

Pour la forme: Matt Paweski
Chris Sharp

For sheer sanguineness, attention to detail, and preternatural craft, the sculpture of Los Angeles-based artist Matt Paweski is tough to beat—at once familiar and yet perfectly strange, if not a little uncanny. The familiarity of the work resides largely in its relationship to utilitarian design, either product or urban, and the sense that what he makes has some kind of function, however unfathomable. For upon first glance, Paweski's sculptures are evocative of everything from a Cuisinart to a high-end espresso machine to a sort of elaborate industrial tool as seen through the perspective of Constructivism and the table-size works of the late Anthony Caro. But the closer you look, the more inscrutable and absorbingly useless they become—à la Marcel Duchamp or Bruno Munari. This specious impression of utility is aided by the product-line precision with which the works are fashioned, and their seemingly domestic scale. They appear machine-made, but they are for the most part painstakingly handcrafted and painted by the artist himself. Thus they are doubly duplicitous in their artful will to mislead us down a rabbit hole of form, function, and detail.

Paweski's fetishistic preoccupation with minutiae is not arbitrary or meaningless, but serves a much broader, more significant purpose, and has everything to do with the fundamentally sanguine character of the work. Contrary to the current zeitgeist, which is increasingly faced with the ecological fallout of Enlightenment-ethos "progress," Paweski's objects unapologetically fetishize industry. The impulse to structure, develop, organize, and even stylize society is, as far as this work is concerned, not all bad. What Paweski makes speaks to a fundamental belief in human achievement, on an almost purely formal level, with regard to postindustrial progress. Distancing itself from the macro, the work scrutinizes the almost hidden junctures, fulcrums, and nodes of certain modes of metal-based construction, and makes them the center of attention.

This, and more, becomes obvious in the artist's recent exhibition *Daisy Chain* at Herald St, London (2020). Featuring eleven new plinth- and wall-based works made over the course of last year, the show marks a number of important shifts in Paweski's practice. Perhaps the most immediately striking relates to the palette, which vacillates between confectionery-esque and Pop (two sides, perhaps, of the same coin). Colors play off of one another in heavy contrast—red and pink, black and yellow. *DRANE* brings to mind a small, inverted xylophone, or possibly some kind of handheld organ, and features a small rainbow of colors: orange, red, white, and a light lime green. The Pop quality of this unconventional gradation of color imbues the work with a real optimism. Nothing—as per Pop—like color to brighten up your day.

Two other wall-based works, *LOCATION* and *LOCATION (ROUTR)*, deploy a slightly more subdued variety of color, but to equally intriguing effect. Angling out from the wall, they are marked by crisscrosses and riveted bow-tie forms, bringing to mind primitive arcade games or switchboards—in any case, some kind of interface—and if they are indeed parts of some larger whole, this signals a shift in the artist's practice into a new relational register. Where before many of the sculptures may have

seemed like autonomous, apparently functional objects in and of themselves—evoking the Cuisinart, the espresso machine, et cetera—they here assume a certain semi-autonomy.

I am thinking in particular of *COMPRESSR*, *PNCH*, and *RING(CUPS)*. Circular like crowns, gaskets, or nuts, they can be read as parts of what must be a much greater machine, and thus are more relational than earlier works I can recall, such as *Tina* or *2 Seater* (both 2018), whose symmetrical structures and unified colors (or non-colors) tend toward the illusion of self-contained autonomy. The newer works more explicitly conjure up a conceivable context in which they might have a specific, but nevertheless unknowable, function. This is not to say that they don't hold their own—they do—but they no longer seem like enclosed, self-contained integers. To what extent this decision is intentionally political and a direct response to current events is hard to say. It nevertheless *feels* political, and reflective of our current, very human predicament of mutual interdependency, as opposed to the patently retrograde belief in independence (as manifest for instance in the demon of nationalism). This is a point at which the politics of form, and the pleasure of the thing itself, become undeniable.

147 Matt Paweski, *COMPRESSR*, 2020. Courtesy: the artist and Herald St, London.

Photo: Andy Keate

148 Matt Paweski, *Tina*, 2018. Courtesy: Herald St, London; Park View/Paul Soto, Los Angeles; Gordon Robichaux, New York

149 Matt Paweski, *LOCATION(ROUTR)*, 2020. Courtesy: the artist and Herald St, London.

Photo: Andy Keate

150 Matt Paweski, *ELEVATR(LICORICE)*, 2020. Courtesy: the artist and Herald St, London.

Photo: Ruben Diaz

151 Matt Paweski, *Reflex*, 2019. Courtesy: Herald St, London; Park View/Paul Soto, Los Angeles; Gordon Robichaux, New York. Photo: Ruben Diaz





