

Cat's Cradle Constructions: a game for several players or more intent on inverting, subverting, parodying or accenting the laws of gravity.

"... the diagonal line of connection and changes of state, webwork of ... fissures and openings. Reality here develops as a multiplicity of hypotheses continually etching themselves into the concrete, a reality founded not in ... given a priori, but re-created at each point anew through ... specific gestures, actions, or speculations." (Kwinter, S. [2002]. *Architectures of Time: toward a theory of the event in modernist culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. 117)

"... tactics is never autonomous but always contingent. It depends on the very conditions – power – that it both lacks and seeks to subvert. It mines it blindly, provisionally, and always at intimate proximity from within." (Kwinter, S. [2002]. *Architectures of Time: toward a theory of the event in modernist culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. 123)

"... the line and the diagram work as ends in themselves. This is not intended to preclude pragmatic necessities. Rather it is to allow for the emergence of the diagram as a plotting of complexity – a complex of relations – that is always more than the addition of elements." (Benjamin, A. [1998] *Lines of Work: notes on diagrams*. *Architecture New York*, 23. 39)

Paul Cullen's skeletal arrangements of wood and metal struts that pin various domestic objects to the ceiling are both ludic and prosaic. They demonstrate nervous, propositional energies alongside a protracted pedantry of constructional deliberation. They are like metaphysical speculations diagrammed through an ensemble of meaningful vectors, yet recall distracted workshop idylls in the afternoon. Sometimes like a clutch of jackstraws before they spill onto floor or table, Cullen's bunches of sticks and brackets all converge on one item or one small area overhead, with an insistence that conveys both maniacal intent and thoughtless aggregation. Cullen's *Falsework* installations map the complexity of real things onto the complexity of formal, heuristic schemata, while evoking with great affection the elaborately indirect means of attaining simple mechanical goals in the drawings of Heath Robinson and Rube Goldberg.

During one of his numerous trips to Europe and the United States over the last few years to see examples of site-specific art, garden designs and various types of artistic and scientific models, Cullen discovered the late 18th century Eise Eisinga Orrery in Franeker, the Netherlands. Eisinga, a wool carder and amateur astronomer, built an accurate, working model of the solar system in his living room to prove to his panicked neighbours that the earth's imminent incineration in the sun due to planetary conjunction and collision, would not happen. With its accommodation of the scaled relations of tiny planets' orbits and their gravitational attractions to a cumbersome panoply of wheels, weights and pulleys, Eisinga's planetarium struck Cullen as having certain affinities with the earnest absurdities of Goldberg and Robinson, and with the purposive purposelessness of his own forlornly specific assemblages.

Cullen's sustained speculations on, and inversions of, the laws and effects of gravity might align his practice with Peter Sloterdijk's assertion, which updates Marx on the critique of religion, that "all criticism begins with the critique of gravity". Though it would be plausible to trace a far reaching history of signs and materialities that favoured the porous, the perforated, the latticed, the speckled, the tessellated, the light and the relational, especially outside of Europe, Sloterdijk's argument that "all previous natural languages, including theoretical discourse, were developed for a world of weight and solid substances" is persuasive up to a point. Cullen, however, indicates no aspiration to find himself in a totally weightless world of

lightness and frictionless mobility. Cullen's desire to both subvert and point up the workings of gravity were evident in his earlier series of drawings and installations in which pieces of furniture and sets of domestic items were suspended via rope and pulleys from gallery ceilings and walls. As with his current work, these objects were often dissected assertively by cuts and notches that, together with the straining tracery of cords, made each work resemble a type of room-size exploded diagram of the everyday; a world in traction displaying domestic space as a field of forces and things that are kept in provisional tension through the explanatory patterns of habit. Through the weighted and accented specificity of each carefully deployed item to every other one in Cullen's work, gravity is marked up, accented both as an invisible network of connectivity and as a means for the world to attain cumulative, numerable presence.

The surgical incision into a world whose formalities and solidities may oppress us, links Cullen's project with that of Gordon Matta-Clark, who sawed through houses and bored through laminations of brick and plaster to recover the exteriority of the interior, and aggressively open up architecture's hidden politics of the social. Cullen's filling up of 'between' spaces with falsework thickets of bracing, props and clamps, on the other hand, leans partway toward the accumulative tactics of Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau* projects, in which 'empty' space became inhabited by crystalline accretions and grottoes of modelled facets, that acted as equivalents for all the unseen or hidden, but palpable, energies of the psycho-sexual realm, the 'noise' and unmanageable connections between discordant things in the modern world's economies of material excess and profusion. The traits of obsessive addition and alteration which help shape the *Falsework* fabrications, are even more present in the intense repetitions and accumulations that characterise Cullen's books and doctored chairs (not included in this exhibition), that have been manically perforated by swarms and clusters of yellow pencils.

Although Cullen's *Falsework* contrivances employ an open-form linearity of organisation that does resemble the objectivity of diagrams prioritising the eye and disentangling the body from the thickness of the world, a closer look at these stuttering networks shows a metonymical language of abutments, joints, cuts and discontinuities that puts the participant artist/viewer in the midst of the temporal and the responsive; in the space of partial procedures of alignment and dis-alignment, of potentially endless re-adjustments. The programmatic is constantly deflected by improvisation. The works partake of Cubism's complex language of continuity and discontinuity; and restate Cubism's triangulation of the temporal, the tactile and the systematic. Cullen's use of real objects, however, differs from the Cubist pictorialising of the object or part object, preferring to let the objects and a lexicon of simple constructional materials retain their identities as recalcitrant instabilities, holding their place in the world as well as the artwork.

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