

## EPPUR SI MUOVE, ART ET TECHNIQUE, UN ESPACE PARTAGE

July 8, 2015, Luxembourg

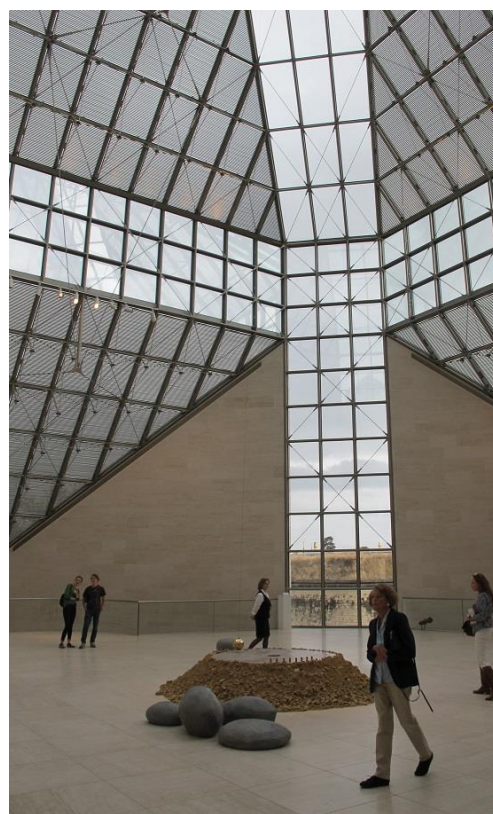
MUDAM  
LUXEMBOURG

At 18:00 I attended an opening of the exhibition "Eppur si Muove. Art et technique, un espace partagé<sup>1</sup>" (*Eppur si muove (And yet it turns). Art and Technology, A Shared Sphere*) co-organized by Musée des arts et métiers from Paris, in The Grand Duke Jean Museum of Modern Art (*Le musée d'art moderne Grand-Duc-Jean*) MUDAM.

The Museum is located in a new Kirchberg neighborhood, filled with office buildings, some of them hosting institutions of the European



MUDAM



MUDAM. Central hall

Union as well as a campus of the University of Luxembourg. The spectacular MUDAM building was designed by a renowned American architect, born in China, a Pritzker Prize laureate, Ieoh Ming Pei, well known from the glass pyramid in the Louvre courtyard. The museum building sits on an eighteenth century fort *Thüngen*, also known as "Three Acorns" in reference to the acorns that sit atop each of the three towers.

From a perspective of a visitor coming towards MUDAM, its building does not look spectacular in contrast to the much better view from the city side. But the best sight is from a bird's eye view or on a scale model. This is another example of the common issue that architects and their clients forget that we are not birds. On the other hand the interior of the museum building is magnificent and the needs of art exhibitions are well met. During my recent conversation with Adam Budak on the *Kunsthhaus* building in the Austrian Graz, I was skeptical about its exhibition capabilities due to, in my opinion, inconvenient shaping of the interior subordinated to the needs of the exterior. I remember a very interesting talk of one of the *Kunsthhaus*' architects Colin Fournier on the design process of this building given at the *Manggha Museum* in Krakow. Adam Budak, who had served as the *Kunsthhaus Graz* curator for several years, defended the design, claiming that the difficult interior was



Exhibition opening. *Mudam Café*.

a challenge and as such gave exhibition designers better opportunities to show their talent. I have to admit that I am not convinced by those arguments. A friendly and simple space (it can always be made more complex by adding extra elements), allows exhibition designer to concentrate on the expected effect instead of struggling with the restrictive matter of the building. But of course, this is an opinion of a layman and I am not going to argue much with Adam Budak who is one of the world's top experts in this area, currently the Chief Curator of the National Gallery in Prague, and earlier a curator of contemporary art at *Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden*, *Smithsonian Institution* in Washington, DC, and in *Kunsthhaus Graz*.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mudam.lu/en/expositions/details/exposition/eppur-si-muove/>



The exhibition opening attracted lots of people. The first observation is that people are better dressed here than at openings I usually attend in Krakow, but their clothes are a little bit boring – suits and little black dresses are dominant. Poland seems to be more exciting with more artistic dresses. The opening was held in *Mudam Café* – a creation of the Erwan and Ronan Bouroullec brothers, two artists from Brittany. This is an in-door structure covered with textile tiles, inside which there are two long white cafeteria-style tables. As usual at openings, there were several lengthy speeches (MOCAK<sup>2</sup> in Krakow is different in this respect ☺). Frankly speaking, I had problems in concentrating on the contents of the speeches as my French had deteriorated over recent years. At first only water was served, but later a decent sparkling wine appears along with tasty snacks.

