

Well Framed

Jonathan Villeneuve

September 14 – October 19, 2013

Motion takes many forms. Jonathan Villeneuve explores some of them. The artist uses simple machines¹ to create mechanical sculptures with absurd, dreamlike and dysfunctional connotations. In his installations, he develops a vocabulary of forms with symbolic properties: a wave, an undulation, a wavelength, a breath—visual or audio phenomena that are familiar yet also abstract. Drawn by these invisible expressions, which become perceptible if their movement is *embodied* in a physical element or material, Jonathan Villeneuve does not seem at all interested in transcribing or translating them, but rather in bringing them to life. If air, wave, wind are the recurring elements suggested by the movement

in the artist's practice, the physical presence and materiality of the work, proof of relentless labour, is expressed through imposing volumes and a presence of sounds. *Do the Wave* (2009) is a convincing example.

In the installation *Do the Wave* (2009), the rotation of a camshaft, located behind a wall, produces a perpetual wave-like movement in sixty-three vertically hanging 2 x 4 boards. This monumental mechanical structure amplifies the sound caused by the friction of the materials and creates an interplay of shadow and light in the exhibition space.²

Drawing

During a studio visit with the artist in June 2013, I noticed that he makes various sketches and jots technical details in chalk directly on the concrete floor of his studio. Here, in contrast to the practice of many other artists, the spontaneous drawing, in preparation for the work, will not be preciously preserved in a notebook, like a draft to be consulted later. An ephemeral, intuitive trace, this drawing, which nevertheless contains invaluable information, exists only to disappear, erased beneath the footsteps of the artist or studio visitors. Writing and drawing on the floor recalls the gestures of children, who mark out their territory according to the scale of their bodies and sight lines: their point of view. To behold, a question of scale.

Jonathan Villeneuve also draws on the computer, cataloguing multiple versions of an installation in process. Some would say that he virtually explores possible combinations of elements he wishes to assemble to create his installation. The computer drawing also serves to simulate and examine the movements and relationships between the combined elements—in its modelling it is a model in motion. Drawing on the computer emerges here as another way of beholding the space.

The Exhibition

Jonathan Villeneuve's monumental works convey the importance of anchoring them to the floor. All the works? Perhaps not. *Well Framed* (2012-2013), shown at OBORO, seems to be an exception. While it takes up the working methodology of prior installations (the notion of a work-worksite, the transformation of the gallery space, the development of a complex hanging system, the use of modular or non-amplified sound elements), the anchoring of the elements to the ceiling rather than setting or attaching them to the floor orients the visitor towards an experience of weightlessness, of floating. *Well Framed* expresses up to what point Jonathan Villeneuve's work is situated between the air and the ground.

The work occupies OBORO's three exhibition spaces and offers three complementary and inseparable experiences. Visitors are invited to scan the area,³ walk among the movements and sounds of an electromechanical installation, and expose themselves to an audio track. The frame of a computer screen defines the virtual installation space in visual terms. The installation sets drawing in motion and sound in the space. The exhibition is the amalgam of the space, the moving shapes and the sounds that circulate. This is not the first time that Jonathan Villeneuve asks us to gradually discover the components of one of his works,⁴ suggesting through a sideways approach that all the parts form a whole and that an imaginary work is composed in tableaux.

Well Framed exists through and in the movement of twenty-five shapes of 33, 43 and 53 inches hanging lengthwise, each attached with two wires to a mechanism that triggers their motion in the space. These are the installation's main visual components. The artist envisioned various geometrically abstract compositions: a sort of choreography. All the elements together, in a brilliant yellow and floating in the gallery space, now a black cube, also form an instrument whose resonating

properties generate a multitude of sounds and audio textures. Visitors are invited to move about the space in order to discover their own viewing and listening points. In his own way, Jonathan Villeneuve revisits the tradition of kinetic art connected to optical art.

It is sometimes said that artists of kinetic art *draw* in the space; that their works heighten the visitor's awareness of time passing, of how the work transforms across time. The notion of passage, crucial to Jonathan Villeneuve, reveals the various routes to be discovered here. Drawing, calculation, machine, shape, space, system. The passage from the drawing to the system is one, and from the surface of the screen to a three-dimensional space is another. *Well Framed* exposes us to a machine and to a system. The machine is not visible and is kept at a distance; we only perceive its visual and sound effects on the system deployed in the gallery. Does the machine make the system work or does the system make the machine work? Here is an enigma to solve while visiting the exhibition.

Nicole Gingras

Translation: Oana Avasilichioaei

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1. A "simple machine" is a mechanical device that changes the direction or magnitude of a force to provide mechanical advantage. There are eight types of simple machines: lever, wheel, axle, pulley, inclined plane, wedge, screw and winch. Wikipedia consulted in French on August 13, 2013.
 2. Description of the work provided by the artist, August 14, 2013.
 3. It is important for the artist to show the movement in real time, but in the form of a 3D animation. The computer screen placed at the gallery entrance is both the genesis and the memory of what we will see in visiting the large exhibition room. The screen enables us to take in the composition (the choreography) at a glance, and contemplate it. The graphic combinations on the screen are the movements of the installation in the gallery, its breathing.
 4. The exhibition in spring 2011 at LA CHAMBRE BLANCHE, in Quebec City, also took this approach.