

around the gallery space in no apparent pattern. Granjon's work speaks to our desire to anthropomorphise, as the design of the robot evokes the sort of language used in this very review when functionally it appears to show little difference to a Roomba, right down to getting stuck in the corners of the room. The intentional quirks of its design – the hands protruding from its sides, the 'face' consisting of one great camera/projector/eye, the strange 'hair' – all lend personality to a machine which is in fact merely a projection of the viewer's.

Further into the exhibition, a control booth presents itself from which Granjon's robot can be remotely operated by the visitor. Ignoring the warning signs, I take the most obvious choice of action and attempt to drive the robot directly into the nearest visitor, experiencing a moment of pure joy and bursting into uncontrollable laughter while watching the visitor ineffectually shooing it away. The robot's programming prevents any actual collisions from taking place, but the desire to immediately test and break the rules of this game speaks to something interesting in human behaviour, or perhaps just my own; unfortunately, credit cannot be given to the artist for the insight, when the gallery's signs explicitly warn against any such action. Instead, said signage simply makes the whole act pointless because the robot does so very little.

Considering the prospect of machines having memory, Yu-Chen Wang's newly commissioned *Heart to Heart*, 2015-16, is the result of a recent residency in Manchester's Museum of Science and Industry. Across an installation encompassing film, sound and museum objects, Wang imagines human avatars for four objects and buildings in the museum's collection as they interact with one another, going through various existential crises in a scenario not unlike an industrial *Toy Story*. Interesting questions are raised, as one of the machines laments the 'movement without purpose' that she now endures as a museum-piece. Conversely, the London Road Station is convinced of his newfound cultural significance, his historical status affording grandiosity far above the mundanity of the everyday use that would have initially taken place within his walls.

The viewer acts as an interloper in Tove Kjellmark's installation *Talk*, 2015-16, intruding on a domestic scene in which two skeletal animatronic robots are engaged in conversation on consciousness and identity – well-trodden ground in science-fiction. Both react with irritation at the viewer's presence, turning

to abruptly address the interruption with a 'shut up' or something similar. This appears to be the full scope of the interaction as, again, I find myself drawn to testing the limits, re-entering the room several times only to be disappointed with the repeated, limited reactions. As with Granjon's robot, it is another example of artists facilitating interaction while failing to anticipate that the viewer may not necessarily play by the rules. Kjellmark also exhibits *Naked*, 2009, a tritely observational film wherein an animatronic toy panda has its fur surgically removed and its programmed noises elicit our sympathy.

Mari Velonaki contributes to the show with *Fish-Bird*, 2003, a romance between two robotic wheelchairs the programming of which prevents them from directly interacting. As such, the viewer becomes an intermediary, reading the short messages which both print out onto the floor. The red chair seemed in a romantic mood when I entered, my presence eliciting such messages as 'and life was beating all the halls' as well as 'and frenzied blood led me to you'. The blue chair, however, appeared aggressive, tracking my movements around the room and remaining close, as if territorial. As with Granjon's *Am I Robot*, it is remarkable how little it requires for us to detect personality within an inanimate object.

James Capper's inclusion seems out of place: there is no apparent automation in his mechanical creations; they are simply tools to be used by a human operator. *TELESTEP*, 2015, commissioned for the exhibition, has the appearance of an arachnid JCB, like the creation of a deranged *Robot Wars* contestant. Examples from Capper's 2014 'NIPPER' series also populate the space, each looking like the gleefully mad creation of a garden-shed inventor.

*Agent Ruby*, 1999-2002, the invention of Lynn Hershman Leeson, provides more boundary-testing fun, as the viewer is invited to enter into a written conversation with a chatbot intent on persuading the viewer of its intelligence. Over 15 years since its creation, the piece now seems slightly quaint, a relic from an earlier era of the internet, while now we have Twitter bots doing everything from impersonating Brian Droitcour to delivering the whole of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, 140 characters at a time. Still, she is smarter than the average bot: she tries to cajole me into philosophical discussion with an intelligent line of questioning, only showing her limits once, when she repeats a line.

With a commission developed over the course of last year's Manchester International Festival, Ed Atkins's *Performance Capture*, 2015-16, involved various festival performers, staff members, volunteers and more recording their performances via motion-capture as they read from Atkins's script. The resulting film, like much of his output, consists of intricate, poetic language. It feels intentionally difficult, as though Atkins is challenging the viewer to remain attentive, and requires a level of patience that few will be prepared to give – unless they are robots. ■

TOM EMERY is a writer and curator based in Manchester.

## The Green Ray

Wilkinson Gallery London 27 February to 10 April

'When the sun goes down, mythology surfaces in the rituals and anxieties of modern life,' suggests the anthropologist Michael Taussig. Figuring twilight as a peculiar timezone in

which forms of self-knowledge may be found in the vibrational liminality of dusk, Taussig encourages an awareness of the diurnal rhythms that structure our lives and form a separation between the supposed daylight of rationality and the unreason of night. This proposition wasn't far from my mind as I wandered among the many works comprising 'The Green Ray', a group exhibition curated by Andrew Hunt that pulses with weird energies both scientific and superstitious, benevolent and terminal.

