting its morphology, other physical effects will occur. Perhaps it's also akin to some kind of placebo effect. It is creating this very hallucinatory experience—this field of mushrooms growing out of the floor.

Rail: Do you feel the viewer needs to have the experience that these mushrooms produce in order to understand the piece?

Paine: No, I don't think it's necessary to have experienced mushrooms to appreciate the piece. There are other levels to the work which are about meditation within the repetition, becoming the mushrooms as I'm building them, understanding every permutation of the species, understanding every possible variation of form and growth in the mushrooms. It's about a contradictory play between the rules of restraint and freeing your mind.

Rail: Do you invent those mushrooms? Do you work from photographs to produce every one? Or do you create mushrooms as you go along?

Paine: There's a process first of studying the species to such a degree that I can then become like a D.N.A. mixing table in my brain and be able to create unique entities that have the characteristics of the species but are not referring to, on a one-to-one basis, an existing mushroom, or one that has existed. If it was about finding a particular mushroom in the woods, casting that or taking a plaster mold from it, and then reproducing that, that would be a very different kind of project and occupation. You're a technician, but you're really trying to get into the brain of the fungus, to become it.

Rail: Many of the pieces you've created—"Weed-choked Garden" (1998), "Bad Lawn" (1998)—have to do with poisonous plants, plants that cause pain, or that detract from the perceived natural beauty of a garden. With the psychedelic mushrooms, what are they as a signifier to human beings? Do they signify some abhorrent side of nature that invokes fear, or are they a gateway to the sublime?

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Paine: I've always been very intrigued by the relationship between plants or mushrooms and humans. It's very gripping to think that humans, wherever they live, in any climate except the Arctic, have always found whatever plant or fungus is psychoactive in that area. It's kind of incredible to think about how many people had to die to discover which plants were going to be edible, which were going to be poisonous, and which were going to get you high. It reflects something very innate and fundamental about humans. When you think about what the arguments often are, in politics, as in, we want to keep people from doing this substance because it's harmful, it is exhibiting a willful blindness to our history. I think it would be more accepting of the reality to ponder our intricate relationship with these organisms.



Roxy Paine, "Carcass," 2013. Birch, maple wood, glass, and fluorescent tube, 13' 7" × 20' 1/2" × 13' 13/16". Courtesy of the artist and Kavi Gupta Chicago | Berlin. Photo: Joseph Rynkiewicz.

Rail: Do you think they were a catalyst for human development?

Paine: Absolutely. To advance or evolve requires breaking out of a habitual mode of thinking. And habits are also something innate in us, and we slide into repetitive modes of thinking. Drugs and psychoactive plants, especially used in a non-addictive way, have the potential of shedding light on a situation. You could imagine when a tribe or culture is faced with trying to solve problems it would be very important for the success of that tribe to have an alternative way of looking at an obstacle, a new approach. If humans had stuck with what was habitual, we would all be tending our herds, which actually might not be so bad. *[Laughs.]*

Rail: We've been talking about the dioramas, but what about the table versus the window. The table takes several forms—the lab, the investigation—in the newer pieces, like "Scrutiny" (2014), and also in older pieces like "Dinner of the Dictators" (1993 – 95). When did you first start

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visualizing the table as a tool for your art and how has it transformed over the various projects in which it's been used?

Paine: I see parallels between the table and the field: the field is a place of openness in terms of engagement and the way the mind can travel within it. With the field, such as one for a sport or game, you have rules and parameters by which that game can be played on that field, or table. With my pieces and projects, there are parameters around the way the game can unfold and the way the mind can flow through, but they also allow for the element of potential, which can unfold in a great number of possible combinations and sequences. In terms of generating ideas I often start with the table. I have this neurosis that the work table in my studio has to be cleaned off completely at night—in the morning I have to come in to a completely open table surface.

Rail: Not to split hairs, but the decision to put “*Psilocybe cubensis*” on the floor instead of on the table and then thinking about another artist who does floor-based sculpture that the viewer can interact with, like Carl Andre, can you explain a bit about your choice to put certain things on the floor or on the wall rather than on the table?

Paine: Why the field versus the table? They're two iterations that function very similarly for me. The floor becomes a big table, the table becomes a condensed floor.

Rail: Is there a convenience to the table? You put these out-of-control weeds on the table, which exerts a certain control over them.

Paine: That's a good point. With a piece like the “Weed Choked Garden” (2006), the table provides part of the structural rigidity that the chaos of the overgrown weeds is playing against. There are also other elements of that structure and control in the piece. There are remnants of the grooves, the garden rows in the ground that indicate the attempt at order and control, which is still visible, but being eaten away.

Rail: What about translation on a different scale—artistic practice versus mechanization: you've said that you don't want your work to “wear its labor on its sleeve.” On the one hand, the presence of the artist is suppressed by an almost Godlike craftsmanship in the woodwork—

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Paine: Jesus was a carpenter.

Rail: On the other hand your presence takes the form of the choice of the mechanism or the algorithm. Are you, as an artist, shy about expressionism? You do drawings, but then when it comes to the big, really prominent projects, you invoke this perfectionist craftsmanship. You'd never take a hacksaw and make the "Machine of Indeterminacy" function like a Baselitz sculpture.



