



FLAMINGO

**EVERY VESSEL RECORDS
AND DRAMATISES
THE HISTORY OF ITS
MANUFACTURE**

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KUNSTNEREN SOM VÆRK
6. MAJ - 5. JUNI

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The sculptural qualities of sound

Line Møller Lauritsen, cand.mag in Visual Culture, and editor of the podcast Lydkunst.

On stage is a man with a large wind instrument, a contrabass clarinet, that he slowly swings up in the air and down again as he blows long low notes. In front of him stands a barefooted man bowing the strings of his double bass. Between them, sits a third man gently beating a snare drum with two whisks, while swirling a marble around in circles on the drum head. And soon this moment of sounds and movements is translated and transformed into a 3D-printed sculpture ...

The three men on stage are the trio Flamingo, and with the exhibition 'Every vessel records and dramatises the history of its manufacture' at Kunsthal NORD they have installed themselves to make sculptures out of concerts.

The sculptures are translations of each of the three daily concerts Flamingo performed throughout the exhibition period. They are a decoction of information about sound and movements gathered during the concerts. An advanced computer algorithm, specially developed for the project, is fed this information and converts it into a digital file that is printed by a 3D printer.

The sculptures are unique because each of the

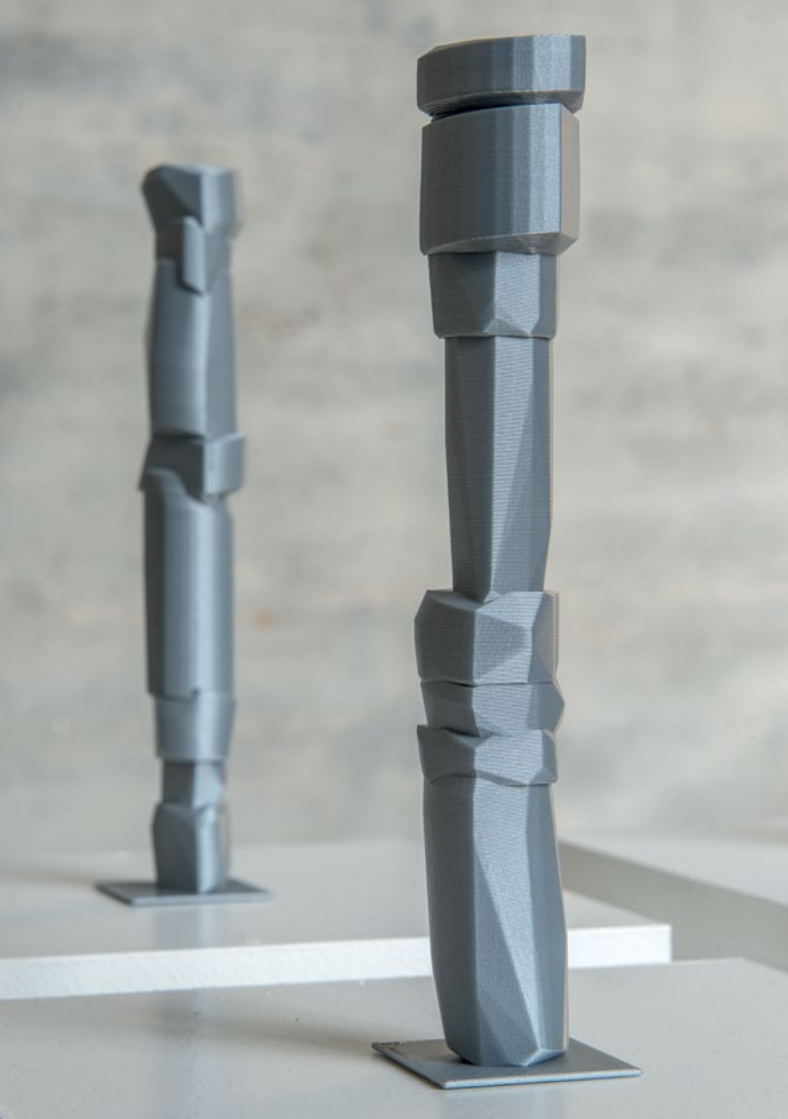


