

KUNSTHALLE BASEL

# GEUMHYUNG JEONG

It is a terrifying yet scintillating technological world we find ourselves in. Speaking, that is, for “us” humans. The food we eat is industrially produced and genetically modified, our bodies’ performances are chemically enhanced, our homes are filled with devices that speak back to us (and even have names: Alexa, Siri), the minutiae of our identities are processed by software algorithms. Traditional distinctions between the human and the technological other are getting rather thin. Geumhyung Jeong knows this.

The South Korean artist and choreographer has from the very beginning explored the depths of the human-versus-other divide. Trained in dance, theater, and filmmaking, she began her career by making performances. The first of these involved attaching rubber face masks to different parts of her own shrouded, slowly writhing body or to moving electric vacuum cleaners, giving the dislocated heads eerie agency. In subsequent pieces she performed physical rehab maneuvers or CPR on medical dummies—but tenderly, almost erotically, as if attempting to bring these undead things to life.

Eventually Jeong began creating installations to display her vast collection of facsimile body parts and related paraphernalia. She laid them out like archaeological artifacts: prosthetic devices, medical test specimens, sex toys, inflatable dolls, all arranged according to category or type. Accompanying videos juxtaposed

**HOMEMADE**

**RC TOY**

**3.5.-11.8.2019**

*Homemade RC Toy, 2019*

Installation with robotic sculptures, videos,  
and various materials, consisting of:

**1**

5 robotic sculptures

Mixed media

Each approx. 29 × 90 × 107 cm

**2**

4 sets of object arrangements

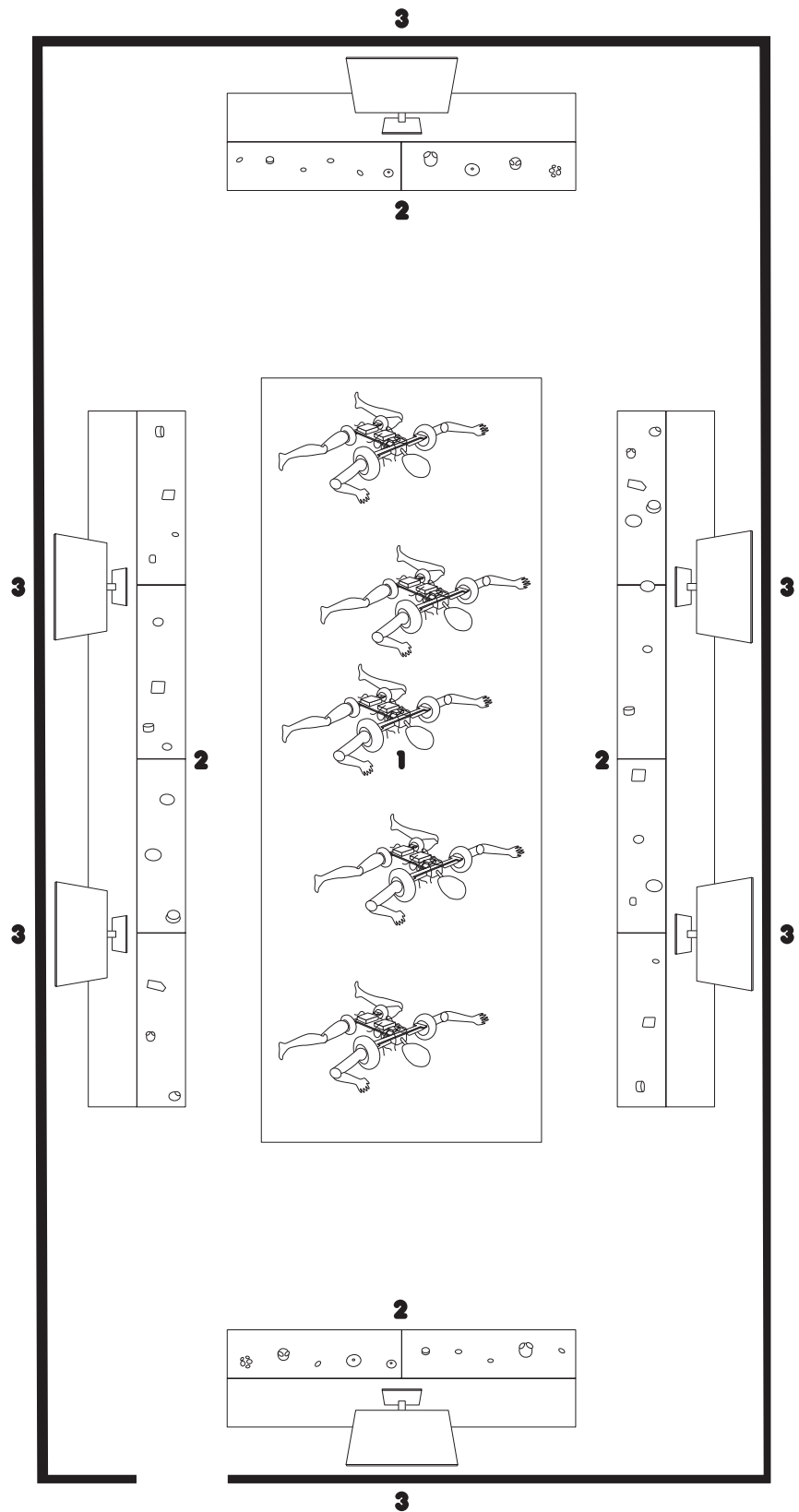
Mixed media

Dimensions variable

**3**

6 HD films, color, silent

Various durations, looped



infomercials describing the items with her own matter-of-fact demonstrations on how to use them. Thus, through different media, Jeong has been doggedly probing the relationship between her living, fleshly self and inanimate bodies, whole or in pieces, in a manner both captivating and strange.