The exhibition itself raises the issue of relations between art and technology. I find this topic to be rather worn out. I remember a critical comment of Adam Budak on the *x versus y* type exhibitions, just as this art versus technology, as being an easy way out. But I do know some positive examples of this. I really liked the exhibition “*Mathématiques, un dépaysement soudain*” that I attended at *Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain* in



MUDAM. Reading room

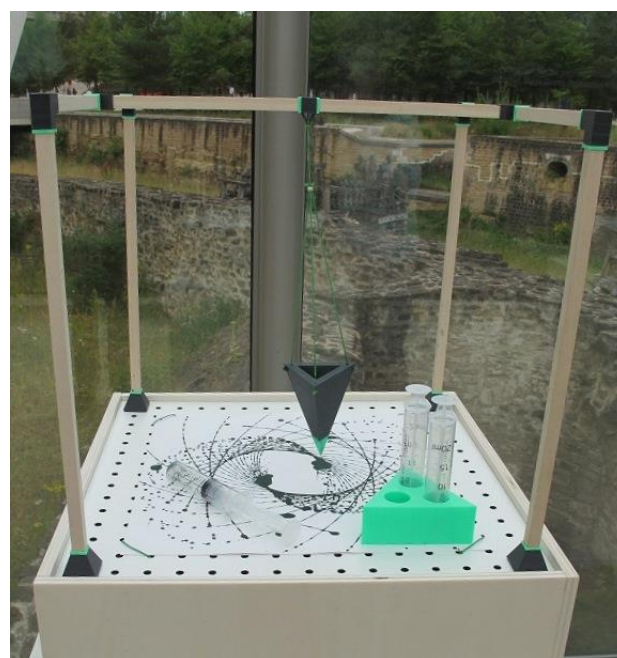


Jean Tinguely, *Fatamorgana, Méta-Harmonie IV*, 1985

floor, starts with a work of Piotr Kowalski, whose main part is the Foucault pendulum conceived to demonstrate the rotation of the Earth. Piotr Kowalski was one of the most prominent twentieth century contemporary artists of Polish descent. He was born in 1927 in Lwow and left Poland when he was 19. Then he lived in Sweden, Brazil, USA, and France. In the latter, he died in 2004. He studied architecture, physics and mathematics (he was a student of Norbert Wiener!) at the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* in the USA. What is interesting, he worked briefly at the I. M. Pei New York studio.

Paris, in 2012. The links between mathematics and art were explored there, but in an excellent way. I think that an anchor point linking art with another sphere triggers interests of many people in the contemporary art, which quite often is believed to be incomprehensible and disconnected from real life. Going back to the MUDAM exhibition, I think that it was only partially successful, although some objects of art there are very much worth seeing.

Three floors of the gallery are devoted to the following three major sections of the exhibition: “*Measuring the World*” (*La Mesure du monde*), “*Matter Revealed*” (*La Matière dévoilée*), and “*Inventions Applied*” (*Les Inventions appliquées*). The first section, in the central hall of the main



Patrizia Bolzan i Marcello Pirovano, *Make Art With Science 2015: Pendulum*.

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.mocak.pl/>



Alicja Kwade, *Asia (UTC +3 – + 12), North America (UTC – 10 – –4)*, 2015

Next to the main hall, there is an intriguing work of Jean Tinguely entitled “Fatamorgana, Méta-Harmonie IV,” brought from Basel. From time to time, the installation starts moving and generates loud noise.

