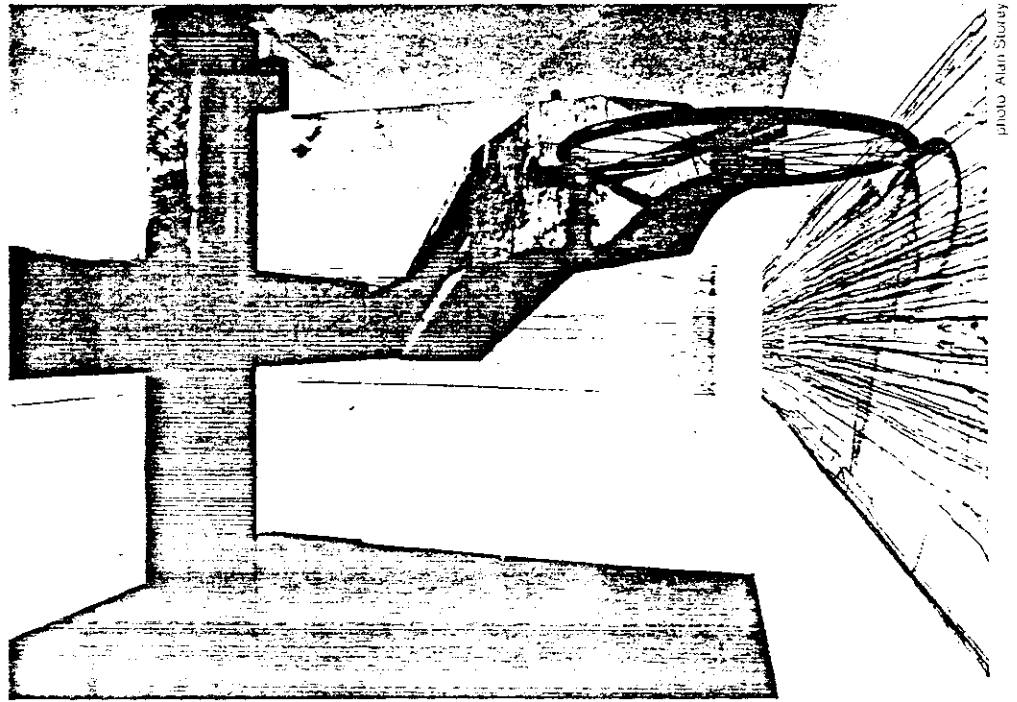


Alan Storey
Or Gallery
Vancouver
October 24 to November 3

Alan Storey's *Draw* is like a large, anthropomorphic Minimalist sculpture awakening and responding to the "compression" of the intimate dimensions of the gallery. This large motorized sculpture moves sluggishly, laboriously around the room — every window sill an obstacle, every corner a potential trap. Like a primitive Canadian robot arm for space shuttles, and banged together from sea-soaked timbers salvaged from the docks, it probes its way around and around the clean white room leaving sensuously inked traces of its aimless toil. Its actions bring to mind some of the negative forces which have been operating in the workplace since industrialization: alienation, repetition of meaningless tasks, the reinforcement of standardized behaviour. The apparent futility of the sculpture's task and its great difficulty in getting over the obstacles placed in its way, underscores and parodies these actions. It raises questions about the nature of work and specifically the work of the artist.

Storey's stated interests were to construct a "chunky" machine which does delicate work, and to create a situation which draws attention to people's "social awareness". In other words, the viewer is made conscious of the other people in the gallery — their proximity to each other and to the moving sculpture.

As the title of this work suggests, the sculpture is conspicuous in that it is doing the work of an artist: it is drawing with the aid of a car battery, a windshield wiper motor and a wheelchair wheel. Storey's gentle mockery of "mark making" serves to exorcise the quasi-modernist training many art students, including himself, experienced on the west coast during the mid to late 70s. The viewer who chooses to partake in the exorcism may experience a tinge of guilt when secretly enjoying the delicate smudges and drips drawn by the "sculpture-machine". The band, deliberately positioned on the gallery walls where paintings should hang, reads like a non-objective drawing, a landscape, an abstracted musical score or the mural of marks left by an electro-cardiogram describing the palpitations of the heart. With this aesthetic experience comes the memory of the position this training led to: the exhaustion of formal arranging and rearranging within the strict dictates of two-dimensional Modernism and the eventual demise of the painted mark. While some artists continued, others turned to figuration, others to video, others to performance, installation, theory and still others stopped altogether. Storey's answer to this collective crisis was to turn to three-dimensional work.



Alan Storey, *Draw* (1984), mixed media installation, courtesy: Or Gallery

There is a slight air of danger about it, although the unsuspecting viewer would at worst experience a gentle nudge at the back of the head, effectively stopping the arm from moving. The three-piece arm swings laterally on the end of the main arm, creating a menacing vice-like space — likewise harmless. The structure is playful yet also plays with the sensation of danger.

Storey also worked with elements of chance. Ideally the sculpture was to rotate unassisted for twenty-four hours a day during the length of the installation. Technical complications made this impossible adding a new element to the work: Storey was always present to assist the arm over the window sills, out of the corners and to press the button which cranked up the lead weight after four or five revolutions. Like a man and his trained dog, Storey and his sculpture-machine worked full days at the gallery.

One would have to try very hard not to enjoy this piece, or at the very least be amused by it. With its backhanded critique of mark making and its parody of automation, it goes beyond mere entertainment, but playfulness is certainly its most salient characteristic. Vancouver continues to present itself as a city in which artists relatively free from the pressures of rigorous and relentless competition and criticism develop towards artistic maturity in idiosyncratic ways — in this case fortunately so.

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