Whereas until now Jeong's surrogate bodies were docile and lifeless, in her Kunsthalle Basel exhibition she focuses on the body's active enmeshment with technologies, and on questions of control. Her new installation centers on five human-scale, remote-control sculptures that she cobbled together from metal brackets, batteries, wires, dental study props, and disassembled mannequins. They lie face-down, with rollers jutting out of their articulated jaws and rubber wheels for joints; the mess of visible wires circulating between their batteries appear to be veins and organs, while thick cables connect them to electrical outlets, like exaggerated umbilical cords. They are ungainly yet impressive, neither demonstrably male nor female, and neither very humanoid nor quite toy car. Unlike the spectacularly sophisticated tech devices on the market today, these freaky machines look like the work of a pre-digital-age amateur inventor, or the results of a teenage science experiment.

It is interesting that a trained dancer noted for her precise choreographies has turned to such homespun mechanics. Jeong spent a lot of time sourcing the component parts on specialist websites and eBay, buying them new and used. To construct and operate her creations, she taught herself the basics of programming and robotics. In the newly commissioned performance she has conceived and executes together with them, they will never move smoothly, convincingly, *humanly*. They are clumsy, home-made replicants. Against the sleekness and industrial perfection we expect today from our gadgets, or the organic materiality of something natural, these are Dr. Frankenstein-like creations only tangentially like us.

Surrounding them are stepped plinths whose bright colors echo the robot sculptures' wiring. The plinths display fetishistic agglomerations of spare parts: wheels, cables, gutted medical-practice torsos, home repair parts (their Ace Hardware store labels intact). Some items are shiny, like new products for sale, and one gets the sense that the artist is fascinated with their practical beauty. Others are slightly battered from past experiments. Interspersed are silent informational videos that document the

planning, building, and activation of Jeong's technological offspring.

In their default state, the sculptures are frozen, comatose, even if all that wiring and machinery certainly *suggests* movement. And indeed, the installation will be the setting for a series of live interactions between the artist and her uncanny others, beginning June 6 and continuing thereafter. In the performances, the artist's body melds with that of her creations as she crawls at their level, lying at the start partly atop an eviscerated medical torso outfitted with crudely taped joystick controllers. She caresses it with such excruciating slow and sensual allure, it feels almost too intimate a scene to watch. Fondling the attached controllers, she occasionally uses enough force to elicit movement from a nearby robot, accompanied by a hum and glowing battery-powered lights.

Absurdly simple, yet somehow spellbinding, the relationship revealed between Jeong and her robots—essentially her quest and inevitable failure to make (human) contact—drives the performance. It is a mechanical ballet both curious and unsettling, ominous and weirdly sensual. The artist's choreographed interactions, like her exhibition as a whole, question the boundaries between animate and inanimate, controller and controlled, flesh and machine. The artist thus advances a vital comment on our technologized world: as humans are increasingly replaced by machines, as “dumb” things gain life force and agency, and as we humans become ever more inert, Jeong spectacularly stages the transformation of our relationships.

Geumhyung Jeong was born in 1980 in Seoul, where she continues to live and work.

**PERFORMANCE TIMES**  
Duration approx. 45 minutes

6.6.2019, Thursday, 7 pm

9.6.2019, Sunday, 2 pm

10.6.2019, Monday, 2 pm

11.6.2019, Tuesday, 2 pm

12.6.2019, Wednesday, 2 pm

14.6.2019, Friday, 7 pm

15.6.2019, Saturday, 7 pm

16.6.2019, Sunday, 7 pm

10.8.2019, Saturday, 2 pm

11.8.2019, Sunday, 2 pm

Please note: Seating is limited, no reservations, and no admission after the performance has begun; please arrive on time.

Thanks to

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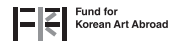
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**GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION**

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German

5.5.2019, Sunday, 3 pm and

26.5.2019, Sunday, 3 pm and

16.6.2019, Sunday, 3 pm

Curator's tour with Elena Filipovic, in English

27.6.2019, Thursday, 6:30 pm

Guided tour, in English

**EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

**Kunsthalle Basel Night**

12.6.2019, Wednesday, 7 – 10 pm

Geumhyung Jeong performs a technical test of her robotic sculptures from 7 – 9 pm. Free entry.

*Kunsthalle ohne Schwellen*

8.7. – 2.8.2019, workshops for people with disabilities

In the all-day workshops, participants explore the current exhibitions and try out different forms of artistic expression. By reservation only: [kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch](mailto:kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch)

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find a selection of publications related to Geumhyung Jeong.

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More information at [kunsthallebasel.ch](http://kunsthallebasel.ch)