

# SIDSEL MEINECHE HANSEN KW INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

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Review by Alexandra Symons Sutcliffe

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Following the logic of both magic and design—in which an object changes form while the mechanism of transformation remains concealed—Sidsel Meineche Hansen has become part designer and part sorcerer for her current exhibition, *Real Doll Theatre*. Here, she continues her ongoing research practice into the disciplinary nature of technologized capital on bodies, desire, pleasure, and labor, as well as its estranging, superstitious, and psychological effects. The relationship between *Untitled (Sex Robot)* (all works 2018), a wooden marionette-cum-beta-type sex robot, and the dolls featured in *Maintenancer*, a video collaboration with Therese Henningsen documenting the maintenance of sex dolls in a German brothel, is the most acute site of comparison in this exhibition. The brothel's caretaker fully inserts her arm into each of the doll's orifices to clean them after use at one point in the film. Meineche Hansen's sculptural sex robot shares some technical properties with these personified sex dolls—like theirs, its jaw is jointed to only open, so as to prevent it from ever unexpectedly snapping shut. Evoking the way an arachnid moves from side to side rather than forward and backward, the subtle divergence from recognizable human behavior marks the viewer with a deep sense of discomfort. But while the dolls in the film are artificially soft and pliable—so much so that even their fingers can bend right back—Meineche Hansen's wooden form threatens splinters. *Untitled (Sex Robot)* is not meant to be an infantilized doll, but rather a strong and agile mechanical servant that may exceed its design purposes.

The list of collaborators for this and all of Meineche Hansen's recent exhibitions is long, as her practice relies heavily on a cooperative methodology. Having studied at Goldsmiths Centre for Research Architecture, she owes a lot to the processes of critical design education. Her work departs from this model by playing with incongruities of form: the uselessness of a sex toy made of wood, the semitransparency of molds designed to simulate dense human flesh, the

**SYLVIA KOUVALI**

antiquated character of the exhibition soundtrack that recalls Gregorian chanting. All of which serve to highlight her interest in sitting with the strangeness of designed utility, suggesting that perversion lies in the design, not the desire.

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**SYLVIA KOUVALI**