

## ARTIST INTERVIEW

Interview between Geumhyung Jeong and ICA Exhibitions Curator Andrea Nitsche-Krupp from August 2024

**ANDREA NITSCHÉ-KRUPP** How did you first start working with machines and robotics?

**GEUMHYUNG JEONG** I was initially interested in controlling an object from a distance and in the remote controller itself. Specifically, the triangular relationship between a remote controller, the controlled object, and the person controlling the object.

**ANK** When you are constructing a machine, do you have a specific movement or action you are hoping to achieve?

**GJ** Yes, I usually start by imagining the potential movements I am hoping to achieve. Often, it doesn't work like I imagined, and I must change the plan. But then it becomes much more interesting to figure out what they can do from their own physical reality than the hypothetical reality I had imagined.

**ANK** There is a correspondence between the machine bodies and the human body via the inclusion of artificial skeletons, and we relate to them as bodies, yet in terms of movement the figures respond according to the mechanics of their robotic parts.

**GJ** In addition to an ongoing sculptural project, I think this work is also choreographic, it is also a dance. The idea of building the body function of the sculptures started with copying human movements, but their movements show how obviously machine they are. I find it cute when they try to move like humans but in their own way.

**ANK** This installation of *Under Construction* includes working tables on which there is an array of various spare parts and tools. To my mind, these tables signal an active working space of construction, and also the pre-history of the machines. How do you think about this presentation and display of tools and parts within the exhibition?

**GJ** Right. It indicates the whole story of the machines, how they are made and what they are made of. The parts on display are like the organs of the machine's body; they could be read as anatomical information natural to them. It could be not only the pre-history of the machines, but also their future, a backup plan. I just made the robots; I am not yet familiar with them. I am sure they will have constant technical problems to fix but I don't yet know what kind of unexpected problems they will create. Like most of my works, the line between the process and the result is not very clear. It will continue to be under construction, and I will actually need to use the parts and tools on the table to fix or replace broken parts of the robots while I am preparing the live performances. And at the same time, I imagine the arrangement of the objects on the table could generate a narrative independently from the robots, like a choreography of array.

**ANK** This exhibition includes a separate gallery space that contains video documentation of the machines – their movement, your choreographic interactions, and your production of them. The room is set up with various monitors and there is also live footage of the machine installation in the other gallery playing on closed-circuit video. How do you think about that space?

**GJ** The idea for this aspect of the installation started from the specific character of the ICA gallery and the character of this small room adjacent to the main space. The first idea I had was to make a messy room, like a secret closet. A place that would feel like you are somewhere you are not supposed to enter, seeing things you are not allowed to see. The kind of room in which it feels like someone is trying to hide something away. Then I came up with the idea of emphasising the video materials on many monitors. Creating a place that looks like a control room with the videos of the testing moments of robots that shows their constant failing and progressions. Like someone's unshared folder on a personal computer. And then, the idea of having the closed-circuit video was added so we can monitor the robots, like a real-time control room. We can see the past and present of the robots in the Video Room.

**ANK** How do you approach the relationship between sculpture and video in your work?

**GJ** Sometimes I think that if a sculpture is strong enough, it would not need extra information like a video next to it. But I also accept that my robots are created with the idea of possible movements and performance in them, and therefore, it would be more fun to see a performative video alongside the sculpture. In terms of the form of the video, I enjoy trying something that I would not be able to do in a live performance and showing the production process or history of the bodies being tested and failing.

**ANK** The unpredictable process of creating these robots – specifically embracing moments of failure – seems integral to this work. How do you think about failure?

**GJ** The whole process involved constantly failing and finding solutions. But I also realised that sometimes what I thought was failure was not. Sometimes I am impatient during the process, and I try to find a solution quickly if I see something doesn't work. But I find later, after trying all the other options and then going back to the starting point that it was working. It was just technically not perfect in the details, but the idea was correct.

**ANK** Often your work is silent or indexes the ambient, practical sounds of making and moving. This kind of quiet adds to a feeling of suspension and closeness that harnesses our attention. Could you speak to sound in your work?

**GJ** I found that creating movements and sounds are not separable. When I try to make movements, it brings sounds. And often I make movements following or according to the sounds they produce. I like the movements of musicians when they play music. And I like the sounds created by dancers when they move without music. I think sounds can occupy

a room immediately. If the sounds are overwhelming, it can interrupt one's ability to focus on seeing visual images. I tried to be careful with using sounds.

**ANK** Related to let's say, this non-performative sound, I am wondering how you consider the idea of boredom in your work. Boredom can be a clarifying state of mind to inhabit, and I'm curious to hear your thoughts on it.

**GJ** I think there are some necessary boredoms we can enjoy, although it is not always easy. We can like something that is boring yet agree that the enjoyment is only in its necessity. Other times, something is not boring, but it takes time; it is slow or repeated so our body gets tired, yet we can still enjoy it even if we felt asleep during it. These are positive boredoms I would say.

One of the worst boredoms, or a kind of negative boredom, can be found in trying to reject boredom: when someone or something tries to entertain people to avoid the boredom but fails.

Below image: Geumhyung Jeong, *Under Construction* [work in process]. Photo by Kanghyuk Lee, 2023.

