

English **David Mutiloa, *Synthesis***. From July 19 to September 25, 2017. Individual project, Sala Gran. *Barcelona Producció is an initiative of La Capella*.

In the modern office workplace, spatial design and brand communication have evolved in step with novel notions of management, business efficiency and a labour market that progressively favours flexibility and adaptability. The typical Western office worker – their physiology as well as their psychology – has also been overhauled. Twentieth-century time-and-motion studies first standardised and rationalised the salaried worker's time and space. And today the twenty-first-century worker is increasingly a co-working independent contractor who navigates an entirely dissolved working-week structure, continuous competitive 'disruption' and the so-called 'gig economy'.

Using sculpture, video projections and human presence, David Mutiloa's exhibition *Synthesis* proposes that this condition has led to the appearance of pharmacologically managed depression, "an illness of responsibility". It has also induced a terrible form of boredom – the spectre of both the boundless outsourcing of undesirable labour to the developing world, and automation leading to a world without work. *Synthesis* shadows these ideas through two video projections, live action by human worker-performers and the display of a series of sculptures made from steel, silicon, resin, computer components, pharmaceutical drugs and other materials. These sculptures derive from human anatomy and iconic industrial design forms conceived for the office environment

from the 1960s to the 1990s. These decades saw a transition from the typewriter to the personal computer, and from rooms with regimented rows of desks to spaces with customisable cubicles, 'neighbourhoods' and flexible work 'nests'. Arranged on and around a modular platform like industrial still lifes, the sculptural elements are sometimes juxtaposed with office-systems brochures. They often represent variations based on an individual element that Mutiloa has abstracted, augmented or made into its inverse form through moulding and casting – furniture, desk accessories and structural systems, for example, that were designed with both high style and ergonomics in mind.

Prominent among the sculptural forms are those based on the classic Pop-era Valentine typewriter, first produced in 1969 for the Italian brand Olivetti. Large metal forms are derived from wall connectors from the revolutionary Action Office systems, introduced by the Herman Miller company in the 1960s. Modular 'workstations' for the 'human performer' were comprised of angled and movable fabric-wrapped walls, which an office worker could supposedly arrange to create his or her own ideal work space. Other sculptures adopt the form of articulated arms with support for screens, or are taken from the Aeron chair, also produced by Herman Miller. The latter, a seat with exaggerated lumbar support, became so popular

with Web startup companies in the late 1990s that it was nicknamed the 'Dot-Com Throne'. Other forms recall the frame of the 543 Broadway chair, and a metal grid evokes the Shopping Cart desk; both of the earlier pieces were designed by Gaetano Pesce in the 1990s for the notoriously open-plan, multicoloured offices of the advertising agency TBWA/Chiat/Day New York.

A large suspended video projection will present a series of highly composed shots of the installation itself, and will be filmed and edited during the exhibition and later inserted into the composition as if following a just-in-time production methodology. The second video projection of *Synthesis* also gives the whole exhibition space its uncanny soundtrack – a relentless, evolving, aural collage that seems to evoke the hum of a post-industrial factory floor, or the placeless drone of the knowledge economy. The screen shows a virtual camera moving over and around a spatial environment that Mutiloa derived from the 1970s office system produced by Olivetti, from which the exhibition also takes its title. Continuously generated from a 3D digital model, the visualisation comprises a looped animation that is screened throughout the exhibition.

Human work-performers move listlessly around the exhibition; they are employed by Mutiloa's exhibition, yet are apparently doing nothing at all. In a widely cited study published in 2013, experts predicted that almost →

**David Mutiloa** (Pamplona, 1979) studied industrial design and fine art in the Basque Country and Catalonia. He has had a number of solo exhibitions, among them *Differently from what I had expected* (García Galería, Madrid, 2016), *Formal Exercise* (Blueproject Foundation, Barcelona, 2015), *Notes on Color* (Grey Projects, Singapore, 2015), *Good Displays Catch Crowds* (Centro Huarte, Navarra, 2014) and *Es difícil dar con una buena lámpara* (García Galería, Madrid, 2013). In addition, his work has been shown in a number of group exhibitions, notably *Generación 2016* (La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2016), *Especies de Espacios* (MACBA, Barcelona, 2015 – in collaboration with Serafín Álvarez), *The Dark Side of the Party* (SOS 4.8, Murcia, 2015), *The World of Interiors* (The Green Parrot, Barcelona, 2014) and *FAQ: Zona de preguntas frecuentes* (Antoni Tàpies Foundation, Barcelona, 2013). He has been an artist-in-residence at Gasworks (London, 2016) and Hangar (Barcelona, 2013-2015), amongst others. He currently has a working space in Salamina.

→ half of the jobs in the US were at risk of being automated in the next two decades. Driverless technology, cheap computers, deep learning and big data are leading to increasingly sophisticated tasks being done by ever-smarter machines across a whole range of sectors – from translation to logistics, but especially in office and administrative work. A pessimist would argue that wherever office work can be broken down into a series of routine tasks, no job is safe. If new technologies are not yet replacing workers, they may nevertheless be putting them under increased surveillance in order to monitor their activity and productivity minute by minute.

As automation rises, does the value of the tasks that can be done only by humans therefore increase? What is at stake when affective faculties such as creativity – the supposed domain of the artist – are more than ever part of a productive and evaluative logic? Does the notion that one must project one's own personal brand through the splintered attention spans of social media point to a future marked by a total synthesis of individual fulfilment, freelancers' anxiety and corporate competitiveness for all?

Latitudes

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The\\_Future\\_of\\_Employment.pdf](http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf)