

Large print guide

Geumhyung Jeong: *Under Construction*

**25 September –
15 December 2024**

Geumhyung Jeong's solo exhibition *Under Construction* centres on sculpture that is perpetually in a state of becoming. The artist creates mechanical bodies, an entanglement of metal and artificial human bones that move in halting and unpredictable ways when operated via remote control. These figures are presented in the gallery in dialogue with the parts and tools that will append them, along with videos of their development in Jeong's Seoul studio. Each sculpture will be regularly re-attended by the artist in a series of performances. Process and result are indiscernible; the work exists as an exchange between human and machine. It is equally a physical form and an ongoing trial and error, i.e., Jeong thoughtfully constructing, amending and coaching the robotic beings as they attempt movement.

In this, the project addresses the co-existence of human and machines, or even humans and objects, today.

What is more, *Under Construction* interests itself not in the magical promise of new technology – the slick, the instantaneous, the invisible – the mechanics are straightforward and exposed. Yet a kind of magic is present. It's in the entrancing as much as the awkward, in the oddly endearing discomfort the figures provoke. Specifically, it is within the affinity we feel towards these mechanical beings, something akin to what political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett has called 'a shimmering, potentially violent vitality intrinsic to matter'.¹ Human agency relies upon what Bennett has described as 'a vast entourage of non-humans'.² *Under Construction* recognises this, and the inverse: these non-humans rely on us as well. We are inextricably intertwined with the machines and objects in our lives, and Jeong's project submits this need not be a one-directional relationship of use-value and consumption. Rather, Jeong makes a case for the

prolonged, the tactile, the reciprocal engagement with inanimate things. And she makes her case with great seriousness, and not without humour.

This exhibition is supported by The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism – Korean Arts Management Services, and the Henry Moore Foundation.

1

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 61.

2

Ibid, 108.

Artist Bio

Geumhyung Jeong (b. 1980 in Seoul, South Korea) lives and works in Seoul, South Korea. Jeong has participated in performing arts festivals internationally and her solo exhibitions in international contemporary art institutions include: *Upgrade in Progress*, FMAV Fondazione Modena Arti Visive, Modena (2020); *Homemade RC Toy*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (2019); *Private Collection: Unperformed Objects*, Delfina Foundation, London (2017); *Tate Live: Geumhyung Jeong*, Tate Modern, London (2017); *Private Collection, Atelier Hermès*, Seoul (2016). She has also participated in numerous group exhibitions including: *The Milk of Dreams, The 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia*, Venice (2022); *Copenhagen – Red Light Green Light (In the Realm of the Senses)*, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2022); *Immortality, The 5th Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art, Ekaterinburg* (2019); *APT9 The 9th Asia Pacific Triennial, Brisbane* (2018); *ANTI,*

AB6 The 6th Athens Biennale, Athens (2018); *The Public Body 02*, Artspace, Sydney (2017); *The Promise of Total Automation*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2016); *Surround Audience: New Museum Triennial 2015*, New Museum, New York (2015); *The Beast and the Sovereign*, MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona (2015); *East Asia Feminism: FANTasia*, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2015); *Gesture*, WKV Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2014); *Burning Down the House*, The 10th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju (2014). In 2016 Jeong was the winner of the Hermès Foundation Missulsang Award and in 2014 of Zürcher Theater Spektakel Kantonalbank Acknowledgment Prize. In 2009 she won the Excellence Award for Alternative Vision at the Seoul New Media Art Festival and in 2007 Dokkebi Award at the Chuncheon International Mime Festival.

Interview between Geumhyung Jeong and ICA Exhibitions Curator Andrea Nitsche-Krupp in August 2024

Andrea Nitsche-Krupp:

How did you first start working with machines and robotics?

Geumhyung Jeong:

I was initially interested in controlling an object from a distance and in the remote controller itself. Specifically, the triangular relationship between a remote controller, the controlled object, and the person controlling the object.

ANK:

When you are constructing a machine, do you have a specific movement or action you are hoping to achieve?

GJ:

Yes, I usually start by imagining the potential movements I am hoping to achieve. Often, it doesn't work like I imagined, and I must change the plan. But then it becomes much more interesting to figure out what

they can do from their own physical reality than they hypothetical reality I had imagined.

ANK:

There is a correspondence between the machine bodies and the human body via the inclusion of artificial skeletons, and we relate to them as bodies, yet in terms of movement the figures respond according to the mechanics of their robotic parts.

