



Clémentine Adou  
Xmas  
Text by Benjamin Thorel

“Movement is not material. It means simply that the work extends in time as well as space. ... Perhaps it means nothing more complicated than being able to ‘breathe freely’ in new dimensions, finding a language which situates them [the artists] in the world as they have become aware of it.”

Three movements are developed by Clémentine Adou in Xmas: pictures, sound, objects are set in motion, each according to their own logics, in a loop, without a pause; each one isolated from the others. The screening shows the streets and, in the shop windows, the machines that stop and go, under the twinkle lights. The images are silent: the soundtrack is cut, edited, and broadcast in another space. The voices, the noise, the music, the singing and honking, are now distorted to create a suspended, eerie soundscape. Somewhere else, dissected umbrellas are spinning with hesitation; they get stuck, then make an effort, insist, gather speed, and go on spinning.

Where are we? Is it Christmas, which was just a month ago, and will come back in eleven? Winter break as a utopia: fairy lights and paper lantern turn the longest nights in bright ones; trees are dressed up with colored balls as if there were covered in fruits; and so on. The windows of the department stores stage the easy ritual of “Christmas magic”: they bustle with automatons made of paper and other biodegradable material, shaking and fidgeting, embodying anew “the fetishism of the commodity.” We are back in Walter Benjamin’s texts, with his descriptions of dummies in arcades: uncanny, motionless reflections of the passers-by, showing them they are irrelevant to the value exchange mechanisms.

“Breathe freely,” writes Guy Brett. In his book, *Kinetic Art*, he brings Lygia Clark and David Medalla with Takis to insist on movement as part of a language of forms the meaning of which comes into existence in the spectators’ perceptions. I thought of Brett because of Clémentine’s moving sculptures, witty combines of found objects and small motors that spin in a weird, and exhilarating, way. The umbrellas ribs are open and dangling; little red clown noses are stuck on them, and they have their own way of randomly sliding back and forth the fragile metal rods, making arhythmical “bops” and “plops.” This aleatory, unpredictable dynamics is simultaneously playful and moving; it doesn’t comply with any predetermined, well-oiled, time-limited, logics or mechanism. In the video, Xmas, the camera creates color compositions out of the heaps of fake gifts, then catches a spiraling form, before it focuses on an abstract, fugitive detail.

Works that manifest themselves as moving, changeable phenomena, may provoke a suspension in time; an “eternal present,” writes Brett; an “unfixed expression” that allows to reconsider perceptions and consciousness. “Because they are always being renewed, afresh from the beginning, they suggest a kind of liberation from historical time and from the oppression of past accumulation of material.” What is at stake with the animation of things, is to set time and space to a new rhythm.