

Descriptions: 1. *Preface to a Showdown: 3 Music Boxes* 2. *Bicycle Wheel Muse Sick and on its Final Delay* 3. *Craps*

In *Preface to a Showdown: 3 Music Boxes*, my initial interest was in making something decorative; something that is always there, but no one really pays much attention to. The music box seemed like the appropriate choice. I decided to make three of them that would each represent a unique decorative force while maintaining basic similarities in look and function. The three music boxes I built are each the same in dimensions and basic material, but each is unique in other ways. The boxes are all made from pine and plywood and inside contain paper strip mechanisms. Each mechanism sounds like a traditional music box but functions like a player piano by employing hole punched paper strips or rolls. The mechanisms are motorized, each being capable of unique movements. I will refer to the boxes as either A, B, or C in order to help my description. Box A is a simple loop of black paper extending out and above the box with a repeating sequence of pitches.¹ Box B has the physical appearance of a loop of white paper extending out and above the box, but is actually like a long scroll with the rolled up parts stored within. Box C is a very long roll of white paper that spills out onto the floor. The motorized paper strip mechanisms inside each box are programmed to turn on and off. The motor in box A is also programmed to change speed. The insides of the boxes are not visually apparent, though the paper can be seen coming out of each box or going back in. The white and black loops could be likened to the white and black forces in chess, but the words *preface to a showdown* imply that they have not yet revealed themselves completely. Since the white loop is actually a scroll, it could potentially change its melody at any point, becoming like the white paper strip that spills out onto the floor, whose melody is in constant flux. The three boxes accompany one another in combination: constant looping together with constant change, but they are also very separate from one another both spatially and in the speed of their movements; the black loop hurries while the other two take their time.

Bicycle Wheel Muse Sick and on its Final Delay is based upon Marcel Duchamp's first readymade *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and other works. The original idea for my work was to have a bicycle wheel placed perpendicular to the ground with a white pole extending from the center towards the ceiling and a black pole extending from the center towards the ground. Various emotional sounds from both male and female voices were to emanate from speakers attached to the rim of the wheel. Instead of following through with this idea, I decided I wanted to represent what I consider to be a single moment of a transformation from Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*, which as exhibited at MOMA, employs a black bicycle fork, a white stool, and a white plinth all connected or touching one another. In my work, I am still using black and white, but they are placed differently.

The pedestal, which happens to be an old conductor's podium, sits on the floor. The bicycle wheel hangs from a wire attached to the ceiling. Another wire hanging from the ceiling supplies power to a low rpm motor turning the wheel slowly. The whole apparatus could be thought of as a reluctant conductor of sorts, dangling from its plinth on the ceiling, preferring to rest above the podium than to stand on it; like someone resisting the gradual dipping into cold water. The sounds of crying emanate from one speaker while sounds of motors emanate from the other. The person who I recorded for the voice over (crying) had what I consider to be a fairly androgynous voice. I didn't

¹ The inner side of the black paper loop is actually white.

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want a voice that clearly belonged to a particular sex, although perhaps the resulting sound is more one than the other. The recorded motors were specifically tuned to aesthetically fit in with the melodies from the two looping music boxes.²

The connection of my wheel to Duchamp's *Monte Carlo Bond*, has to do with his idea of eliminating chance and replacing it with a thinking force; a being of some kind. Duchamp explained about his roulette wheel "I believe I have eliminated the word chance. I would like to force the *roulette* to become a game of chess" (Schwartz 2000, 703). The *Monte Carlo Bond* is reminiscent of a medieval wheel of fortune or chain of being: the view to those on the outer part of the wheel is one of unpredictable, and perhaps meaningless, chance, while those in the center can predict or act as the first cause (i.e. *primum mobile*) of events. Those in the center of the wheel act upon those on the outer part while remaining unaffected or at rest themselves.

Craps consists of two dice with paint removed so that one die is entirely white and one die is entirely black. This idea is again related to the notion of chance and to two opposing forces. I also think of *Craps* as somehow related to the white and black loops of two of the music boxes, in part because they are not what they seem to be. The title refers to the game and also to the fact that there are two of them.

² The repeated melody is actually taken (though transposed) from a previous composition of mine called *Preface*. In *Preface* the same melody and drone are played on the Stroh violin simultaneously as plucking and bowing. I used this harmony or aesthetic to relate (for myself) the motors from *Bicycle Wheel Muse Sick and on its Final Delay* to the two looping music boxes.