Patrizia Bolzan and Marcello Pirovano, co-founders of Milan-based group *Tecnificio*, present three works of the “Make Art With Science 2015” series, commissioned by MUDAM, namely: “Pendulum,” “Optics,” and “Circuit.” These are rather simple technological toys made by using 3D printers that are the specialty of *Tecnificio*. Unfortunately, the “Circuit” is already broken. The two remaining devices are guarded by a museum staff member who has exclusive rights to operate them. Low reliability is a quite common fault suffered by “technologically intensive” pieces of art. This incident is surprising since the devices were created not by artists, but by an engineering company specializing in industrial design. The exhibited works also trigger a question about the limits of art. Are these devices examples of art, or are these simply toys? All definitions like “the art is a human creation giving pleasant aesthetic impression” obviously do not make any sense. As a counterexample it is sufficient to mention here the creations of *Viennese Actionism*. Masza Potocka, the director of MOCAP, gives a very simple definition:

“art gallery directors decide whether something is art or not”. In my opinion, this definition is too exclusive. Would the paintings of Andrzej Wróblewski not be pieces of art if they are not exhibited? I think that these days absolutely all human creations can be classified as art, as well as works produced by robots, computers, and similar devices – they (and their software as well) are human creations, after all. Certainly, gallery directors or curators play a key role in deciding what will stay in human memories for the long term by selecting works to be presented at exhibitions or included into collections. And this process is highly independent of the intention of the creators who were aiming at producing a piece of art or simply something useful. In that sense the mentioned “selectors” are important creators of the art world.

Further in the exhibition there are three works from the series “Time Zone” of Alicja Kwade, a Pole living in Berlin, made of bronze and stainless steel, represent the superimposition of time zones starting from the prime meridian. They show how political borders impact the

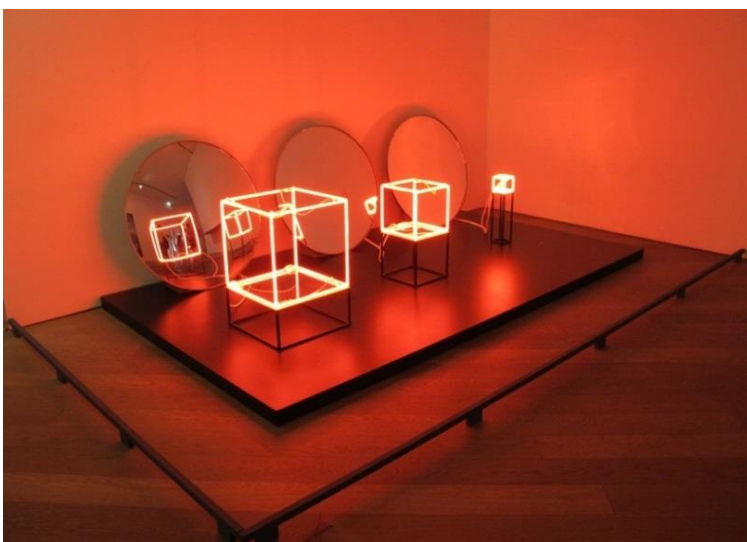


Mel Bochner, *If/And/Either/Both (or)*, 1998

notion of time. I have to admit that as far as the artistic perception is concerned these works do not impress me much. I prefer other works of the artist. Alicja Kwade was born in 1979 in Katowice. She focuses on sculpture but is also active in photography and video.

I really enjoyed the work of Mel Bochner entitled “If/And/Either/Both (or),” as it links my favorite minimalism with color.

The underground floor contains the section devoted to “Matter Revealed.” My favorite subsection was „Optical Games” (*Jeux d’optique*). We can once more see pieces of Piotr Kowalski. His installation “Identité no. 2” borrowed from Centre Pompidou in Paris is an assembly of radiating neon tubes, mirrors and

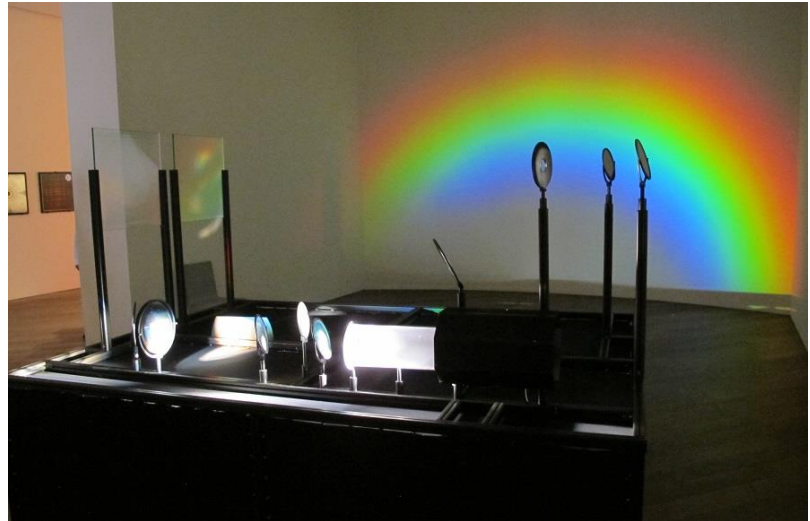


Piotr Kowalski, *Identité no. 2*, 1973



red light giving a pretty interesting effect. The second optics-related work of the same artist shown here entitled “Lumière (arc-en-ciel)” looks like a huge school laboratory set demonstrating light dispersion and creation of a rainbow. This is also a solid, although not sophisticated, engineering creation ☺.

