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Man and the Machine:
A Profile of Artist David B. Jang

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David B. Jang
Red Inclination, 2016; 100" x 31" x 31"; Window Blinds, Steel, Electric Motor and Custom Circuit Board.

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Red Inclination, 2016
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Window Blinds, Steel, Electric Motor
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One part artist, one part engineer, David Jang is inspired by man's dependence on the man-made. His kinetic sculptures nest in the cross-section between the experience of man and machine. They are simultaneously hilarious and haunting; they shift, drip and whirl, causing us to re-examine our dependence on the appliances and electronics that populate our daily lives.

Jang's process is one of constant experimentation: he refines and re-thinks each sculpture until it is warped, flipped, tripped and running just as he wants. "I look at these sculptures like a drawing or painting," he said. When you draw, you go back and forth, there's a push and pull that's happening with your physical motion and thought process. For these sculptures the push and pull comes from me experimenting and science, or biology, or whatever you want to call it, pushing back."





David B. Jang. *Compression Panorama*, 2016; 48" x 144" x 48" (dimensions variable)
Air Compressed Plastic Bottle, Vibrating Electric Motor and Custom Circuit Board

In his most recent work, *Deflecting Production*, featured in his Fall 2016 solo show at Gallery 825, the push and pull is witnessed in the perpetual motion of the installation. Driven by an electric motor and custom circuit boards, the hinged rods produce a scissor-like movement that never ceases. The patterns made from the overlaying of one metal rod on top of another create an intricate, detailed and always changing room-sized object.

In their play with light and pattern, Jang's sculptures constructed of window blinds, such as *Red Inclination* and *Black Lewdness*, are among the most painterly in his oeuvre. As the blinds automatically switch from open to

closed, they shift the light that filters into the room through their slats, having just enough impact on the surrounding environment to change the way the room is perceived. The patterns created by the layering of blinds on top of blinds draw in the eye, moving it around the sculpture as might a painted pattern on a canvas. "When I first began this window-blinds piece, I was manually turning them," said Jang. "I started to wonder what it would look like if I were to have several cubicles of window blinds, hooked up to an electric motor so they could turn in unison. So they would adhere to a particular pattern of performing."



David B. Jang, *Subjectivity Value*, 2014; 105" x 444" x 150" (dimensions variable)
Window Blinds, Steel, Electric Motor and Custom Circuit Board

There is a palpable, literal rhythm to Jang's work: the sculptures make noise as they move. Whether it's the plastic clinking of the blinds opening and closing, or the whirring of an electric fan, the kinetic motion is further articulated by the sound created by synthetic materials shifting through space. In his work, *Compression Panorama*, unmarked plastic soda bottles are hung from above and hooked up to an electric motor that causes them to vibrate against one another. Here Jang plays with the language of movement and how motion is perceived in today's consumer culture. The vibrating bottles create a heavy hum, loud and impossible to ignore. In today's world we recognize a

vibration as an alert: a new e-mail, text, or other notification is communicated through a visible and audible buzz that demands a response.

By distorting the original functionality of the appliance or fixture in his sculpture, Jang tests the bounds of the Uncanny Valley, the theory which postulates that the closer a robot, puppet, or other non-human entity comes in appearance to a human, the more repellent it is to an actual human. If a robot or puppet looks sufficiently non-human but behaves as a human does, its humanist traits elicit an empathetic response (think C3PO for example). However, if the entity appears realistically humanoid, its non-human characteristics become



David B. Jang. *Deflecting Production*, 2016; 120" x 216" x 120" (dimensions variable)
Electric Motor, Steel and Custom Circuit Board

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more pronounced, evoking a feeling of eeriness or strangeness to its human counterpart. Jang's allowing these electronics and fixtures from the everyday landscape to take on different motions or functions from their intended purpose, lifting them out of their normal, domestic context, makes them provoke this same feeling of strangeness.

Appliances are human-like in their purpose. They have a job, a function, they contribute to society in their way. Machines were, and continue to be, invented to minimize human labor. "All of these fixtures are like therapy," Jang hypothesized. "We constantly rely on these things. We fetishize consumerism. Just watch a show about a house renovation. The fantasy is about how comfortable their lives will be, about how much better they'll feel because of their new appliances and devices. Everything now is moving so fast. Convenience has become a human priority."

The narrative of machines revolting against their human masters is not a new one. It has appeared in science fiction since the beginning of the genre. Viewing Jang's art, one may be reminded of the machine rebellion à la *Maximum Overdrive*, in which once docile appliances and vehicles begin to fight back, re-appropriating their human-programmed functions to attack the species that created them. Jang addresses notions of the machine's dependability and our reliance on the effectiveness of our own electronic devices to aid us in functioning as humans in today's society. We function as humans because we have access to phones, computers, appliances and electronic devices that make our lives comfortable and convenient. Are we judged as much by our access to machines as we are by our compassion or empathy towards others, qualities that are often defined as being exclusively human? Machines were created to enhance our experience of life. What Jang makes clear in his kinetic sculptures is that such machines have become inseparable from the human experience.