concerts is exactly that. Flamingo plays improvised music, which in itself means that there will always be variations in the recorded sound. The movements of the musicians are never the same from concert to concert. The number of people in the room also varies; For some concerts two people listened to the music, sometimes twenty, and maybe only one of them listened to the concert in its full length. A large part of the concerts Flamingo were likely performed in the empty gallery space without a crowd. These factors were crucial for the final design of the sculptures.

By incorporating the movements in space during concerts into the sculpture, Flamingo emphasizes the unique in experiencing music performed over limited time in a limited space. It is a much more complex experience than a strictly sonic experience.

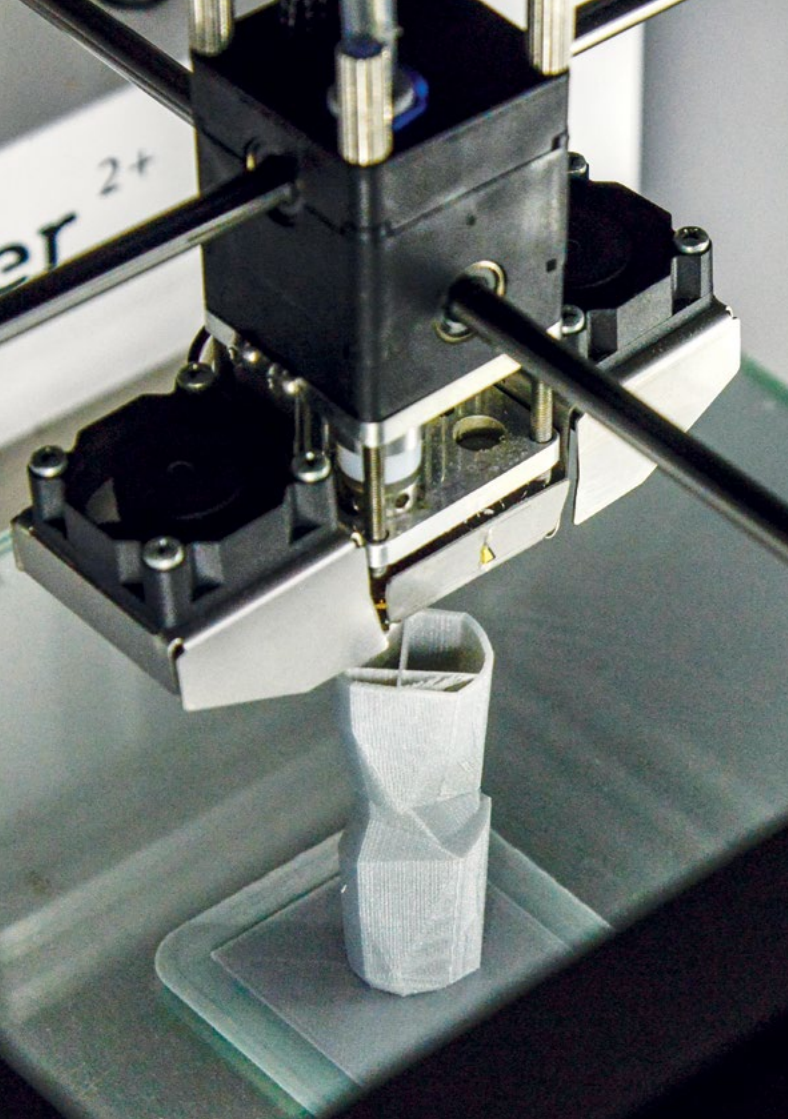
Not all factors can be detected and condensed into a printable digital file. For example it affects your listening experience if you hear music alone or with someone you care about; if it's summer or winter, or if your bike had a flat tire when you were heading out the door that morning. There are a myriad of factors that establish that concerts are always unique experiences, and with the project 'Every Vessel' Flamingo exposes and clarifies exactly that. The documentation of the concerts is not a reproduction of the sound, as concert documentation most often is, but an attempt to reproduce what is unique in the experience.