Roxy Paine, "Control Room," (2013). Steel, wood, automotive paint, glass, and fluorescent tubing. 13'7" x 18'23/8" x 12'5". Courtesy of the artist and Kavi Gupta Chicago | Berlin. Photo: Joseph Rynkiewicz.

Paine: It's an encyclopedia of all the ways to construct something or build something with wood. In "Machine of Indeterminacy," where the piece is a conglomerate of rigid and fluid connections, it employs mechanistic methodology as well as arduous hand carving. This is a machine exerting tremendous effort but with no particular reason. It's a good question: why not leave the chisel marks apparent? It's about obsession, and bringing the same obsessiveness that one brings to the work conceptually to its methodology and materiality. I'm always refining whatever methodology and material I take on. It's about transformation and applying the same rigor to the macro and the minutiae. Someone might perceive this as just a piece of wood or a piece of stainless steel, but I see it as chemistry, a cellular structure with great potential. Putting it another way, there's a certain alchemical process with the wood pieces being stripped down. When you imagine a machine or industrial appliance, it has various colors, materials, metal finishes, and gloss levels. These sculptures are translations of machines, they are not machines.

Rail: You've called it a neutralization or a neutering.

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Paine: A sort of stripping down or unraveling of an object. In a way, it is a denuding of these physical characteristics, and a simultaneous additive of wood as a sculptural material. It's a way of removing what's extraneous, so that they can be taken out of their normal context, and contemplated for what they signify—when you delve into the minutiae of angles and relationships and proportions, somehow they do become inadvertently beautiful.

Rail: Are the painting machines a formalization of the artist's practice? And by painting machines I'm including "SCUMAK no. 1" (1998) and "Painting Manufacture Unit (PMU)" (1999 – 2000). What exactly do you accomplish by making a machine that creates a work of art?

Paine: It's always about asking what it means that this machine is making art. What occurs when there is a series of displacements, such as the artist's practice onto the museum or gallery, or the displaced moment of a creative act, the displaced moment between creating the program and beginning the work? Each machine sets up a language of elements and rules by which those elements are utilized. I create the apparatus, I create the system, I create the controls, but then it's almost like that is the beginning of a second part of the process which is really about potential. For instance, the same program will always create two entirely unique works due to natural processes. That's because thermodynamics, room temperature, drying, and cooling events are all natural forces present and not within the machine's control. So there is this collision between industry and nature, and control and the uncontrolled that I find interesting.

Rail: Where does the art reside?

Paine: It's in the displaced contradiction that the origin of those natural forms comes from mechanistic processes. It's in the dialogue between what is carefully prescribed and what is naturally happening, and it's in the translation of geologic forces into the form of physical paintings.

Rail: In the dipped paintings, how did you conceptualize the process of painting as something being dipped?

Paine: It began with a manual process.

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Rail: Was it done by hand with the eventual intention of mechanizing the process?

Paine: It was a curiosity, it was an experimentation, it was a material investigation, but at the same time I was very much thinking about mechanization and automation—factory production and mass production as points or counter points. Things that are resistant to or antithetical to the so-called “creative mind” and colliding these ideas and seeing what comes from the collision between them.



Roxy Paine, “Psilocybe Cubensis Field,” 1997. Thermoset polymer, lacquer, oil, and steel, 41/4 × 328 × 222”.

Rail: With “SCUMAK,” did the form come first or the machine to create the form?

Paine: Again, it was from the most simple beginnings of experimenting with a hot-glue gun. But it’s not like I was playing with a glue gun and thought of machines for the first time. It could have just been an experiment and remained an experiment with the material itself, but then it needed to be realized as a fully automated process.

Rail: The irony of this is that while you’re transforming painting—the institution—into a mechanized process you’re also mimicking a natural process. The “SCUMAK” extrusions resemble a process of accretion, a stalagmite.

Paine: The flow of lava. Yes, accretion and layers of molten material that are accumulating at a certain point. They simultaneously reference art and the history of art, but for me it would be very unsatisfying just to be having a dialogue with art history by itself, or the history of painting. I want to extend the dialogue to the natural world, the forces of nature, to the history of the

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factory, mass-production, labor-saving devices, and the idea that the manufactured object will free us from our manual labor and free us to have more time for the mind and creative pursuits.

Rail: Mechanizing the creative pursuits, what does that leave time for?

Paine: Masturbation ... and *Hoarders* re-runs.

Rail: You've at times gotten a bit of criticism from painters for earlier pieces like "Model Painting" (1996), "Model for an Abstract Sculpture" (1997), and the Display Cases—"Pigeonhole." Would you say those are precursors to the "SCUMAK" and the "PMU"?

Paine: For some of them, they were simultaneous, but not precursors. But yes, they all do interweave conceptually. Those works each set out to look at different realms, but they have many commonalities of thought.

Rail: Those encyclopedic accumulations of brushstrokes and blobs, are they a critique of the facility of abstract expressionism? What is the idea of assembling every kind of brushstroke you can have?

Paine: It's more about tendency or innate quality of the human mind to classify, to categorize, to name everything. It's almost envisioning where that impulse has run amok or traveled unchecked, and seeks to go from classifying and ordering and naming every type of plant or mushroom or insect, to classifying every mote of dust on this table. It's more about our brains and specialization than about one specific painting movement from the 20th century.

Rail: Do you like painting?