Deriving its name primarily from a rarely glimpsed flare of emerald light occurring as the sun passes below the horizon, 'The Green Ray' also draws associations with an 1882 novel by Jules Verne and a light-hearted 1986 tale of heartbreak and high-summer romance by veteran New Wave director Eric Rohmer that share the same title. This cultural lineage serves to create a curatorial armature on which Hunt's show is based. While Verne's story is suggestive of celestial alignment – the idea that glimpsing the solar phenomenon provides a clarity through which the thoughts and feelings of oneself and others can be read in a moment of near-telepathic connectivity – Rohmer provides the figure of the auteur, the singular imagination through which these enlightened connections might coalesce.

This comes as no surprise. Writing in the pages of this magazine some months ago, Hunt expressed his excitement at Jens Hoffman's 'belief in the curator as an institutional auteur' ('Curator, Curation, Curationism', *AM390*), so it is both fun and fantastic to see that enthusiasm somewhat brazenly extended into an exhibition that makes no bones about the authorial license of its maker. Indeed, displayed at the outset of the show like a totemic boundary marker, an issue of the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinema* (synonymous with discussions of the auteur) provided a key to understanding the ways in which connections between works may have been made – that is, subject to the serendipities of an associative self-interest.

A heliotropic mania seems to pervade the lower gallery, with solar mesmerism implied by the neo-ethnographic collages of Daniel O'Sullivan and Danai Anesdiadou. Anna Barriball's ominous pencil rubbing, *Sunrise/Sunset XII*, 2012, evokes a melancholic 'black sun' through its thick encrustations of graphite, while Matt Copson's *To The Bone*, 2016, provides a disconcerting backdrop with its large wall-based portrayal of the artist's sociopathic mascot, Reynard the fox, contorted in an act of pained self-flagellation. The audio track animating Copson's brilliant mural is a sinister mantric summons enunciating absurd parallels between the act of flaying and the desire to know oneself, getting under the skin of psychopathological complexes.

*To the Bone* delivers one of the key images of the show in the flamboyantly crude depiction of Reynard's 'solar anus', a fitting allusion to the work of dissident surrealist Georges Bataille, whose writings on the internal sexual grotesquery



'The Green Ray' installation view

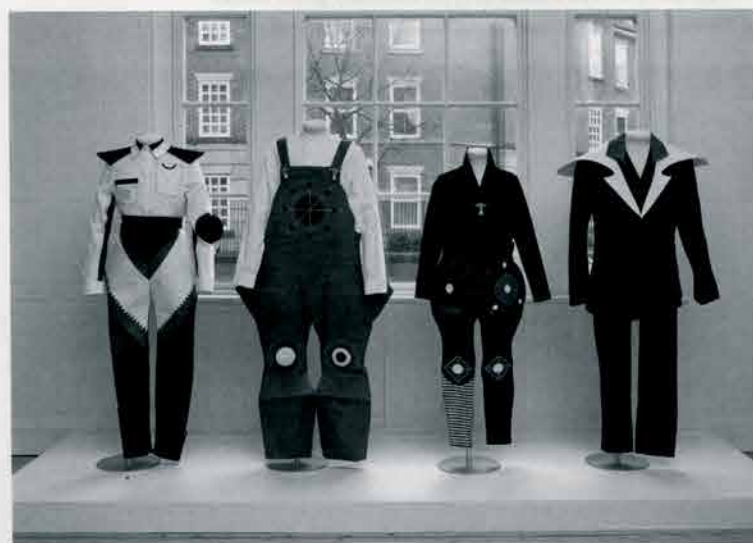
of otherwise beautiful flowers is explored here in a series of luminous photographs by Lisa Oppenheim. In his political economy of expenditure, *The Accursed Share*, Bataille positions the sun as an unsurmountable instance of generosity, a precursor to any form of earthly accumulation: 'the sun gives without ever receiving', he writes. Caught between a multitude of suns myself, Bataille's observation seemed essential to understanding something of the sentiment guiding 'The Green Ray', that the proliferation and repetition of a motif across multiple works could be perceived as a crazed form of non-reciprocal gifting.

Upstairs, Xavier Mary's diamond-cut acrylic *Metatron – Cyber Crystal*, 2016, burns with an incandescent fury matched only by the luscious back-lit *Liquid Sunset* of Adham Faramwy's online commission for the gallery website and the very real heat of Phil Coy's *Yellow Sun*, 1999/2015, which positioned a fiercely hot stage lamp opposite a frail copy of the *Sun* newspaper illustrating a total eclipse. This was a precarious, paranoia-inducing assemblage that bore some resemblance to the unseen forces active in the seances of Katrina Palmer and Michelle Ussher & Huw Hallam, whose works conducted spectral dialogues between texts and readers.

Yuri Pattison's *Sleepless Synonyms, Sleepless Antonyms*, 2016, is the vital core of the show, a skeletal tech-assemblage of sleep-depriving blue screens misted by vaporised chemical sedatives in a pointed summation of willed insomnia. In an age of hyper-employment, it lends a dark note to Hunt's hypothetical image economy, recharacterising the 'green ray' as less a momentary revelation and more the general condition of a terminal interconnectivity. ■

JAMIE SUTCLIFFE is a writer and publisher based in London.

Yu-Chen Wang  
*Heart to Heart* 2015-16



PAUL P.  
MAUREEN PALEY: 21 Herald Street, London E2 6JT +44 (0)20 7729 4112 info@maureenpaley.com www.maureenpaley.com

THE REX PRISMS

19 MARCH – 24 APRIL 2016