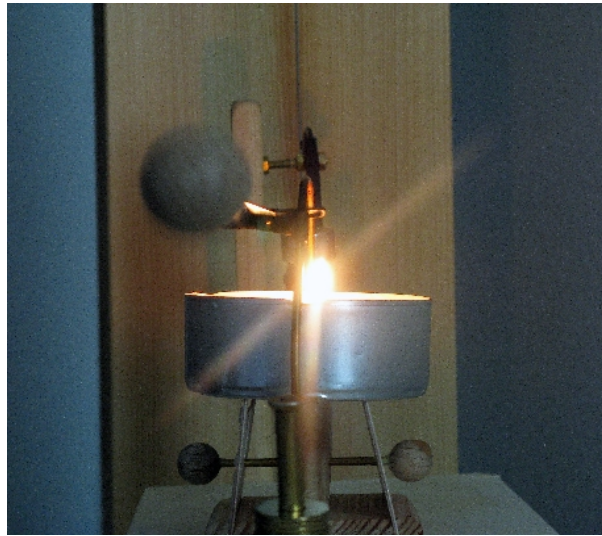


**“Automata a cappella”**  
Sept 10<sup>th</sup> – October 15<sup>th</sup> 2011  
Vernissage Friday September 9<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm



**Art as game**

Five artists from five different countries made five different machines: machines that toy with the idea of musical instrument and its normal function; machines that are made of a combination of superb craftsmanship and simple everyday objects; machines that purge the canons of our daily lives.

In the first room we can see the work of French artist **Daniel Depoutot**. The work, called “Totentanz,” quite literally displays the dance of death, but in an ironic way, as if mocking the serious tradition of the theme. On an old record player, playing a song by famous punk rock band “Ramones” at varying speeds, we find a fake dancing skeleton, built by the artist with small wooden parts taken out of found objects.

In the second room, we find the work of German artist **Jens Hickel**. The work, titled “Automatic,” portrays a humanoid pseudo-hokey player, who repeatedly hits, instead of a ball, an old guitar. Entirely made of found objects and parts, the work moves through a complicated pneumatic system, thus contrasting with high technological sophistication the irreverence of the player’s gesture and the garbage-quality of the materials employed.

The third room hosts the work of Italian artist **Lorenzo Scotto di Luzio**. Using an approach similar to Depoutot, Scotto Di Luzio also uses a record player as the basis of his work “Ghost.” However, this player does not sound, but instead it is used as a platform where pieces of metal tapes are laid out. An electrical mechanism fixed to the player touches the metal pieces and triggers the movement of a pantograph, which in turn draws the words “drop out” on a piece of paper. These words were used by the artist’s brother to point out Lorenzo’s eccentric attitude. As the player rotates constantly, the process also repeats constantly.



In the fourth room we find the work of Norwegian artist **Kristoffer Myskja**. In his piece “Interference Machine,” two mechanical arms holding lubricated cotton pads move along the rim of two crystal glasses filled with water, thus making them sound. In addition, the level of water in the glasses changes constantly (as the water level lowers in one glass, it rises in the other). The fluctuation of liquid levels translates into slight changes in the tones. When two (sound) waves of nearly the same frequency mix, a third tone is created, called interference. As the main tones move away from each other the interference gets faster and more violent. As the tones get closer to each other the interference slows down, and for a moment the tones reach an equilibrium state, silencing the third tone completely. A simple game, which we all played at least one in our life, is turned into a complex, self-controlled system, and into a very idiosyncratic musical instrument.

Finally, in the last room “Nocturno,” by Argentinian artist **Edgardo Rudnitzky** awaits us. This is an installation comprised of seven elements. Each element consists of a monochord (an ancient musical instrument with one string) whose string is hit by a small plastic hammer. The hammer is pulled by a magnet which in turn is set in motion by a mechanism involving a small wooden swing, a metal spring, and a candle. Each monochord is tuned to a different note, forming a so-called hexatonic scale (much used, for instance, by French impressionist composers). The result is a delicate composition played by self-acting devices without the help of electricity.

The works exhibited in “Automata a Cappella” seem to have an urge to remind us not to take ourselves too seriously. Like toys do. For art is in fact a game. These machines show us that art has an intrinsic playful quality, in that it has no practical use. Whether the artwork has a meaning it is for the spectator to decide, but art exists for its own sake, like a pure game. Indeed, what is game cannot be serious, although it must be played seriously—to paraphrase Hans Georg Gadamer—in order to function properly. And this is exactly what the “automata a cappella” do: they play, yes, but they do it very seriously.

*Mario Mazzoli*