GJ:

In addition to an ongoing sculptural project, I think this work is also choreographic, it is also a dance. The idea of building the body function of the sculptures started with copying human movements, but their movements show how obviously machine they are. I find it cute when they try to move like humans but in their own way.

ANK:

This installation of *Under Construction* includes working tables on which there is an array of various spare parts and tools. To my mind, these tables signal an active working space of construction, and

also the pre-history of the machines. How do you think about this presentation and display of tools and parts within the exhibition?

GJ:

Right. It indicates the whole story of the machines, how they are made and what they are made of. The parts on display are like organs of the machine's body; they could be read as anatomical information natural to them. It could be not only the pre-history of the machines, but also their future, a backup plan. I just made the robots; I am not yet familiar with them. I am sure they will have constant technical problems to fix but I don't yet know what kind of unexpected problems they will create. Like most of my works, the line between the process and the result is not very clear. It will continue to be under construction and I will actually need to use the parts and tools on the table to fix or replace broken parts of the robots while I am preparing the live performances. And at the same time, I imagine the arrangement of the objects on the table could generate a narrative independently

from the robots, like a choreography of array.

ANK:

This exhibition includes a separate gallery space that contains video documentation of the machines – their movement, your choreographic interactions, and your production of them. The room is set up with various monitors and there is also live footage of the machine installation in the other gallery playing on closed-circuit video. How do you think about that space?

GJ:

The idea for this aspect of the installation started from the specific character of the ICA gallery and the character of this small room adjacent to the main space. The first idea I had was to make a messy room, like a secret closet. A place that would feel like you are somewhere you are not supposed to enter, seeing things you are not allowed to see, in the kind of room in which it feels like someone is trying to hide something away. Then I came up with the idea of emphasising the video materials on

many monitors. Creating a place that looks like a control room with the videos of the testing moments of robots that shows their constant failing and progressions. Like someone's unshared folder in a personal computer. And then, the idea of having the closed-circuit video was added so we can monitor the robots, like a real-time control room. We could see the past and present of the robots in the Video Room.

ANK:

How do you approach the relationship between sculpture and video in your work?

GJ:

Sometimes I think that if a sculpture is strong enough, it would not need extra information like a video next to it. But I also accept that my robots are created with the idea of possible movements and performance in them, and therefore, it would be more fun to see a performative video alongside the sculpture. In terms of the form of the video, I enjoy trying something that I would not be able to do in a

live performance and showing the production process or history of the bodies being tested and failing.

ANK:

The unpredictable process of creating these robots – specifically embracing moments of failure – seems integral to this work. How do you think about failure?

GJ:

The whole process involved constantly failing and finding solutions.

But I also realised that sometimes what I thought was failure was not. Sometimes I am impatient during the process, and I try to find a solution quickly if I see something doesn't work. But I find that later, after trying all the other things and going back to the starting point, it was working. It was just technically not perfect with details, but the idea was correct.

ANK:

Often your work is quiet or silent or indexes the ambient, practical sounds of making and moving.

This kind of quiet adds to a feeling of suspension and closeness that harnesses our attention. Could you speak to sound in your work?

GJ:

I found that creating movements and sounds are not separable. When I try to make movements, it brings sounds. And often I make movements following or according to the sounds they produce. I like the movements of musicians when they play music. And I like the sounds created by dancers when they move without music. I think sounds can occupy a room immediately. If the sounds are overwhelming, it can interrupt one's ability to focus on seeing visual images. I tried to be careful with using sounds.

ANK:

Related to let's say, this non-performative sound, I am wondering how you consider the idea of boredom in your work. I find boredom to be a very clarifying state of mind to inhabit and I'm curious to hear your thoughts on it.

GJ:

I think there are some necessary boredoms we can enjoy, although it is not always easy. We can like something that is boring yet agree that the enjoyment is only in its necessity. Other times, something is not boring, but it takes time; it is slow or repeated so our body gets tired, yet we can still enjoy it even if we felt asleep during it. These are positive boredoms I would say. One of the worst boredoms, or a kind of negative boredom, can be found in trying to reject boredom: when someone or something tries to entertain people to avoid the boredom but fails.

Main Gallery

Left in various gestures and states of completion, Geumhyung Jeong's mechanical bodies occupy the centre of the gallery floor. Their bones resemble the order of those in a human skeleton, yet they are everywhere appended, flayed and sutured by machine parts. They are neither inanimate nor animate beings; even in their stillness they exude an uncanny frisson of life. Around the perimeter of the room are six working tables arranged with carefully placed metal parts, tools, medical model PVC bones, and all manner of screws and wires. The setup approximates Jeong's studio in Seoul, which is located in an industrial manufacturing building. As such, it also serves as a ready-made workshop for the artist, who will continue to construct, repair, and test her bodies in a series of rehearsals and performances on specific dates during the course of the exhibition.