The work of Véronique Joumard born in Grenoble and living in Paris, entitled “Paravent” (*Screen*), is a simple structure built of large plastic Fresnel systems. The work “The Invisible Message” of Paris-based artist Laurent Montaron consists of two sails, reels with wire, electrical parameter meters, gloves, and two



Piotr Kowalski, *Lumière (arc-en-ciel)*, 1992



Véronique Joumard, *Paravent*, 2013



Basia behind the “optical screen”

hammers. This is a reference to early wireless communication experiments conducted in 1866 in American Virginia by Maholm Loomis. It is worth noting that these experiments were performed before Guglielmo Marconi, who is widely recognized as the inventor of radio, was born.

In the same part of the exhibition we can find a strange object entitled “Prototype for a Nonfunctional Satellite (Design 4; Build 3)” designed by Trevor Paglen along with a group of NASA specialists. This is a prototype of a low-orbit satellite which after launching would create an art installation visible in the night sky.

The volume of the satellite, quite small during the launch, would increase considerably on the orbit. The satellite would stay in space for several weeks and would then burn in the earth’s atmosphere. Trevor Paglen was born in 1974 in Maryland and studied geography and photography.

A separate hall is occupied by a huge table surrounded by a large net creating a cage of sorts. This is the “CoRobots” installation assembled and operated by students and researchers of the *Interdisciplinary Center for ICT Security, Reliability and Trust (SnT)* of the University of Luxembourg. I gave a talk in that center the day before and discussed issues of scientific cooperation. Two small robots move on the surface of the table. We can see a little drone as well. The installation is supplemented by several screens showing lines of the executed software code and some other



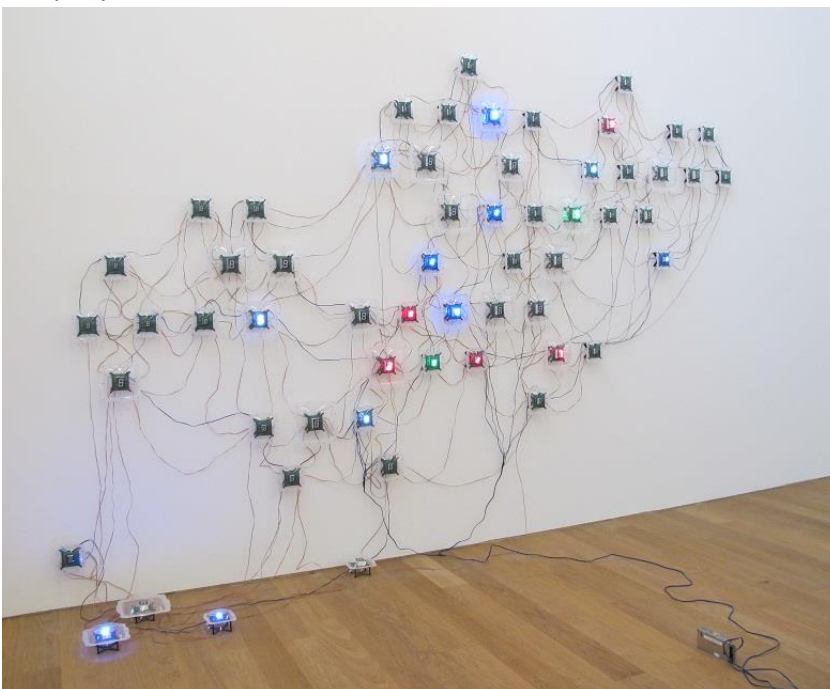
Laurent Montaron, *The Invisible Message*, 2011



Trevor Paglen, *Prototype for a Nonfunctional Satellite*  
(Design 4; Build 3), 2013

There are some blinking toys, so characteristic to many contemporary art galleries. One example is the installation entitled “Life (Corps sans Organes) No. 18” (*Body without organs*) by a renowned Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima. It consists of interconnected digit displays symbolizing a human body. A sequence of digits in the range 0 to 9 is pseudo-random. The work refers to a postulate of a non-hierarchical body constantly redefining itself according to evolving desires and external stimuli. The postulate was conceived by a French poet Antonin Artaud and later extended by two philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. As blinking effects are concerned, I was relieved not to see the Lissajous figures generated by vibrating metal plates, the figures that are almost obligatory at such type of exhibitions and so trivial that there are hard to digest.

