

# The Promise of Total Automation

The exhibition *The Promise of Total Automation* investigates the fascination for automation. The allure of an automated life not only sustains production, communication and control of finance capitalism, but also feeds alternative dreams and utopias that plead for an ecological relation between human, technology and nature. On the basis of divergent theories, faiths and visions, the artists invited the audience to develop their own take on the topic.

How did the technical system in which we live become what it is? Does an increasing level of automation create an obstacle for the free individuation of the subject, to humanity's political and emotional agency? What about a subject no longer in need of labour, no longer in need of responsibility and self-reflexivity, living in an over-monitored loving environment? Have objects, originally designed to satisfy our desires, by now enslaved us – or will they enslave us in the end? Or: do they simply open new ways of thinking, creating and configuring things culturally, politically and socially that we have yet to explore? Will the faith in "things" and technical objects constitute an authentic and emancipative rupture with the anthropocentric and capitalist tradition, or will it only reinforce this for the sake of capital, and the few; for the sake of the data-colonisation of mind and space?

The artists in the show adopt the notion of a post-human community, consisting of interdependent objects, technologies and beings, as the point of departure for their investigations about desire, affect and imagination, about aesthetics, ethics, knowledge transmission and political responsibility. Production machines, technical objects, images and artworks populate the space, coming from the archaeology of the digital age as well as from fantasies of a technological future.

## Athanasios Argianas

\* 1976 in Athens, lives in London



Silence Breakers, Silence Shapers (Aberrations on Percussion) No. 9, 2015, © Athanasios Argianas, Courtesy Aanant & Zoo, Berlin, Photo: Stefan Hähnel

Song Machine No. 7, 2007  
Aluminium, Miranti wood, string,  
180 x 110 x 110 cm

Collection of Daman Sanders and  
courtesy of the artist

Silence Breakers, Silence Shapers  
(Aberrations on Percussion) No. 9, 2015  
Electroformed copper, electroformed  
brass-plated copper, mussel shells, cast  
bronze, ceramic tiles, fired ceramic, laser-  
etched finger cymbals, 95 x 400 x 100 cm

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Athanasios Argianas's work bridges  
languages, kingdoms and bodies.  
Language can be written, sung,

or translated into musical notation. The animal and mineral kingdoms fluidly move towards one another. A bodily presence, even in absentia, runs throughout the works. Argianas makes objects that can be used for performances that in turn produce data with which to define the shape of future objects. The never-ending production of new connections initiated by the artist during the process of creation is carried forward by the visitors, who are invited to survey and navigate the works not only with their eyes but often with their fingers as well, undertaking a physical and mental journey through a series of milestones the artist has positioned in space.

Silence Breakers, Silence Shapers (*Aberrations on Percussion*) No. 9 consists of a clinically white, L-shaped tiled bench/wall on which a series of oyster shells (some of them natural and others cast in brass), metal cylinders, copper hats and finger cymbals have been placed, their scraggy, iridescent surfaces offsetting their spare support. Each object seems to be awaiting activation. The finger cymbals are engraved with poetic instructions such as "Scrape the ground with this disc, make a sound with your wrist". Reading the words on these small instruments awakens a sense of synaesthesia, an anticipation of the sound of metal clattering across the ceramic surface yet to occur. The structure supports and nourishes the objects: it is only when they are tapped on its white, resonant surface that the work is performed and they come to life. In this sense, it functions like an open, alterable musical score that visitors are invited to navigate through, symbolically and physically, and whose notational configuration they are permitted (and expected) to change.

Song Machine No. 7 is a wood and aluminium sculpture, a hybrid, elegant and precisely handcrafted piece of furniture with an industrial touch. As a machine, it generates meaning, content and body movement. As a sculpture, it combines different styles and densities and

materialises multiple ways of occupying space and appropriating the history of forms. The lyrical phrases embodied or engraved on the sculptural forms of Argianas's song machines suggest analogues for a music that unfolds in space, leaving viewers to wend their way along a series of objects, read, and perhaps inwardly hear something. The sculpture articulates its own song in space. Everything is fluid and can be infinitely recomposed and appropriated. Nothing is fixed. Everything is a device or a score: free to be interpreted, freed from any determinism.

"We often have to create parables or myths to understand concepts that are not intuitively graspable within the power and conventions of language. They become metaphors we use as tools like shadows in a cave. The most radical ideas of this century – those that completely overturn our perceptions of the world – usually come from physics. Surely, it's an uncomfortable situation to deal with: the idea that you're not going to have finite answers, that everything is an approximation of something else, and that there are no certainties. I try to keep my choices open outside of myself – to let other factors decide for me – and to embrace contingency." (Athanasios Argianas)