Paine: I love painting. There are a lot of pieces which I consider paintings, like the "Dry Rot" (2001) fungus. They're three dimensional, coming off the wall, but they're firmly attached to the wall. They're not rectilinear, but they function on one level as paintings on the wall. I spent a great deal of time and intensity painting them. Then there's a series of, I call them "abstracts," that are based on fungal modes of growth, crusts and jellies and so forth, but they're not referring to one specific species, and they become these abstractions of flow, of growth, of an entity that's expanding on a wall. So there's been a lot of pieces that I consider paintings.

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Rail: How do these relate to drawings like “Every Shoe in the New York Times”?

Paine: I did a whole series of drawings in the '90s that were taking that day's *New York Times*, and choosing an entity to search for, like an ear. I'd find every single ear that existed in that day's *New York Times*, and then I would draw them and redraw them in ink. They would be enlarged, but all would exist in the same proportion to each other that they existed in the newspaper. It created this sort of floating field of that entity. It's about extraction and distillation. Distillation has always been a very crucial idea to me in the work. If you think about the process of distillation, where you're taking a larger, more complex organic entity, like a brew—it's a very complex organic soup, then by heating it, you're separating it out according to different molecular weights. Alcohol is only one thing we distill, also the process of taking crude oil, and fractionating it, which is a form of distillation into 50 different compounds, from wax to diesel fuel to kerosene to precursors of different plastics. The drawings you spoke of are like taking this fermented soup; looking at the newspaper as that fermented soup; then by a chemical process extracting the one component you're interested in from that soup. It's cataloging, characterizing, and classifying. It's about focus and the way the brain works when it is thinking about one entity in the world: you suddenly see that entity everywhere. I see it as akin to when you're hunting for mushrooms; there's a point when you're walking in the woods and you don't see any mushrooms, but then when you are able to tune in, they suddenly appear. It's about perception. It's about how the state of mind that you're in directly affects what you perceive in the world.



Roxy Paine, “Dinner of the Dictators,” 1993-1995. Freeze-dried food, place settings, glass wood, dehumidifier, 427 1/4 × 118 1/2 × 50”.

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Rail: A lot of your aesthetics are based on a certain secret knowledge that via the medium you're using becomes an aesthetic representation, like in "Intrusion" (2014) or the "Erosion Machine" (2005). How do the algorithms that you use as a basis for these pieces generate form?

Paine: That came out of the whole thought process of control and absence of control, and of seeking a different means of removing the direct control. There's a whole lineage of that thought process that is interesting to me; the Surrealist's Automatism, John Cage and the I Ching, but in this case the idea of removing the artist's control, by taking a certain set of facts and data to create these forms that echo and reflect this natural process of erosion in nature, was compelling to me.

Rail: In the translation between these data sets and the process of erosion, did you find yourself preferring certain sets despite the seeming non-correspondence between the initial information and the end result?

Paine: Yes, there are certain data sets that are extremely boring. With the stock market data that I used, there are periods that are very flat where there's not that much activity. The variance occurs within a much narrower spectrum which yields much less variability in the forms that might be created. I guess the data sets that I've sought out are those that have greater variability. The period that I chose for the stock market data was from 1999 to 2001, a period of volatility with the tech bubble and the corresponding crash. I want to make clear that I didn't want the rock or the piece in the end to be a one-to-one illustration of the data: as in looking at a certain spot and saying, "that's September 2000." It's more about variability within data and how the confluence of repeated points causes a magnifying effect. The contradiction of taking something that is dry and factual, and transforming it into an evocative canyon network is part of my intention.

Rail: Are you trying to create an inclusive set that implies both a natural aesthetic and human activity in one larger whole?

Paine: It's not equalizing, but rather drawing parallels between human activity, and the forces of nature, like the stock market which is not a rational activity. It's a complex manifestation of human nature, and thus of nature itself.

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Rail: “Intrusion” (2014), replaces the game surface with a section of a granite formation outside of Worcester, Massachusetts, which is indiscernible, to a certain degree, from the results of the erosion machine. How does containing the geologic topology in this envelope of a game instill meaning and how did you choose that specific formation?

Paine: It was actually a formation I drove by, and I became obsessed with it. This was about 2008, I had a 3D scan done of this formation, which was great except that it was a terabyte file—a massive chunk of information. For five years or so, I couldn’t do anything with this information, you’d try and open it and it would crash the computer. Computers have gotten a lot more powerful and finally I was able to deal with this data. I started to use it as a kind of raw material, and as components and elements that I could manipulate and play with sculpturally and virtually. It refers to that place, but it’s been completely cut apart and re-assembled, so its relationship to the place is very removed.

Rail: When you say cut apart and reassembled, do you mean resized to fit in a pinball machine or completely manipulated and re-configured?

Paine: Re-configured. It’s about seeing this entity not as a beautiful landscape, but as something to be broken into component parts and reconstructed, which is interesting to me not only as a manifestation of my own psyche, but of the human psyche in general.

Rail: So you wouldn’t recognize it necessarily. But fitting it in the pinball machine, what is the game that is being played?

Paine: It’s a game of time; taking two very different conceptions of time and combining and colliding them. The geologic formation represents a conception of time, deep time, the time of billions of years; the formation of this igneous rock, its upheaval, its erosion and submersion and exposure to the elements. That conception is collided with the briefest of moments: the time of a human playing a game with a device. Its function is a meditation on time and it has a quiet to it partly because of the stripping away of all the lights and the mechanisms and the bumpers and the flashing. All of that is brought to the stillness of this rock formation that exists and existed long before humans.

