

Art in America

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Untitled, 2008, mixed mediums, each 72 by 36 by 18 inches

Mumbai-based Sudarshan Shetty, who has been showing internationally for some time, recently had his first solo exhibition at Tilton. The eight mechanized sculptures (all untitled, 2008) seemed to extend the scope of the automated world, offering a finely tuned tumble with the absurd. A condom attached to a ventilator rhythmically inflates and deflates. Automated shoes made of clear acrylic endlessly march in place. Watching these machines perform human functions made for a sense of a remote, floating reality, or a long-distance relationship with oneself.

The incessantly active objects were in every room of the gallery's two floors. Downstairs, two tall glass tanks contained liquids into which fabric was continually being dunked by motorized metal rods. In one, a man's suit lowered into and then lifted out of a milky fluid, suggesting a washing action; the cycle, however, never ends and seems to accomplish nothing. A heavy piece of leather in the other tank was plunged in and out of a viscous red liquid. Both contraptions use wheels and belts for a slow, ratcheting movement evoking that of a drawbridge and stress the ponderous nature of the mindless repetition. In the same room a terra-cotta pot on a set-up of turning gears repeatedly tips forward as if to pour out liquid. The gesture brings to mind the elemental need to quench one's thirst but, in this case, turns hollow, since there is no recipient and no liquid.

The most intricate piece was a group of nine cast-aluminum dog skeletons encased in red Plexiglas box forms. Each "dog" was equipped with a tiny surveillance camera placed in its ribcage, which swept the room and fed the oscillating scans to one of nine screens. Wall-mounted in a grid, the nine images became a mural-size kaleidoscope of the room, punctuated by the arc-like rib bones. But the question remains: who was operating this surveillance? Despite the tension of these unresolved issues, the piece became hypnotic through its pendular motion and graceful, curvilinear forms. Ultimately, this exhibition exerted a mesmerizing grip on the viewer. The odd, elegant devices produced a disturbing sense of human activity detached from its originating source.

-Deborah Everett