The exhibition's title, 'Every vessel records and dramatises the history of its manufacture', is a quotation by the art historian Norman Bryson, who in his book 'Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting' conducts an analysis of a classic Still Life painting. Bryson points out that the pictured candles, bowls, etc. are more than just their physical representation, they also carry, as the quotation says, the story of their creation within them. The surface of a container, for example, tells the story of a potter's neat work with hands and turntable.

Similarly, the sculptures in 'Every Vessel' carry the story of Flamingo's concerts within them, they are more than just form. The reference to Norman Bryson can also be seen in conjunction with the concerts which not only produce sound. The sculptures and the sonic experiences are much more than just shapes and sounds. In the small details of the sound and the sculptural surfaces there are far greater narratives and meanings.



Meet a new medium: The concert sculpture

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About the use of 3D printing in the performance work and exhibition "Every vessel records and dramatises the history of its manufacture"

A new release format for music

With digital music distribution, it has become increasingly difficult to publish records and earn a profit. Everything is made available, everything is shared online. The three musicians who make up the trio Flamingo, Christian Windfeld, Chris Heenan and Adam Pultz Melbye have found a way of challenging this trend by materializing the digital. In fact Every Vessel started as a project to explore new release formats for music; how to maintain the overall experience of a concert in sculptural form using 3D printing. The sound is not stored on a CD or LP that contains the sound and can be played back but as a sculptural image of the concert, a handheld figure. Every Vessel, however, is different from and more than just a number of sculptures. It is a performance that took place over a four-week period in Kunsthall Nord, where people and machines, music and sculptures were carefully staged in a spatial course where you as a visitor played a

number of important roles - as museum guest, concert goer, art audience and even as a designer.

The music

The sound of music calls for you the moment you enter Kunsthal Nord. In a raw concrete room with a particularly high ceiling, three instrumentalists are in action. With double bass, the uncommon but highly fascinating contrabass clarinet and a myriad of small percussion instruments on a snare drum an intense and sensible music is being created. The music is complicated and the sounds are dense without being loud. In a slow pulse there are a lot of intricate exchanges between the musicians: one on one, two against one, all together or solo at the same time. The

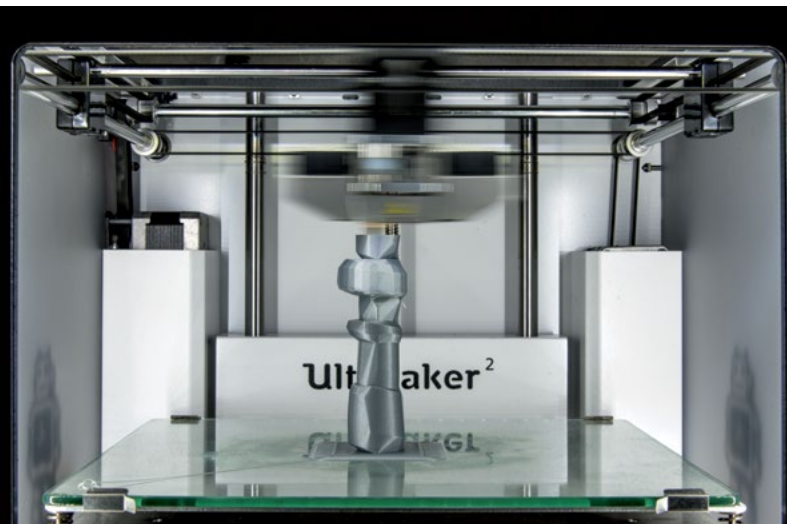
expression draws on classical avantgarde music where unknown timbres and refined patterns of notes and sounds play a more important role than recognizable melody and basic form. For example, it is hard to figure out how much is pre-composed and how much is created in the moment.

