Human Factors

Kim Harty

BOLT RESIDENCY
CHICAGO ARTISTS COALITION
May 30 – June 17, 2014
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Helen Lee

An artist displaces an object in a straight line from point A to B, exerting X amount of force counter to gravity. This simple textbook definition of work provides framework enough to begin a conversation about Human Factors. In a bastardized art-world calculus in which we take the derivative of work with respect to the variable of time, we arrive at the idea of efficiency. Human Factors explores efficiency in the artists studio through various recursive relationships in which the making-of-the-work is embodied in the work itself. The independent variable of time is defined for us by the parameters of an open camera shutter, the staccato of chronophotography, and the speed of light as mediated through material. Our index in this landscape is the line. The line expands, extrapolates, and builds upon its definition from the shortest path between two points into grids, networks, matrices, and projections. These complex bifurcations more accurately reflect the non-hierarchical prevalence of line in modern thought. Human Factors draws out for us the reality of our constant immersion and engagement in a language of movement as the agency of making work.

To the materially-uninformed eye, Harty’s process in creating much of this work is fairly obscure. In Topography of Sublime (Glass, Gravity, Body), hot glass is extracted from a furnace and repeatedly and somewhat ecstatically shaken and drizzled over various forms, creating cage-like meshes of catenary curves. These are then inverted and assembled, and further entwined together with more hot-glass-drizzling. Witnessing the ease of Harty’s process belies this very specific technique she has developed; she exercises the virtuosity of making it look easy. In some respects, this ease is facilitated by the fact of gravity—it is natural for hot glass to fall, much like the expectation of honey drizzling off the comb. One thinks of Trisha Brown’s explorations of movement and mark-making in the dance studio, or of her own meditation on the fact of gravity in Man Walking Down the Side of a Building (1970). These works emphasize all movement as bound by gravity, but more importantly, these works foreground the artists’ actions as a medium through which gravity is expressed. In the case of Topography of Sublime (Glass, Gravity, Body), Harty capitalizes on the magic of glass as an amorphous solid. We are treated to the expression of her rapid undulations of the material as it glides down its glass transition curve from behaving as a liquid to behaving as a solid. The aggregation of the artist’s accumulated shaking and silica-slinging is then coated in a rich, black layer of soot. The work amasses a set of problematics in vision that are akin to those in Duchamp’s Sixteen Miles of String—Is this transparency? Do we look at it/through it? Is this a framework? Is it a boundary? In her titling of the work, Harty nods to the history of the sublime landscape. Edmund Burke articulates in his canonical text on the sublime, “Anything that is great, infinite or obscure could be an object of terror and the sublime, for there was an element of the unknown about them.” While the gestalt of the work might engender this gaze of the infinite, a technical reading of the work stands in contrast to this sensibility of the infinite. Materially-speaking, this mass of glass strings represents a very specific unit of time.

Our experience of the world is less of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.”
—Michel Foucault

Time functions as a common denominator in most works in this exhibition, but is a focal point in What Have You Done All Day? In this video work, Harty literally anthropomorphizes the arms of an analog clock with the swoop of her own arms. The body serves as keeper of time. Video enables the accuracy of her mechanics,
the synchronization with real time, and extends her performative motions through time, ad infinitum. But the medium also emphasizes the artist’s finite, mortal body engaging in the human act of measuring this infinite dimension.

Harty’s patron saint here is less Christian Marclay and more Frank Gilbreth—a pioneer in motion studies from the turn of the century, perhaps best known in popular culture as the protagonist in *Cheaper by the Dozen*. Gilbreth’s fanaticism for mechanical efficiency contributed greatly to the evolution of movement studies in manufacturing and clerical industries. He is often mentioned in the same breath as Frederick Taylor, who is regarded as the father of scientific management. These two figures in mechanical efficiency, however, emphasized different ends of the efficiency equation. Taylor’s focus was on minimizing time, whereas Gilbreth’s focus was on minimizing unnecessary movement.

Harty carries Gilbreth’s intuition for movement into her work *Discipline and Form (Veronese)*. Movement is considered with respect to the artist’s background as a glassblower, and by extension, the idea of craft as movement-based, embodied knowledge. Harty draws from the storied veronese form in glass history. This form harks back its depiction in Paolo Veronese’s painting, *The Annunciation* (1578). This painting served as inspiration for Vittorio Zecchin, who, in 1921, launched the now well-known Venini brand with the veronese vase. The form has come to stand as a benchmark for virtuosity and is something of a glassblower’s delight.

Harty examines these threads of virtuosity, repetition, movement, and work in *Discipline and Form (Veronese)*, using long-exposure photography to capture her repeated attempts to outline a human-sized veronese form with LEDs. We might interpret line in this work as a form of hyperdrawing. In her essay, *The Restless Line*, Emma Cocker offers a definition of hyperdrawing as a form of techné: “It is in these terms, that Hyperdrawing might be considered a form of productive knowledge—or techné. Here, techné is not used in its habitual sense, where it is taken to simply mean the skillful art of making and doing, the practical knowledge or technical facility of craftsmanship. . . Rather than referring to drawing solely in spatial terms, where the attempt to go beyond is conceived as one of giving shape to new forms, or of making—and leaving—a space wherein something unexpected might materialize; drawing can also be understood temporally, as the act of making time and of deciding how to act.”