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Rail: There is no game. It's made of wood, there's no flipper, there's no way to play the game.



Roxy Paine, "SCUMAK (Auto Sculpture Maker)," 1998. Aluminum, computer, conveyor, electronics, extruder, stainless steel, polyethylene, and Teflon. 163 × 96 × 48".



Roxy Paine, "PMU," 2001. Aluminum, stainless steel, computer, electronics, relays, custom software, acrylic, servo motors, valves, pump, precision track, glass, rubber, 110 × 157 × 176".

Paine: So really, the piece is no fun.

Rail: Unlike something like the new table-based piece "Scrutiny" (2014), which is replete with all these measuring and recording instruments that are also unusable, by virtue of being wood, but also have nothing to look at. What is the focus of the piece?

Paine: "Scrutiny" is a cataloging of different ways we can know an object or an entity. It's a catalog representing very different ways of measuring, weighing, understanding the vibratory aspects of a specimen. All of these are extensions of our senses—sight, sound, hearing, taste,

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smell—but we’ve come to develop more and more sophisticated ways of quantifying our senses into absolute values or values for comparison. It’s about this aspect of our brain that seeks to understand an object in every possible way. It becomes a metaphor for the way a human can be subject to incredible scrutiny from every possible angle, or the way that humans can suddenly be drawn by hysteria and ill-meaning people to scrutinize something they had never thought about before. It could be thought of metaphorically as an examination of the mob mentality that exists in the human instinct.

Rail: Do you see the data sets and the collection of data as forms of control?

Paine: Of course, knowledge is a form of control. By knowing, we can take action or measures, but more importantly it makes us feel that we’re in some kind of control. If you can understand the mechanisms of a disease, you can seek to provide a remedy for it, so you have some way of controlling this thing that hitherto seemed uncontrollable. But I’m actually more interested in the way we gain comfort in the illusion of control. We tend to have a belief that we have more control than we do. It was such a surprise for us to find out that we have no idea what happened to the Malaysian jet that disappeared off of Australia—we think we should at least know something about a man-made object that’s flying 30,000 feet in the sky and carrying 300 people. At least we think someone must know, but no one does. I’m interested in the limits of control and our knowledge. We think about chance—three months ago, if you had wanted to buy stock in Malaysian Airlines, you might think, now’s a pretty good time because there’s no way another Malaysian jet is going to go down, the chances are so slim and people are freaked out now. What was the chance of a Malaysian jet being above Ukraine at the exact moment when a separatist rebel had an anti-aircraft missile? What are the chances of two jets from the same airline going down in the span of several months in completely different circumstances in completely different parts of the world? Control, we have the illusion of control. We have a lot of data and a lot of information, but there are huge and surprising gaps.

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Roxy Paine, “Every Ear in the NY Times on February 28, 1996,” 1996. Vinyl, paint, pencil, and ink on paper, 19 × 24”.

Rail: In pieces like “Checkpoint” you place the concept and institution of control in a diorama setting. What is the function of elevating this dark and banal interlude?

Paine: It’s about perception and it’s about how we frame information and knowledge—it changes the way we perceive it. Continuing the dialogue about control, this is about a certain “machine” that human beings use to control other humans, or protect humans from other humans who might want to wreak chaos.

Rail: Does it kind of romanticize it? When most people remember a diorama, they remember this idea of wonder—of looking at something foreign, different, or historical that had some significance. By instigating this constructed perspective in “Checkpoint” you are forcing all the objects in the space into lines of perspective and contracting the space to follow a perceived 2D visual geometry and perhaps achieving a sort of magical status. I see a certain nostalgia and romance in the presentation of this banal space.

Paine: It’s definitely not romanticization or nostalgia; it’s about transformation. For me, this is a base element, there are certain elements in society—there are certain elements that I find more base than others. A security checkpoint is not an inspirational or aspirational space, this is not a space that elevates dialogue or elevates human thought. This is a place of complete standardization for gathering and monitoring information. I guess on the positive side, people would say it protects and provides security and comfort. You could certainly make another argument that it’s about the government expressing power, and reminding people of its power over you. I’m not putting this piece forth to say “question all checkpoints, or security lines now,” but to question it as an expression of power. Getting back to looking at it as this base element,

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it was something I wanted to be trans-mutated and alchemically transformed. If it exists as a space that's not about contemplation or the higher realms of human thought, then to try to make it into that. Maybe it's a futile effort, but it's an interesting attempt to try.

Rail: What would be its opposite?

Paine: You mean how to turn something spiritually elevated into a base place? Perhaps turning a Buddhist temple into a parking lot. Unfortunately humans do things like this all the time.

Rail: What would be your reaction if a Natural History Museum wanted to place it in their galleries?

Paine: I would be okay with it as long as there wasn't some attempt to make it what it's not. Actually if I walked into the Museum of Natural History and saw this, I think it would raise a lot of questions. In some sense it's idealized, the forms are all reconstructed and made into shadows of their ideal. Maybe some people would just take it at face value, but enough people would find it a means through which to contemplate and question why is this there and what it means that it's in this place, during this time, with other visions of constructed reality.