On the wall behind the musicians ones curiosity is further stimulated by the projection of two screens with a variety of curves in different colors and sequences. They are constantly evolving and you sense that they are in some way connected with the musical experience.

The music stretches over half an hour and draws on the concert format. Some guests sit down and stay until the music rings out. Others follow the dramaturgy of the gallery and gets up in mid-performance to move on through the exhibition.

The sculptures

In the adjacent room the art audience feels at home. A forest of tall and slender white-painted pillars is grouped in threes with an approximately 20 cm high silver gray figure standing on each one of them. Even though the small figures have an abstract expression they still contain an organic potential: they are reminiscent of tall silhouettes, strange monolithic rocks or a chimney that the Spanish master architect Gaudi could have dreamed up. This is mainly due to the variation between

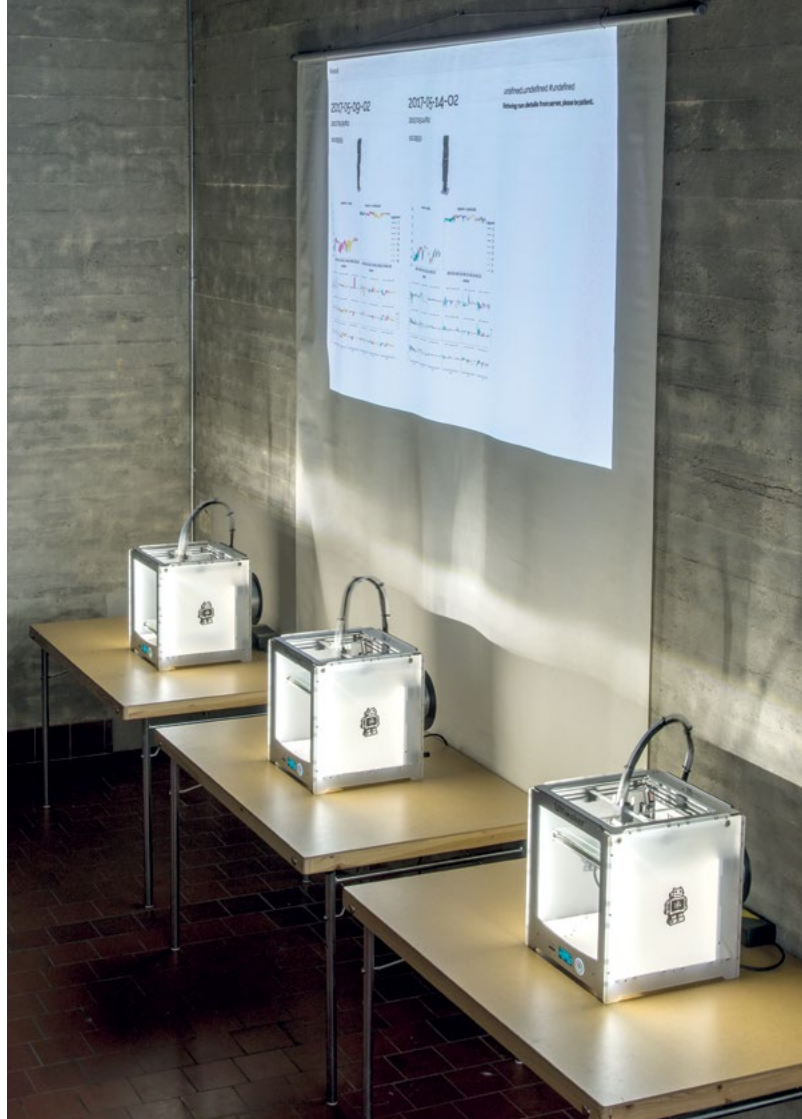


the sculptures. Because even though the sculptures obviously have similarities in terms of their size, material and characteristic grooved surface, it is easy to see that they offer different paths of deepenings and augmentations. Each pillar is marked with a date; Three sculptures have been made every day over the course of a month. At the start of the exhibition the room was only sparsely inhabited but after 30 days of exhibition 72 sculptures occupied the pillars.