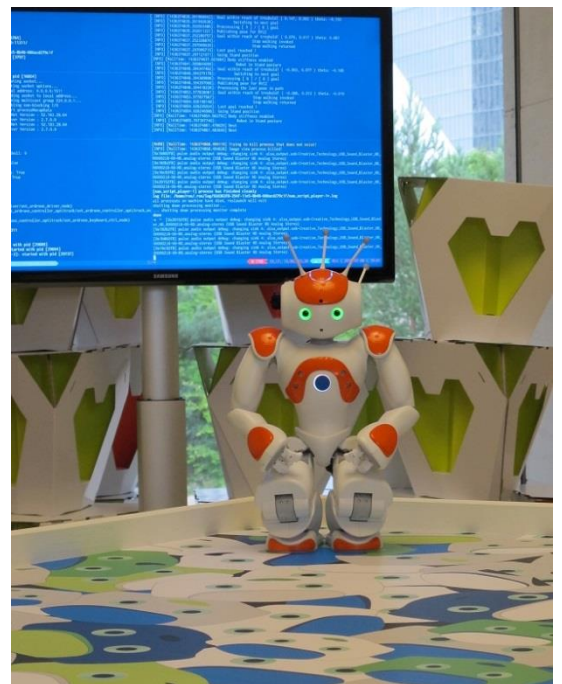
Among relics of 19<sup>th</sup> century technology I was especially impressed by a collection of tools manufactured by a Viennese company of Franz Wertheim exhibited at the 1855 *World Fair* in



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Life (Corps sans Organes) No. 18*, 2013

information. The whole arrangement is to illustrate the future of art in which robots interact with visitors. Personally, I did not have any interactions with the exhibit since when I was in the hall, the university staff was apparently not able to make the system run. I have to admit that the robot greeting visitors at the newly opened *Europe – Far East Gallery* in Krakow makes a much better impression.

The upper floor contains the third section of the exhibition devoted to applications of science. It contains contemporary artwork mixed with early industrial tools and technological devices.



SnT, *CoRobots*

Paris.

A color video “The Column” by Adrian Paci is really touching. It shows the murderous work required first in a quarry in China and then on board of a barge, to pull out and process a huge block of marble. The block is gradually transformed into an elegant, classical column of the Corinthian order. The column was first placed in Paris, next to *Jeu de Paume*, and then presented in the Albanian Pavilion at the 2014 *Architecture Biennale* in Venice. The video lasts 25 minutes and it is not easy to see it in its entirety during a single visit to the exhibition. Adrian Paci was born in Shkodër, Albania, in 1969 and studied in *Akademia e Arteve* in Tirana. Since 1997 he lives in Italy.





Adrian Paci, *The Column*, 2013, movie frame

Among the technological exhibits, one of the most interesting is a cross section of the chassis and engine of 1907 *De Dion-Bouton* from *Musée des arts et métiers* in Paris. To those who love that kind of technology I recommend the excellent collection of old airplane engines exhibited in the *Polish Aviation Museum*<sup>3</sup> in Krakow. An Installation “*Miracolo Italiano*” by Damián Ortega is an *oeuvre*, not only technological but also artistic. It consists of three Italian Vespa PX 150 motor scooters. The first one is an original model, the second is partially disassembled, and the third – fully disassembled. Separate parts are exhibited by suspending them on hardly visible wires. The whole installation reminds me of drawings in user manuals. The Mexican author is known from his famous work entitled “*Cosmic Thing*”, presented at the *50th Venice Biennale* in 2003, where parts of a disassembled Volkswagen Beetle were hanging in mid-air.