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Installation of "Symbiosis" in Iroquois Park, Philadelphia
May 27 - 30, 2014



Roxy Paine, *Symbiosis*, 2011, installed 2014, standard industrial pipe, plate and rods, 3/8 inches thick 304/304L stainless steel or schedule 40 pipe depending on diameter. Photo James Ewing Photography. © 2014 for the Association for Public Art.

Roxy Paine's work consistently blurs the lines between the natural and artificial. He is known for work that explores the collision of industry and nature, and his series of stainless steel "Dendroid" sculptures are exemplary manifestations of this practice. The "Dendroids," a term combining "dendron" (Greek for "tree") and -oid (a suffix meaning "form"), are monumental structures that convey a fusion of industrial and organic forms. They evoke arboreal structures, vascular systems, synaptic networks, and industrial pipelines, interpreting the natural world through a man-made lens. The structures represent search, growth, and the branching of systems that suggest dormant energy and potential, a theme Paine has explored in his work for the last 15 years.

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The New York Times

October 13, 2010

Man of Steel's Industrial Web, Mirroring Nature

By HILARIE M. SHEETS



Branching systems: "Distillation," by the sculptor Roxy Paine, is being welded together at his home and studio in Treadwell, N.Y. Credit Phil Mansfield for The New York Times

Treadwell, N.Y. ROXY PAINE'S stainless-steel Dendroid sculptures seem straightforward enough at first, clearly recognizable as treelike forms. But they always manage to veer into ambiguous territory. "[Maelstrom](#)," for example, displayed on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Art last year, posed as a mass of fallen trees in the aftermath of a storm. Yet its branches were exhibiting decidedly unbranchlike behavior: fusing and connecting in the manner of neuron paths or pulses of energy.

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Mr. Paine's Dendroids are never really just about trees.

"Distillation," the most complex and immersive in his series of 22 Dendroids, is now barreling through the [James Cohan Gallery](#) in New York.

Here Mr. Paine pushes the metaphoric content that underpins these sculptures to new extremes. It still uses arboreal forms, but they now mesh with other overtly defined branching systems: a vascular network of arteries and veins with two plump kidneys, mushroom colonies and their germinating mycelia, neuron bundles and taxonomic diagrams, and raw pipelines connected to steel tanks and industrial valves.

"'Distillation' is a meditation on seeking purity, the pure essence of something, but at the same time the piece is very impure," Mr. Paine said last month during a tour of the piece, which was in the final stages of welding at his studio here in Treadwell, in the Catskills. He pointed out how the industrial pipeline flows from the kidney into a tank, for instance, and that the pipeline has fungus growing on it. "It also relates to the way I've always thought about my process. How ideas come in coarse and ferment in the brain, and eventually are distilled out of that brew. It's a map of the way humans constantly flit between different frames of mind and fields of knowledge."

Each one of his Dendroids is made from standard industrial piping — the kind typically used by the pharmaceutical industry and nuclear power plants — that Mr. Paine bends, welds, grinds and polishes into seamless organic forms. They mirror nature but always retain their gleaming industrial artifice. That dichotomy reflects the artist's ambivalent feelings about tampering with nature.

"I'm skeptical about the potential for horrible consequences, consistently realized," he said. "But at the same time we are able to feed six billion people through science and altering nature. That's kind of a miracle."

Like his work Mr. Paine, 44, also straddles worlds. He and his family split their time between an apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and their home in rural Treadwell. In the country he has converted a barn into a full-production metalworking shop that's staffed by about a half-dozen assistants.

Disassembled Dendroids awaiting future installation are splayed out in the surrounding fields, their antlerlike steel components blinding in a strong sun, and beautifully moody in cloudy light. His "100 Foot Line," scheduled to be installed this month at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, is a single tree trunk that tapers to a simple point; it is the antithesis of "Distillation." Next spring Mr. Paine will assemble "Ferment" at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Mo., and "Inversion" at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Under Michael Auping, the chief curator, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth acquired Mr. Paine's "Conjoined," two trees whose limbs merge in a web of struggle or attachment. It was [first shown in Madison Square Park](#) in New York in 2007.

"It's amazing that Roxy has done as much public work as he has and received so little critical attention," Mr. Auping said. "There is a kind of outsider quality to his work and to him."

Mr. Paine, who grew up in suburban Virginia and left home at 15, has always operated on his own terms. He studied at the Pratt Institute in New York but never graduated and helped form a collective gallery with other artists called Brand Name Damages in Williamsburg in 1990. It was there that he showed his first kinetic sculpture, "Viscous Pult," which flung paint and ketchup with brushes at the gallery window in a rebellious take on action painting.

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During the next decade, he became known in the art world for his increasingly sophisticated machines that produced paintings, drawings and sculptures, and for his facsimiles of mushrooms that seemed to sprout from gallery floors or walls. As with Mr. Paine's Dendroid series, these art-making machines and mushroom fields are based on analyzing the visual language of the thing he's replicating, establishing a set of parameters, then finding as much variation as possible within those rules.

For "Distillation," which required about five tons of stainless steel in 5,000 parts, the pipes for the branches use a different lexicon of twists and bends than those for either the neural or vascular systems. The pipes, which come in 30 different diameters, as wide as 14 inches, are each pushed through a hydraulic bender in about 20 discrete moves to make it start to look organic.