The alchemy

Ultimately the exhibition leads one down a staircase into a nearly dark engine room where you sense the threads are gathered. Three 3D printers glow in the dim lit room and one of them is about to create another sculpture made of silver-gray plastic thread. The abrupt movements and aggressive sound of the 3D printers computer-controlled glue gun, that gradually constructs the figure, makes the entire scenery alluring and alarming at the same time. You suddenly find yourself very close to a small mysterious robot performer who performs its little solo dance within the scope of the designated print plate, but at the same time reveals its process and its transformation of raw material like you were witnessing an alchemical scene where films and novels have taught us that security is always questionable and consequences ethically incomprehensible.

On the wall over the three printers a projection shows





which sculptures are being printed and what data of which they consist. Numeric values and curves show that data is being processed and the parameters tell you that there is a connection between the music and the sculptures. Here you can see the sound of the instruments, the bodies of the musicians and even the movements of the spectators which via microphones and sensors mounted in the concert room are collected as data and transformed into solid form.

On a final projection in the room you can browse the data sets of all the exhibitions sculptures. Here, in the alchemist's cave, you get the "explanation" of the previous two rooms, the link between music and sculptures, but this is also where one's astonishment gains momentum. What is it that we cannot see? How can sound become physical form? What is the secret formula, and can I "trust" the sculptural form that the printer gives the music? Was it really the form I heard?

Of course there is an algorithm behind this. A software that interprets the data recorded during the concert. The 3D printer itself can not "hear", but it can read the file formed by audio and motion data from the concert. To me, however, what is particularly interesting in Every Vessel is that as a viewer or concert goer I do not doubt that there is a connection between the concert and the sculpture. That the sculpture, so to speak, is sound. But what kind of sensory register is it that I am suddenly invited to activate?



Sensing across media

The French found-object artist Arman (1928-2005) has used musical instruments as sculptural material in numerous works. In Arman's works the instruments have violently been forever silenced and paradoxically, the absence of sound becomes very intrusive. He lets the instruments change register from music to visual art, from an expectation of sound to a wondering about sculptural form. Arman uses the instruments as found objects and thus turns our expectations for one art form onto the meeting with another. These expectations for something else create an effective contradiction in the sensational experience; the point being that it does not fit, but sharpens our senses. Yes, sharpens or annoys us by shifting the normal "boxes" for sensational experiences which are extremely biased in our culture despite centuries of explicit multimedia and cross-aesthetic art (see Mitchell 2005).

Music is a time based medium in the sense that we listen to it for a certain amount of time and it makes sense to ask how long a concert lasts. Sculpture, on the other hand, is categorized primarily as a spatial media, characterized by having a physical extension in space. A sculpture 'sits' in space rather than 'lasts' in time. There is a long aesthetic theoretic tradition of linking certain ways of sensing with potential for particular enlightenment (Lessing 1766). Although media-specific characteristics do not tell us anything about the quality of our sensory experience of

concrete works, they can reveal something about our expectations to how different types of art typically organize our experience and sensation.

How, for example, we "listen to music", "look at art" and "go to a concert". A particular group of cultural consumers would often agree when to listen, look, sit, walk, speak or be quiet.

With Every Vessel, Flamingo challenges Kunsthall Nord's guests to mix such pre-set sensory mindsets in new ways. Specifically by "exhibiting concerts" in an art gallery where you will have to be present at a certain time in order to "hear the art". And even though you had the option to take a stool you had to choose where in the room you wanted to sit - and for how long. As mentioned the "concert room" followed by a "sculpture room" which then again was followed by a "tech room". One could not only see and hear music unfold over time, but also see and hear a sculpture take form. As a guest you are forced to mix the roles that relate to different ways one typically senses certain artistic media. The title of the exhibition and performance project emphasizes this attention to multimodal sensing across artistic media.

