



For this artist life began in Detroit where he grew up, and so he often returns to the industrial design aesthetic of car manufacturers in that city, the idea of a human touch or its absence comes off the assembly line in Detroit. And yet his drawing robots are pieces of sculpture, not accidental but also not necessarily efficient, they do embody some formal considerations. So what is art here? That's too big a question. Where responsibility lies is better—that's a key component of what he's interested in—and he wants to share the responsibility with anyone who walks into a gallery: viewers need to get involved and figure out what's going on there. Craft? That's one of those horrible words. Control for him is a better one, he's very particular about how his part of the work is made, without assistants.

The self-contradictory nature of artistic creation extends further. Is multi-tasking possible? It was notoriously said that Gerald Ford could not fart and chew gum at the same time. Be that as it may, the current installation is called *Multi-tasking* because six different robots, a major component of some being a foam cast of the artist's hand, simultaneously make six different drawings exploring six different trains of thought, while responding to the gallery's environment in different ways, according to temperature, humidity, motion, with circular or square structures, and so on and on. Each time a drawing is finished the robot is reprogrammed with new rules, new rules for art, always desired, always being reformulated. The artist doesn't necessarily believe ordinary humans can or should multi-task—the work just raises the question, and raises the problem of thinking about multi-tasking into a many layered task of its own: how are humans replaced by machines, how has art been taken over by the mechanical age, what has this done to the notion of the aesthetic or the beautiful—social, political and artistic questions much larger and, to the artist, more important than the visual elements of the works themselves. Don't forget the notion of the joke, the invocation of a funny, childish toy that runs in many ways through this artist's work. In part, wit makes social criticism more palatable—don't forget Jerry Ford. Wit might also help recall what is for this artist the crucial larger intellectual process that the work embodies, after the fact, when the mundane object is replaced by conversation.

And so what about color? He smiles broadly as he replies, I'm a sculptor, I don't do color. He feels there's enough variation in making marks with different sizes of graphite sticks to keep him busy. And he claims he draws like a sculptor, fisty and chunky. But don't the robots do that too? He says he wants to do nothing in spectacular ways, but it's tempting to reply that the little machines he's made have received bits of his personality, his DNA, and that, far from doing nothing, he has figured out a way with modern mechanical means, to have facets of his own identity as an artist performing in a room even when he's not there. Still today, that's a provocative social and artistic statement.

Craig Harbison, May 2013
Barry Freedland Installation
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