Then, based on a detailed model also manipulated in steel, Mr. Paine and his team built the piece and welded the parts together. The pipes and welding seams were typically put through eight stages of grinding and polishing to produce a brilliant luster. But he allowed more of the process to remain evident in some spots, leaving the factory lettering visible on some pipes and the welding seams raw on the kidneys, which were molded from steel plates using a 100-ton press.

Also included in his James Cohan show, running through Dec. 11, is his most complex mushroom piece yet, with about 25 different species of multicolored fungi cropping out from one wall like a color field painting in relief. Each mushroom, made with a stainless-steel structure covered in a type of plastic and painted with lacquer and oils, is true to its species, although it's impossible that these species would ever all be in the same place, let alone on a white gallery wall.

"I'm envisioning a kind of battlefield with these elements, which in nature would be vying for the same food source," said Mr. Paine, noting that such struggles, as between fungus and bacteria, have produced antibiotics.

These mushrooms, though, don't show how they were made, as opposed to Mr. Paine's kinetic machines that lay bare the art-making process. But "Distillation" embraces the two approaches.

"I'm deciding as I go whether I want a really smooth kind of flow or something more staccato in certain areas and revealing of the source material," Mr. Paine said. "I think of it in musical terms."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/17/arts/design/17roxy.html>

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The New York Times

April 23, 2009

Even High Atop a Roof It Reaches for the Sky

By KEN JOHNSON



Roxy Paine's 130-foot-long tree-like sculpture is made of 10,000 pieces of stainless steel. Credit Librado Romero/The New York Times

An awesome spectacle awaits visitors to the [Metropolitan Museum of Art's Cantor Roof Garden](#), which opens for the season on Tuesday: a gnarly thicket of trees and branches extending 130 feet from one end of the open-air deck to the other and rising 29 feet overhead. It looks as if a tornado had ripped through Central Park and deposited its gleanings here. Except the thicket is made of shiny metal rods and pipe: some 10,000 pieces weighing more than seven tons and ranging from three-eighths of an inch to 10 inches in diameter, with larger trunk sections made of rolled plate. It's as though all that wood had been transformed by a Midas with a stainless-steel touch.

"Maelstrom," the title of this gleaming arboreal sprawl, is the work of Roxy Paine. Many will remember the 50-foot stainless-steel tree he erected in Central Park for the 2002 Whitney Biennial. The uncommonly inventive and industrious Mr. Paine also creates super-realistic, cast-resin replicas of noxious and psychotropic plants like poison ivy and mushrooms, and he designs computer-driven machines that produce abstract, quasi-modernist paintings and sculptures.

What is consistent in these different endeavors is the evocation of a complicated relationship between man and nature. Contrary to the fantasies of many sentimental environmentalists, nature, in Mr. Paine's universe, is not always beneficent. He has created broken trees in stainless steel that appear to have been hit by lightning, and one sculpture whose moving parts are activated by ambient radiation. Nature, as viewed through the lens of Mr. Paine's art, can be downright hostile.

Photo

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"Maelstrom," an installation artwork by Roxy Paine on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum, weighs more than seven tons.
Credit Librado Romero/The New York Times

But there is a larger idea animating his work: that human culture is inextricably part of nature. Viewers of "Maelstrom" will note that in two places the pipe work attaches to red-handled valves screwed into the roof deck's concrete walls. So the network of branches becomes a kind of surrealistic plumbing, albeit less absurd than it might seem on first thought. After all, plumbing, like electrical wiring, highways and the human circulatory system, all have treelike structures.

Mr. Paine emphasizes tension between the natural and the artificial by leaving the welded joints of "Maelstrom" unfinished. From a distance it looks natural, but up close it is obviously a kind of Frankenstein monster.

The real trees in the park surrounding the museum also enhance, by contrast, the work's weird, Magritte-like artificiality. But then you may pause to reflect, as the critic Eleanor Heartney does in a book about Mr. Paine's work published in conjunction with the exhibition, that the park itself is no paragon of natural purity. Designed by the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, it is a pastoral fiction constructed where once there were slums.

If you follow Mr. Paine's logic, you approach the idea that human culture is as much a part of nature as mountains, oceans, forests and animals. Or, put another way, nothing is unnatural. Is a worldwide financial meltdown less natural than a hurricane flooding New Orleans? Are rising and falling crime rates less natural than rising and falling temperatures? What phenomena are not subject to the laws of nature? (Wait, isn't "law of nature" an oxymoron?)

Mr. Paine is not a proselytizer for environmentalism. He is an empiricist philosopher creating visually fantastic thought-experiments that expand our assumptions about the nature of reality and the reality of nature.

"Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom" opens Tuesday and continues through Oct. 25, weather permitting, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; (212) 535-7710, met.org.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/24/arts/design/24roof.html>

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ArtReview

August 2006

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Roxy Paine



left:
Erosion Machine,
2005, stainless
steel, rubber, felt,
glass, galvanized
steel, sandstone,
silicon carbide,
electronics, dust
collector,
reclaimer,
robot, air,
348 x 640 x 348 cm

below:
*Erosion Machine
Stone #2 (1990's.
com Boom Stock
Market Data)*,
2006, sandstone
61 x 168 X 91 cm



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Roxy Paine

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF MAKING ART?