The title

"Every vessel records and dramatises the history of its manufacture" is a quotation from a book by art historian Norman Bryson. "Looking at the overlooked. Four



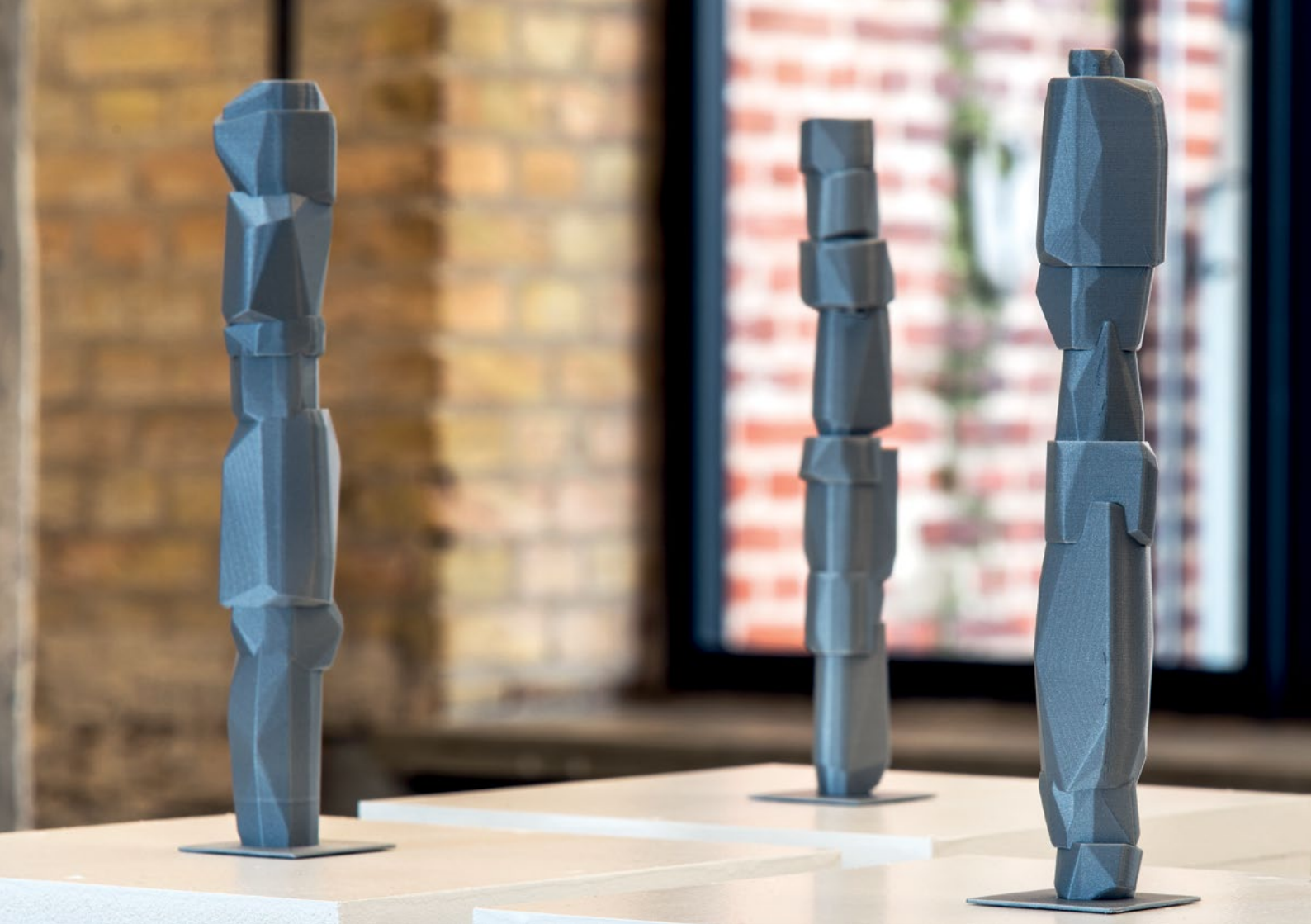
2017-05-07 #01



Essays on Still Life Painting" (1990), set new standards for how an otherwise overlooked genre, still life paintings should be analyzed - critical and constructive. The alluring formulation "every vessel" is attached to Bryson's characteristic of a 17th century painting by Spanish painter Francisco de Zubarán that focuses on the containers, vessels and candles rather than the food, in the paintings he analyzes. The full quote reads: "What engages him [Zubaran] is the sense of touch and the action of hands on matter. In the painting of Metalware and Pottery in the Prado every vessel records and dramatises the history of its manufacture" (1990: 71).

Bryson is convincingly reviewing how the four containers at Zubaran's painting each are marked by the hands and the tools that shaped the clay and the metal, but at the same time is a staging of how other hands now can grab the can and handle the cup. According to Bryson, a particularly important point in this type of still-life paintings, or bodegones as they are called in Spanish, is to create a spatial experience of proximity.

This sensation is supported by the absence of a vanishing point and the abrupt way the motif is cut as if it was a continuation of the physical space we stand in. But particularly important in connection with Flamingo's project are the intruding signs of actions or gestures, in Zubaran's case, the human hands that create jars, vessels and other containers of raw materials. Bryson



incorporates another bodegone of Francisco de Zurbarán and characterizes the penetrating sense of physical presence:

"The atmosphere is thoroughly tactile or kinesthetic." (Bryson, 72). Many analyses' of still life paintings focus on the memento mori aspect of the dead things that put our own lives into a disturbing or, if you like, awe-inspiring perspective.

Bryson, on the other hand, emphasizes how the paintings connect the bodily presence of us who look at the painting with the hands that have shaped the things and arranged them so that their materiality and shape jumps into our limbs, intruding, not only through vision but through the sense of touch as well.