Franz Wertheim, *Collection d'outils de tourneur*, 1985



Damián Ortega, *Miracolo Italiano*, 2005

In the same room we can find several strange creations of a Belgian artist using the nickname Panamarenko (his real name is Henri Van Herwegen). The nickname reflects the artist's fascination in flying and is probably derived from “Pan American Airlines and Company”. The works exhibited in MUDAM also refer to flight. His “*Batopillo*” is a figure of a flying human wearing a backpack containing bizarre clapping propellers. Panamarenko has produced more copies of this sculpture.

There are also several variations of the work “*Cloaca*” of Belgian conceptualist Wim Delvoye. The exhibition hosts its mobile version under the name “*Cloaca Travel Kit*.” This art installation is supposed to mimic the human digestive system and is also an allegory of capitalism that reduces a



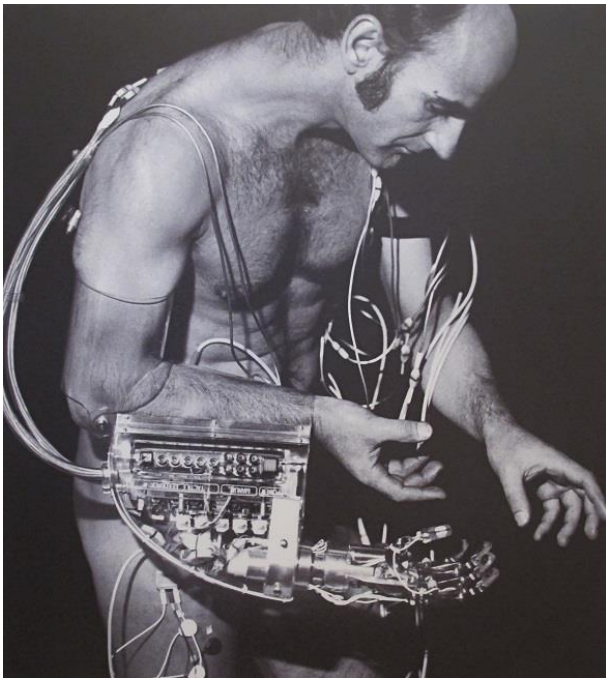
Panamarenko, *Batopillo (klein)*, 2005

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.muzeumlotnictwa.pl/indexen.php>

<sup>4</sup> Els Fiers, “A Human Masterpiece,” *artnet*, <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/reviews/fiers/fiers1-9-01.asp>

time and money for just one purpose: to put a little ball into a hole. Isn't that absurd? ." But such arguments, in my opinion, do not make sense. Following this way of reasoning we can classify my visit to MUDAM or writing this text as absurd too.

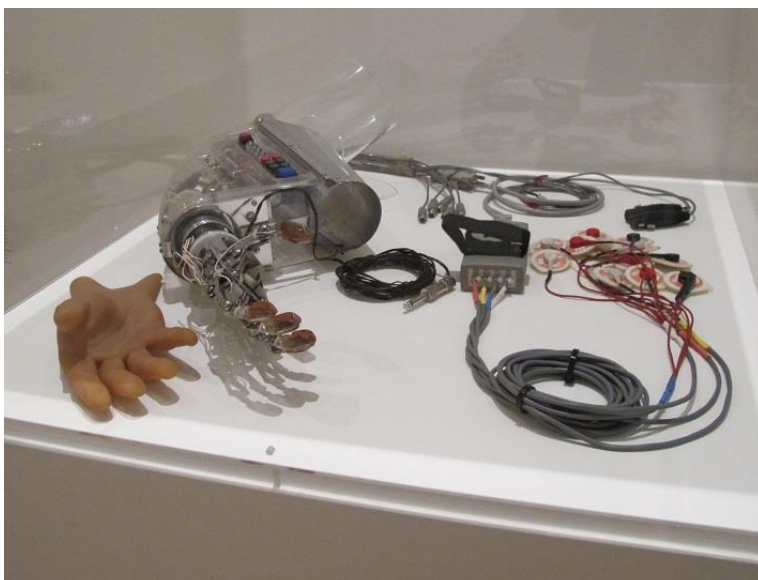
Stelarc (earlier Stelios Arcadiou) born in Cyprus in 1946 raises another important issue, i.e., supplementing the human body with electro-mechanical devices. The artist currently works as a researcher at Curtin University in Western Australia and earlier was affiliated with *Nottingham Trent University*. In the 1980's he commissioned an attachable electromechanical arm at a Japanese company which was able to