ROXY PAINE'S ROBOT ARTWORKS AND
ARTIFICIAL ENVIRONMENTS ASK JUST
THAT QUESTION.

words: JONATHAN T. D. NEIL



above: *Erosion
Machine Stone #2*
(1990's.com Boom
Stock Market Data),
2006 (detail)

For more than a decade now New York-based artist Roxy Paine has built elaborate constructions that seem to answer the following question: how would a machine make a painting or sculpture? This is no easy task. Leaving aside the pragmatics of building a functioning machine, certain commonplaces about art present further constraints to Paine's practice. The most obvious of these is that works of art are generally supposed to be unique. Machines, however, are not good at 'unique', at least not when left to their own devices. So, to ensure that none of his machines will produce identical, standardized, assembly-line products – for that would simply be commerce, not art – at certain points in the logic of each mechanism's build, Paine introduces irreducible contingencies into the equation.

So, with the early *Paint Dipper* (1997) and the various *SCUMAK* (*Auto Sculpture Maker*) devices (1998–2005), the artist's materials – paint and polyethylene – were given their own say in how each 'work' turned out. In more recent pieces, randomized data dictates the realization of form. In the case of *Unexplained Object* (2005), that form is worked and reworked by an array of hidden robotic arms that poke, prod and generally shift the configuration of the piece's canvas wrapper according to subatomic intercepts recorded through a Geiger counter. For *Erosion Machine* (2005), the stream of silicon carbide that cuts canyons into a block of sandstone is directed by strings of meteorological data recorded during the 1980s, over Binghamton, New York.

Unlike the earlier work, contingency in these later projects no longer enters at the level of materials; it now comes into play at the level of operation. And though it may be tempting to write off Paine's machines as contemporary iterations of the process issues that consumed the artists who came of age during the late 1960s and 70s (the figure of Eva Hesse no doubt stands behind the *Paint Dipper*, Lynda Benglis behind the *SCUMAK*), Paine's newest machines push well beyond a concern with any 'phenomenology of making', to use Robert Morris's phrase. The question is no longer one of process, but 'processing'. What Paine's machine's now ask, or at least ask us to consider, is how might a machine *think* to make a work of art.

Since Alan Turing first posed the problem, whether or not machines can 'think' has proven a particularly interesting issue for practitioners of cognitive science and philosophy of mind. Most stands on the matter stem from positions taken on two other long-standing philosophical problems however: that of 'other minds' (How do I 'know' that you are a conscious being, that you have a mind, like mine, if I have no direct access to your thoughts or feelings?), and that of 'free will' (Who am I to 'know' anything, much less to 'act', if I am nothing more than a heap of mindless, robotic cells behaving according to deterministic laws?).

On the problem of 'free will', the configuration of Paine's latest machines would appear to parallel those arguments that place great store by the

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Roxy Paine



promise that quantum indeterminacies at the smallest scales of matter provide the thin sliver of chance, that little bit of freedom, so very necessary to guarantee the place of free will at the origin of all the causal chains that would seem, albeit reductively, to end with us, here and now. With regard to Paine's work, whether such indeterminacy (a more proper term might be 'probability') is quantum in nature is beside the point; as Paine has demonstrated, it could very well be atomic or meteorological as well. What matters is that that little bit of freedom, that role of the dice, is situated exactly where we always take 'thinking' to occur: somewhere deep in the raw material of the mind, a place that Henri Bergson appropriately enough described as a 'zone of indeterminacy'.

The question we are faced with now is whether we feel comfortable recognizing in Paine's machines the operation of a mind. In other words, are they 'thinking machines'? One's first inclination is to state, 'Certainly not.' We do not recognize in these contraptions the workings of minds like yours or mine. But we should bracket this problem a bit by remembering that Paine's machines are intended as works of art, and in particular, as works of art that engage with, and comment upon, the production of other objects conventionally conceived of as a works of art. Paine's machines may not be granted the status of rational, thinking agents, equivalent in every ascertainable respect to real minds, but within the circumscribed field of artistic production, they certainly achieve results in every way indistinguishable from those that have been, and are, produced and presented by real artists. Paine's machines, it turns out, might have minds after all.

above: *Unexplained*
Object, 2005,
canvas, stainless
steel, electronics,
pneumatic
cylinders, valves,
Geiger counter,
244 x 244 x 244 cm

below:
Misnomer, 2005,
stainless steel,
376 x 488 x 353 cm



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above:
Mishmash, 2005
(detail)

