

# ARTFORUM

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**Julianne Swartz**  
DECORDOVA SCULPTURE PARK AND MUSEUM

"How Deep Is Your," the elliptical title of Julianne Swartz's first major museum survey, doubles as the title of a 2012 work that comprises a seemingly incompatible overlay of two distinctive sound tracks about love transported through the museum's meandering architecture by way of bright blue plastic and PVC tubing. The unlikely entwining of the John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band track "Love/Sing" with the Bee Gee's sentimental pop song "How Deep Is Your Love" offers a synesthetic invitation to consider the many improbable aesthetic dualities that course through nearly everything Swartz produces. If this piece engages the highly contested antipodes of modernism, most prominently the supposed schism between visually and bodily oriented knowledge, Swartz broadens the conversation to consider how emotion complicates these two polarities.

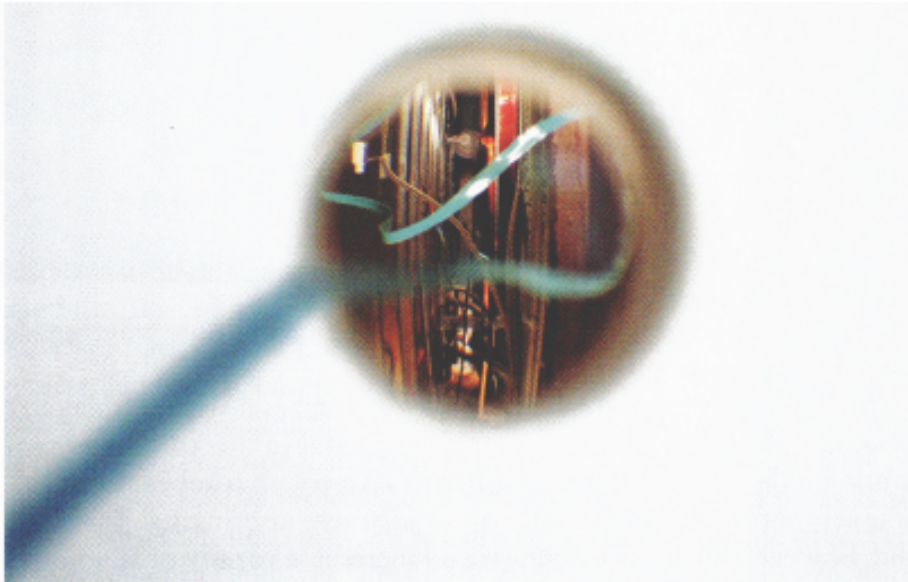
Given the variety of ludic, mechanically driven gizmos on view in this show, it would appear the artist is preoccupied with the intersection of affect and technology. If this concern is rendered rather literally in both *Garden of Infinite Hearts*, 2007, in which plastic, paper, and fabric hearts quiver erratically as they dangle from thin wires that emerge from a cement-block installation, and *Open*, 2009, a wood box containing a voice that repeatedly announces "I love you" when the cover is lifted, there is also something quite endearing about the artist's low-fidelity demystification of the technological phantasmagoria. Unlike Jean Tinguely's historic metamatics or Robert Morris' made-to-measure industrial materials, Swartz's sculptural devices perform their bodily inscription in a minor key, at once maudlin and matter-of-fact. Thus *Composition for a Thin Membrane*, 2012, a hanging sculpture of abaca fiber, suddenly moans in pain before falling quiet for an extended period of time, while the subdued textured sounds of *Loop*, 2010, make it seem as though the woven electric-wire wall piece is almost palpating and heaving with life.

In Swartz's hands, the entire premises feel affectively dynamic, the field of vision and physical museological structures included. In *Storagescape*, 2012, for example, the artist invites the public to peek behind the scenes into the museum's offices through a lens she has installed in a wall that serves to separate the staff's working area from the gallery space. Though they appear blurry and upside down, the anonymous bodies that ensure the institution's smooth running are thus presented as part of the exhibition display. Using equally simple gadgetry in *Camera-Less-Video*, 2009, Swartz brings the surrounding landscape into the exhibition and casts the viewer's gaze out by way of two

side-by-side lenses places in front of a large window in the gallery. Yet these gestures are not, in the first degree, some redux of institutional critique, so many reveals aimed at unmasking hidden ideologies, but stem instead from an interest in various "screens" that mediate phenomenological experience in museological spaces. It is no accident that Swartz insists on imperfect technologies-blurry lenses and refracted mirrors- in which the spectator partially sees her own likeness while viewing her environment. Rather than reinforcing notions of technological determinism, Swartz explores the pathetic entanglement of subjectivities and sensations, and the ways in which the two are partially constructed by and precariously diffused within divergent techniques and structures of perception.

This oeuvre suggests that the most fundamental aspects of existence, such as looking, feeling, and knowing, depend on profoundly unstable operations, actions, and objects. Swartz herself is divided as to whether it is possible to reconcile the potentially paralyzing reality of perpetual fragmentation. *Yes!* she says with *Affirmation*, 2012 a chirpy sound piece (installed in the restrooms and lounge area) that shares positive statements: "I want to be with you," "Your existence matters." "You are a winner." Yet *no!* she suggests elsewhere, as with *Surrogates*, 2012, a group of three cement-and-mica sculptures titled after the artist, her husband, and their daughter, which emit a constant and deeply disconcerting tickling. This uncertainty invites spectators to fill in the blank of the exhibition's title: "How Deep Is Your" becomes a placeholder for a constantly changing and permanently conflicted state of encounter.

-Nuit Banai



Julianne Swartz  
*Line Drawing*, 2003/2012  
Plastic tape, lenses  
Plexiglas, mirrors, lights  
fans, PVC pipe, objects  
found on-site  
Installation view