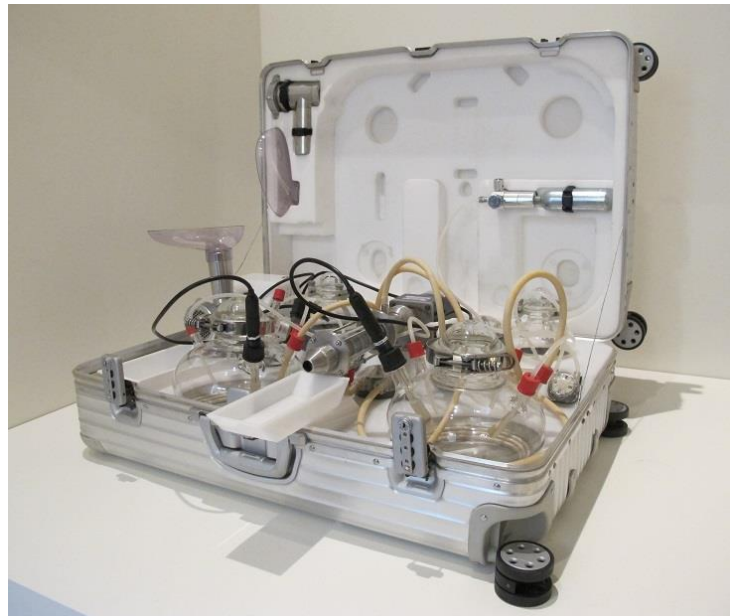
Stelarc, *Third Hand*

organs as well as manipulations with the human genome not a real threat to humanity?

A ten minute long video of a London-based Daria Martin entitled "*Soft Materials*" is an eye-catching illustration of

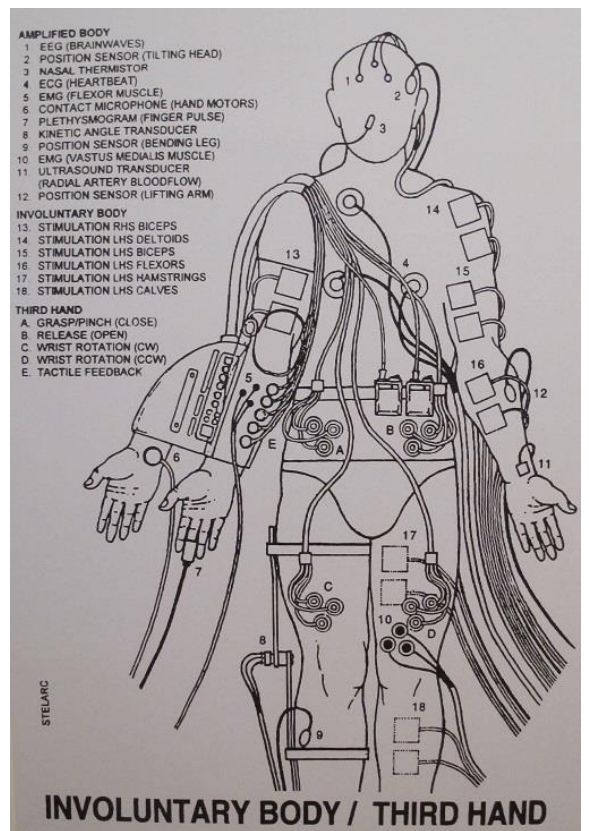


Stelarc, *Third Hand*



Wim Delvoye, *Cloaca Travel Kit*, 2009

react to stimuli from the abdomen and thighs. That experiment is illustrated at the MUDAM exhibition by four works of a common title "*Third Hand*." Another one of his experiments relied on a physical connection of his body to the Internet. Stelarc also had a cell-cultivated ear surgically attached to his left arm. Although Stelarc's experiments are of an art performance nature, ethical and practical questions concerning technological intervention into the human body are quite real with the constant growth in the number of people using artificial joints, heart valves, or pacemakers. Bionic artificial limbs directly controlled by the human brain are becoming a reality. But are the attempts to modify the human brain by implanting such devices as mobile phones or digital memory modules, extra