Works:

1. *Under Construction (Bodies)* 2024

PVC plastic human skeleton
medical models, various hardware components, aluminium profiles, wire, motors, batteries, remote controller

2. *Under Construction (Arrangement of Unassembled Body)* 2024

PVC plastic human skeleton
medical model parts, various hardware components, tools, wire

Back Gallery

The second room contains video and a live CCTV feed documenting the lives of these mechanical beings. On the screens, we watch the artist attentively constructing them, bolt by bolt, limb by limb, testing their capability for specific movements. Jeong explores with equal attention the bodies' successes and failures: their halting, faltering actions as critical as those they manage with graceful fluidity. Jeong's presence – her watchful eye, her thoughtful touch – is a constant throughout.

Works:

3. Under Construction (Video Room)

2024

Multi-channel performance documentation video with sound, live-feed CCTV, cameras, various monitors and playback equipment, furniture

Event Programme

Wednesday 2 October, 6:30pm

Film Screening: *Frankenstein*

Selected by Geumhyung Jeong in conjunction with her exhibition, this iconic 1931 horror film directed by James Whale follows scientist Dr. Henry Frankenstein as he attempts to create life by assembling body parts from the dead.

Tuesday 8 October, 7pm

LIVE PERFORMANCE

An essential component of the artist's ongoing project, this is the first event in a series of live in-gallery performances in which Jeong acts as operator and co-performer with her mechanical bodies.

Wednesday 9 October, 7pm

LIVE PERFORMANCE

In the second in-gallery performance of the series, Jeong manipulates and responds to the machine bodies through a conversation of movements initiated by remote control, physical touch, and mechanised gestures.

Thursday 24 October, 6:30pm

Curator-led Exhibition Tour

Please join us for a behind the scenes tour of the exhibition with curator Andrea Nitsche-Krupp.

Wednesday 6 November, 6:30pm

Film Screening: *Dr. Giggles*

Selected by Geumhyung Jeong in conjunction with her exhibition, this 1992 American slasher film follows a self-declared doctor on a medical pun-filled killing spree.

Wednesday 13 November, 7pm

LIVE PERFORMANCE

Jeong returns to the ICA to continue her ongoing construction, maintenance and choreography with her mechanical figures. Audiences are invited to witness this intimate dialogue live as the artist operates and performs with the bodies.

Friday 15 November, 7pm

PERFORMATIVE LECTURE

Part artist talk, part performance, Geumhyung Jeong will walk audiences through her practice leading up to the current work via lecture, images, video, and movement demonstrations.

Wednesday 20 November, 6:30pm

Film Screening: *Love Object*

Selected by Geumhyung Jeong in conjunction with her exhibition, this 2003 horror film explores animate and inanimate objectification through a relationship with a jealous sex doll.

Sunday 1 December, 2pm

Workshop: Speakers Corner

Quartet

This interactive session explores the intersection of robotics and music with recent ICA artists-in-residence, Speakers Corner Quartet.

Saturday 7 December, 6:30pm

Film Screening: Three Films by

Geumhyung Jeong

The artist has selected three examples of her past work for this special screening: *Munbangu (stationery)*, 2011, *RECORD STOP PLAY*, 2011 and *Delivery Service*, 2020.

Date to be announced

Panel Discussion: Machine

Futurisms

A panel discussion that unpacks the artist's exploration of human-machine interaction and the relationships between objects and performance, the animate and inanimate.

Please visit ica.art to book tickets and find out more information on events including arranging educational and youth tours.



Access

Please do not touch artworks. You can use the icons indicated in the sensory map for further references.

You need to purchase a ticket to the exhibition at the Box Office or online. At the front desk you will receive a sticker which validates your entry into the gallery.

Feel free to take photos of all artworks in this exhibition and share your experience by tagging *@icalondon*

No food or drink in this space.

The Lower Gallery is lit by overhead strip lights. The light levels in these spaces can also be dependent on the weather and time of day.

There is a smaller gallery room on the left-hand side of the Lower Gallery, there is also a small ramp into this space.

You may exit the exhibition through the reading room. For wheelchair and accessible route out of the gallery please use the gallery entrance back via the ramp.

See our sensory map of the exhibition for more information.

Digital Guide

www.ica.art/media/gj-large-print.pdf