Cocker further offers an interpretation of hyperdrawing as a form of restlessness, “a ceaselessly unfolding or agitated practice that appears reluctant to be wholly still or settled, that instead remains perpetually unfinished, unresolved, ‘eternally incomplete.’” On one end of this restless spectrum, Cocker cites forms of physical wandering as a manifestation of hyperdrawing. Merce Cunningham’s *Walkaround Time* (1968) comes to mind as a historical record of the pacing and what-have-you activities that early day computer programmers would engage in as they awaited the data they input into a mainframe to be processed by primitive technological devices. *Walkaround Time* included an homage to Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, incidentally, as evidence of further matricial relationships at play. Dancers moved around transparent inflatable cubes that were screenprinted with images of *Large Glass*. “The literally marking of time through movement, through walking around to get to the other side of waiting, is a useful metaphor for drawing as an activity both intimate and quotidian, related to artistic processes and gestures close to the studio and to the daily practice of drawing and dance.”

On the other end of the spectrum, Cocker conceives, “Restlessness might also be conceptualized as a state of oscillation or vacillation, no longer describing the unfettered meanderings of a nomadic line moving ever forward, but rather its ricochet between various points or positions, an endless performance back and forth, to and fro. The drawn line emerges somewhere between hand and eye, observation and imagination, imitation and invention, between internal and external forces or pressures, somewhere between self and the world.” It is here where I see Harty’s *Discipline and Form (Veronese)*, oscillating between the veronese in its state of idealized perfection, and the veronese as subject to the reality of the artist’s hand. Both Cunningham’s and Harty’s works occupy a territory that is not the worker (programmer/glassblower), or the space of work (office/hotshop), or the work itself (data output/veronese form.) Rather,
Kim Harty is an artist, writer, and educator interested in the intersection of craft, technology, and performance. She has exhibited and performed in galleries and museums across the country including the Chrysler Museum of Art, the Toledo Museum of Art and the Corning Museum of Glass. Harty has taught at the School of the Art Institute, Ox-bow Art School and Penland School of Crafts. She holds an MFA in Art and Technology Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA in Glass from the Rhode Island School of Design. She recently completed the Pilchuck Emerging Artist Residency and is part of the yearlong BOLT residency at the Chicago Artist Coalition.

Helen Lee is an artist, designer, educator, and glassblower. She holds an MFA in Glass from RISD and a BSAD in Architecture from MIT. She has taught at RISD, CCA, Haystack Mountain School of Craft, and The MIT Glass Lab. She lived and worked in the California Bay Area for seven years as a freelance graphic designer for Celery Design Collaborative and Chronicle Books. She was also an Affiliate Artist at Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, CA, from 2009-2011. Helen is currently an Assistant Professor of Glass in the University of Wisconsin Madison Art Department.

in an external space of art, both pieces precipitate a meditation on the friction and impact of labor and the human body, subject to time, manifest in movement. Cunningham’s work points to the gap between human time and machine time—a gap that is still ever-present and relevant as technology continues to evolve, nearly half a century since Walkaround Time emerged. In Harty’s case, it is the cumulative practice of the veronese form that speaks to a deep-seeded accumulation of movement-knowledge in the body. Harty’s observations serve, perhaps, as a theory of a technology we know by the name of craft, which by definition, cannot be out of time synch with the human body.

The friction of the human body against technology surfaces in Harty’s use of the grid in Study of Dissolving Body. The artist’s body amorphously interrupts a projected linear grid as she moves and undulates under an impressively unwieldy pile of tulle. The translucent material blurs the boundary of the artist and her actions in this field of orthogonal logic, dissolving our ability to discern a concise set of XY coordinates for the action at play.

The grid functions conversely in Practice of Looking (Waterlens). Here, the grid aids the viewer in locating him/herself in the physics of projection. Harty employs an obscure but extremely effective device in which the viewer’s image is instantaneously inverted through a series of handblown water lens and projected onto graph paper. This analog displacement, even to the well-initiated, engages a sense of wonder—perhaps even moreso because the expectation of an image these days is so intrinsically tied to machine-based technology. If ones image is not captured by a device before it is propagated through modern media, we’ve nearly forgotten the image in its analog state of behavior: as light. The auratic quality of each handblown water lens matches the quality of this phenomenon—each instance of the viewer’s inverted image is unique and exists solely with the presence of the viewer.

In her statement, Harty asks the viewer, “How does the efficiency imperative function within the artist’s studio, and what are the human factors governing the artist’s production of objects?” Efficiency connotes not solely the arithmetic of work over time, but maximizing this equation, be it through a Taylorian mini-mization time or a Gilbrethian maximization of effective movements. Harty’s work focuses not on the optimization of efficiency, but on the nature of this relationship between movement and time in the artists studio. The human factor at play is that, at the site of the artists body, movement and time elide in lines of gestural force where one can “feel the thrust involved in making it.”

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CAC’s mission and programs are funded by the Alphawood Foundation; Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Arts Work Fund for Organizational Development; Chicago Community Trust; CityArts; The Coleman Foundation; Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation; Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation; Illinois Arts Council Agency; Joan Mitchell Foundation; John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; The Joyce Foundation; Leveraging Investments in Creativity, Inc. (LINC); The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation; and the generosity of members and supporters.

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BOLT Residency is a highly competitive, juried, one-year artists studio residency program offering contemporary artists the opportunity to engage the Chicago arts community and its public in critical dialogue about contemporary art. BOLT functions as an incubator program - taking a holistic approach to the development of residents’ artistic careers by providing: studio work space, exhibition opportunities, professional development, and creative community. Uniquely comprehensive, BOLT is structured to provide artists with myriad resources and support to create, build upon, and sustain a long term career in the arts.

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Exhibition Dates
May 30 - June 17, 2014

Gallery Hours
Monday - Friday: 9 am - 5 pm
Saturday: 12 - 6pm

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