

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Julianne Swartz

JOSEE BIENVENU

Julianne Swartz's sculpture is often made out of materials one might acquire from a hardware store—wire, cement blocks, PVC piping—but these commonplace components are transformed into objects that mimic human processes of communication and connection.

In a set of seven sculptures, clock mechanisms embedded in concrete blocks move fragile-seeming constructions of wire and string around in slow, small circles. Some of these inch around with an insectoid furtiveness close to the floor, while others, more vertically oriented, respond to viewers' footsteps like ultrasensitive antennae. But while the works seem delicate, they are, in their continuous movement, as inexorable and insistent as erosion. In *Touch/Knowledge* (all works 2007), a length of silver monofilament is dragged over coils of wire, suggesting a victory of charm over brutality but also something darker: a kind of stubborn progress made in the face of common sense. In *Known/Unknown*, a loop of wire heedlessly chases its own tail; in *Corner Moon*, installed in a corner, a tiny mirror rotating around a light makes a little eclipse appear and disappear, whole lunar cycles passing in mere minutes.

It is the shift in force from physically unassuming to slightly sinister that keeps these works animated and prevents them from becoming too easy or too cute. One of the kinetic sculptures shown here features wire twisted into the shape of a quivering heart, skating dangerously close to whimsy but in the end narrowly avoiding it; in concert with the other sculptures, it refuses to be categorized as gently, and simply, anthropomorphic—there is something relentless at work here too.

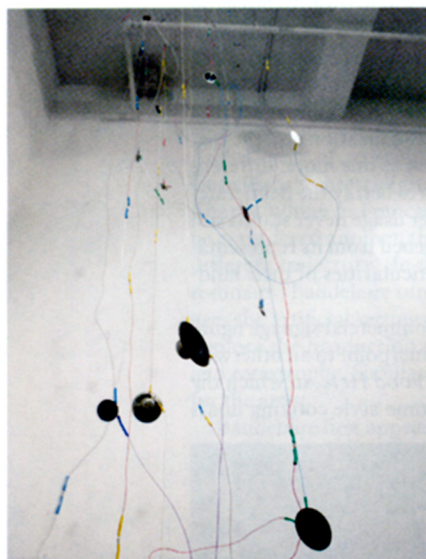
Swartz's earlier works include periscope-like PVC pipes that, when looked into, show viewers their own back or head, or other confounding views, echoing Bruce Nauman's *Live-Taped Video Corridor*, 1970, in which—using the mechanics of cinema rather than those of

everyday objects—viewers walk toward the image of their own back walking away from the camera behind them. Like Nauman, Swartz creates perceptual and metaphysical puzzles, although hers are less about frustration than they are about existential connection.

Body, for example, is made up of a cascade of tiny dangling speakers that emit a low and continuous murmur of clicks and pops, like some utterly foreign language. Only by insinuating yourself very nearly inside the sculpture can you untangle those sounds and begin to hear the voices, which broadcast spoken phrases like "I'm here," "Don't be afraid," and "You are safe here"—the reassuring character of which is undermined by the creepy quality of the whisper—a more intimate take on the kind of pursuit required by Nauman's *Doppelgänger/UFO*, 1988, in which one has to chase a revolving tape recorder around in a circle in order to hear what its murmuring voices are saying. Swartz's *Open* features a similarly ambivalent relationship between what is said and how it is said: a wooden box, when opened, lets loose a rush of protestations of love that are, somehow, disheartening.

The exhibition also includes *After All*, a set of music boxes that Swartz created with the inventor Matteo Ames. Here, "It's a Small World," the familiar Disney song, is divided up between the multiple boxes, which play separately or out of sync. These works share qualities with the others in the show—a stubborn continuity, the disembodiment of something familiar—but they are somehow less affecting, perhaps because more complicated, than the far simpler assemblages that quiver like activated nerves in the other room.

—Emily Hall



Julianne Swartz,
Body (detail),
2007, speakers,
wire, electronics,
and sound track,
11' 8" x 1' x 1'.