The meaningful title points out that the English word 'record' marks a connection between the actual music recording and the medium that contains it. In Danish we have focused solely on the shape and materiality of the media with words like "plade", "bånd" and "Kompakt disk". The idea, as I see it, with Flamingo's concert sculptures, however, is to propose a new, completely intimate connection between the actual event, the recording of the event and the medium containing the event to reminding us of it later on. And this is where the 3D printer comes into play as a technology that can handle this particular, enveloped complexity and where the sculpture as a medium is relevant as an expression that stages, or with Bryson's words 'dramatises' its

relation to the audience, or the user, in a completely different way than, for example, a vinyl record.

The 3D printer as a performer

Flamingo's concert sculptures certainly do reflect the story of their own creation. Layer on layer like annual rings in a tree you can follow the printer's refined coil method and watch the concert take shape. The sculpture is not a symbolic interpretation of the concert, it is the concert, just in another artistic medium and with another history of creation. That is at least the sensational challenge Every Vessel poses to the audience: This sculpture is, with Norman Bryson's words, a 'vessel' consisting of improvised music, the material is plastic and the turntable a 3D printer. One of the most important points of the project is perhaps this sensational roller coaster ride which Flamingo has staged. In addition comes the incorporation of 3D printing technology as a still new, sci-fi-like or alchemistic machine known to print (almost) exactly what you want (Lipson & Kurman).

Other artists have similarly utilized the 3D printer's character as a "dream machine" or what could be called the digital technology's generative qualities. That is, the ability not only to make one form, but to produce forms that develop depending on how you interact with the software (Paul: 10). For example, the Spanish artist Alicia Framis has made an installation, where you as an audience can "print your own scream" (Framis

2013) and American Heather Dewey-Hagborg, has with her project *Stranger Visions* (2012-13), 3D-printed faces of unknown citizens created from random DNA traces found in the urban spaces. In these examples something normally physically intangible becomes present in space due to the interception of the 3D printer because data that can be digitized can also be materialized. In *Every Vessel*, the 3D printer plays the role as an objective recording technology, which, at the same time, slightly magically converts from one dimension to another, from one sensory register to another. You put time into one end and get space out of the other. Or rather: we now know that every vessel records and dramatises its own creation, hence the concert sculptures do not comply with the tradition of sculpture media to unfold for us spatially, but, with the 3D printer's intervention, give us the time of the concert.