top right:
Breach, 2003,
stainless steel,
1069 cm high

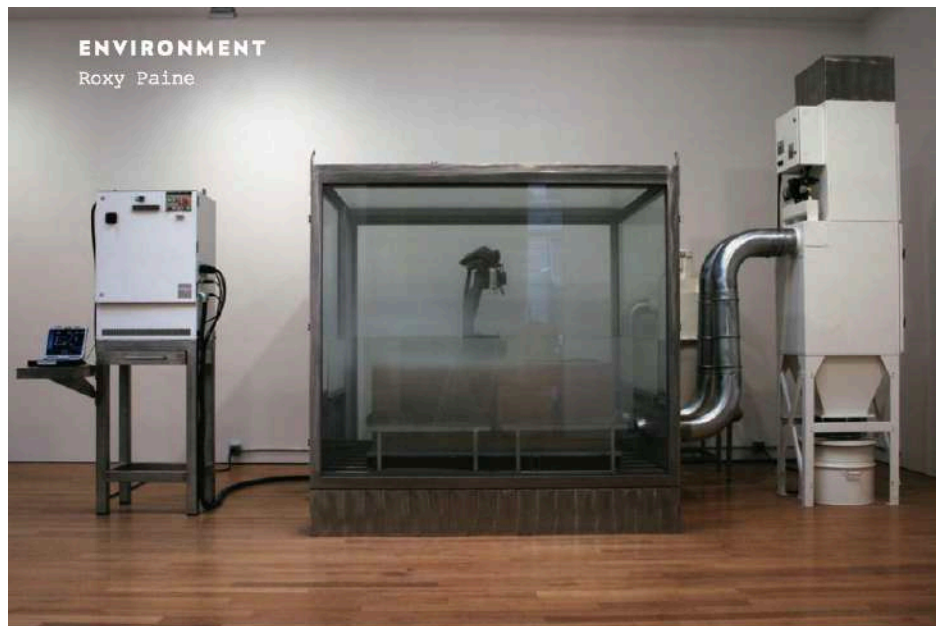


The sleight of hand that Paine's mechanized works play with the problem of other minds may be better understood if conceived of as a short circuit between what Daniel C. Dennett has described as the different 'stances' – physical, design and intentional – one might assume in order to explain and predict the behavior of some object or entity. Briefly explained, each 'stance' offers a different degree of explanatory and predictive abstraction: by taking a physical stance we concern ourselves with the concrete physical processes that affect the object or entity in which we're interested; by the design stance, we concern ourselves with that object or entity's functions and operations; and by the intentional stance, we concern ourselves with its thoughts, beliefs and desires.

The key is that there are simply some objects or entities, a tree, for example, towards which it simply does not make sense nor prove profitable to adopt an intentional stance. Likewise, there are some objects or entities towards which it would seem far from profitable to adopt anything else. Works of art tend to fall into this latter category, insofar as they may serve as extensions of their makers, to whom we may then impute the thoughts, beliefs and desires that we sense in the objects of their industry.

The problem, or rather, the particular power, of Paine's machines, indeed of Paine's art as a whole, is that it does not fall so easily. If anything, his work systematically dismantles the possibility of assuming an intentional stance, not by denying that intentions, thoughts or desires stand behind the work, as was the strategy of artists from Jasper Johns to Donald Judd and after, but by substituting function and operation – i.e. design – for intention, and then substituting concrete physical processes for design, and then the physical for intention, and on and on. Nowhere is this vacuum of stances more clear than in Paine's *Erosion Machine*, where one physical process, 'weather', intends another, 'erosion', through the operation of a rather elaborate machine, itself encompassing a multitude of operations and physical processes, the meaning – or rather the thoughts, beliefs and desires of which, are nothing more than the slow eroding of a sandstone block.

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Erosion Machine,
2005

The question we are faced with now is whether we feel comfortable recognising in Paine's machines the operation of a mind

Nor should it come as a surprise that, alongside his more machinic enterprise, Paine has built, and continues to build, a series of full-scale trees in stainless steel. With titles like *Imposter* (1999), *Transplant* (2001), *Bluff* (2002) and *Placebo* (2004), there can be little doubt that artificiality and artifice are central to these projects. But, as noted above, the tree also serves the impoverishment of intention. One can no more intend to grow than it can desire to speak. Towards a tree, then, we are only rewarded by assuming the physical or design stance.

"Not so with a tree intended as art," one might object. When the artist creates a tree, the messiness of meaning immediately jumps into the frame, and of the trees Paine has made over the years, *Defunct* (2004) is surely the most freighted with an excess of meaning. Inspired by the romantic landscapes of Casper David Friedrich, *Defunct* appears like a natural ruin, a marker of time quite beyond human scales: its lost branches and bare trunk speak of endurance and perseverance, even in the face of an inevitable, and necessary, demise.

The stainless steel of Paine's trees does more than announce their art, however. For Paine, each tree is part of a deeper inquiry into a problem of structure. Though verisimilitude is important, Paine does not approach the trees with the same exacting artifice as he does the reproductions of plants and fungi for which he has become so well-known. Only the first tree, *Imposter*, was constructed through the use of an inner armature, the 'trunk' around which Paine wrapped a steel 'bark'. Since then, each subsequent tree has been built up, has been 'grown', from cylindrical piping and rods of diminishing size.

In this, structural verisimilitude functions as an overriding constraint. And what is a tree except a lesson in structure, one which Paine continues to learn. In the more recent works, he has discontinued grinding down the welds between joints, preferring instead to leave the structural logic exposed, like growth rings worn on one's sleeve. In this, design and physics takes the place of intention. For Paine, the logic of arboreal structure offers another language into which the artist is immersed, his thoughts, beliefs and desires becoming subordinate to it. Through this language, the artist sets in motion yet one more apparatus of manufacture, even if this one is more readily recognizable as conventionally artistic, in nature. ■

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Roxy Paine



left and below:
Weed Choked Garden,
1998-2008,
thermoset plastic,
polymer, oil paint,
PETG, Stainless
steel, epoxy,
lacquer, epoxy,
pigment,
163 X 353 X 96 245 cm



below:
Bad Lawn, 1998,
epoxy, PVC, steel, wood,
PETG, lacquer, oil
paint, earth,
305 x 213 x 122 cm.
All images courtesy
James Cohan
Gallery, New York