Stelarc, *Third Hand*

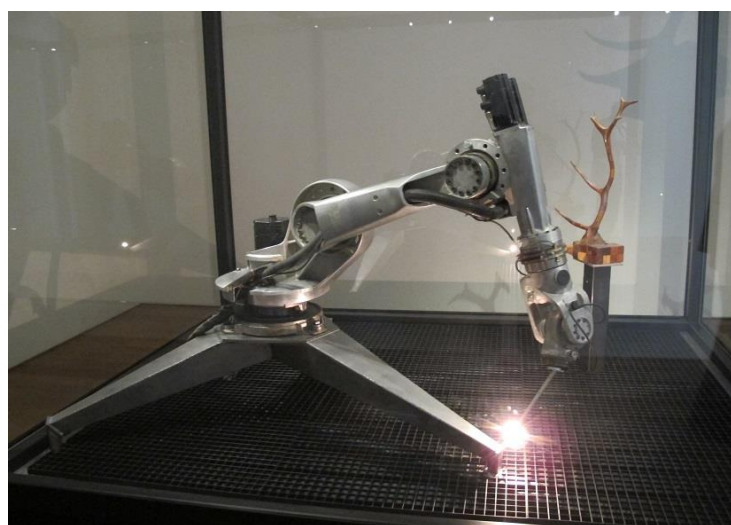


interactions between a dancing person and elastic bars or simple robots. Rhythmic bouncing of a dancer very well match the movements of a mechanical device. "Soft Materials" was shot in the *Artificial Intelligence Lab* at the University of Zurich. The nudity of the dancer is probably to match the "nudity" of the device. Daria Martin was born in 1973 in San Francisco. She received her B.A., magna cum laude, in humanities from Yale University, and M.F.A., cum laude, from the University of California, Los Angeles. She started her career as a painter, but now concentrates on film.



Daria Martin, *Soft Materials*, 2004

British artist Conrad Shawcross, born in 1977, focuses on mechanical sculptures, associating them with various scientific and philosophical ideas. He studied art in *Chelsea School of Art, University of Oxford, University College London*, and others. His work "Trophy" shown at the exhibition is said to refer to



Conrad Shawcross, *Trophy*, 2012

Titian's painting "The Death of Actaeon." A robot operating the light represents the goddess Diana and a branch of deer antlers refers to the misfortunate Actaeon. For me, it is rather far-fetched.

In summary, the exhibition that is to last until January 17, 2016, contains around 200 works including contemporary art pieces but also objects related to the history of technology. In my opinion, although it shows many high quality art pieces, this undertaking is simply too large. Even if a full day is committed to see it, it would still be difficult to cope with so many stimuli and ideas attacking the viewer. Although the exhibition is carefully structured into three major sections, each of them containing several smaller

units, the vast majority of guests will not afford enough time to visit the exhibition several times. We live in times where time is in short supply and more and more often we limit ourselves to read only short texts, view video clips, write brief e-mails instead of long traditional letters. Due to this I have more pleasure visiting a relatively small exhibition, where I am able to concentrate myself properly, instead of spending many hours in a behemoth whose main aim is to please gallery directors and curators as well as attracting media, rather than satisfying aesthetic needs of the general public. This is why I prefer much smaller but more carefully prepared exhibitions, including those related to technology<sup>5</sup>, at locations such as the *Manggha Museum* in Krakow, at the newly opened *Europe – Far East Gallery*<sup>6</sup>, at the *International Culture Center* in Krakow, *Atlas Gallery* in Lodz, some branches of the *National Museum, Krakow* or dedicated galleries of *MOCAP*. Small galleries or limited-size exhibitions in large institutions are in my opinion the future of the art of exhibition.

I also think that from among many technology-intensive art pieces shown in MUDAM only a few really benefit from adding the technological dimension to the art form. I really missed works truly integrating those two aspects, as in for example, art installations of Alek Janicki presented at the exhibition "*Tōkaidō – The East Sea Road*" in the Manggha Museum<sup>7</sup>.

Text i photographs: Andrzej Jajszczyk (e-mail: jajszczyk@kt.agh.edu.pl)

<sup>5</sup> [http://jajszczyk.pl/wp-content/uploads/AJ\\_Technology\\_in\\_Manggha.pdf](http://jajszczyk.pl/wp-content/uploads/AJ_Technology_in_Manggha.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://edw.manggha.pl/en/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://jajszczyk.pl/wp-content/uploads/A\\_Jajszczyk\\_Tokaido\\_Manggha\\_sprawozdanie\\_2014.pdf](http://jajszczyk.pl/wp-content/uploads/A_Jajszczyk_Tokaido_Manggha_sprawozdanie_2014.pdf)