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2017.05.25 #02

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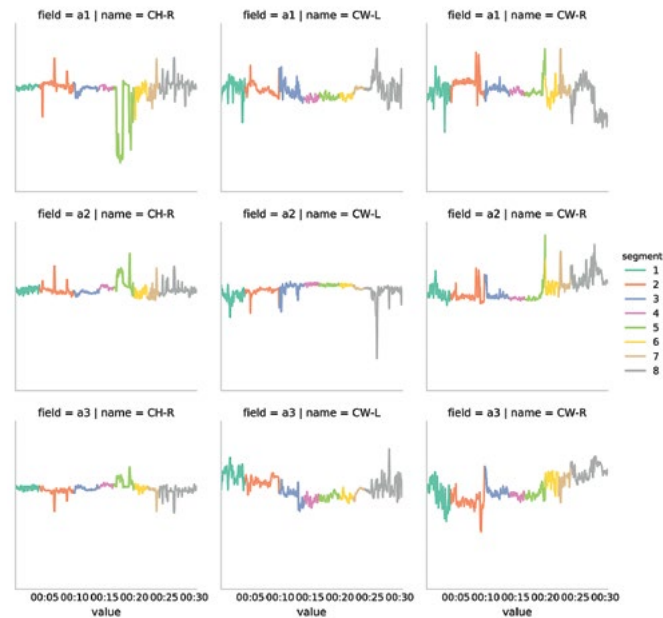
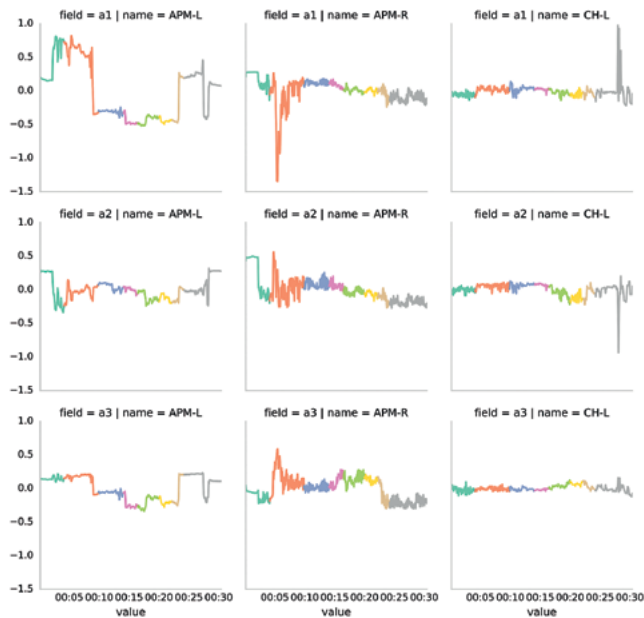
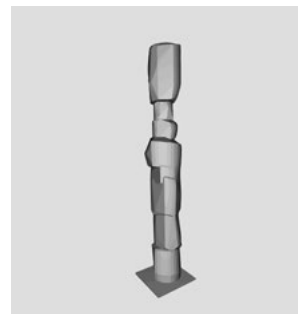
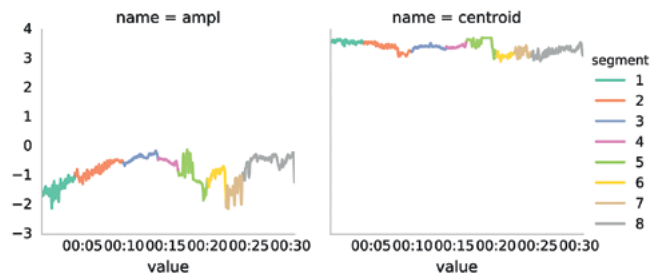




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