Sculpting Between Time and Machine: Hosu Lee’s *Time And Machine*

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One autumn, I visited the clock tower of a hospital where a family member had once been admitted. The tower’s machinery took up three of the building’s five floors. Its clock weight, wound every four days, descended slowly to drive the rollers—a mechanism that required nearly ten meters of space. Narrow, steep wooden stairs. A small attic door, so low you had to bend your knees and bow your head to pass through. Pulleys hanging from a ceiling so high it seemed endless. A pendulum resting at the bottom. Light poured in through the glass windows on all sides, almost blindingly bright, yet it was the deep, dark silence of the motionless machine that pulled me in. The disquieting stillness of the clock tower stayed with me. And it abruptly resurfaced when I encountered Hosu Lee’s work.

At the core of Lee’s practice is a pendulum, one that “longs to move on its own.” In conversation, he shared that over the past eight years, he has explored the pendulum’s material and form through his *Time Machine* series—shaping it into concrete swings and stainless steel grandfather clocks—at times combining them with sound and light-sensing systems to probe the sculptural and the systematic. Like a heartbeat setting blood in motion, his pendulum-driven structures seem to have generated their own temporality and rhythm within the exhibition space. I wondered what had drawn him so deeply into the world of the pendulum. But rather than offering a single answer, he draws the viewer into its hypnotic motion, an experience of time in flux.

In his solo exhibition *Time And Machine* at OCI Museum of Art, Lee expands on this exploration, treating the exhibition space itself as a sculptural body. If his previous shows allowed viewers to observe each work from a distance, here, sculpture becomes a situation, drawing viewers in. The first encounter is with a massive pendulum, its large, round, reflective stainless steel surface moving with deliberate grace. It mirrors us, but what Lee wants us to see lies beyond the surface. Like Alice shrinking down, we step past the clock face, beyond numbers and hands, into something deeper, darker. The contrast between inside and outside unsettles us, enough that we might slip. And then, we land.

It is dark. And unexpectedly, we are outside—a landscape devoid of people. Something has vanished, yet something else emerges in its absence—what Jean-Luc Nancy called “the sudden appearance [...] of the one disappearing.” A utility pole. An outdoor unit. A compressor. A storage container. A fence enclosing them, barring entry. The scene isn’t dystopian in any contrived way; if anything, it is so familiar, so ordinary that it feels like the present. Beneath the polished surfaces, the unkempt machines run on, as if they were always part of the natural world. It’s the eerie feeling of climbing a hill you never knew had a path and looking down at your home, now strangely unfamiliar. The outdoor unit suggests there is an inside somewhere, but we are left outside. Perhaps these machines have something to do with the pendulum we saw earlier. Still, we remain outside. The air is cold, barren. It is both a landscape of someone’s inner world and an exterior scene glimpsed on the way home. The machines hum, deep and steady, filling the silence where people once were.

As our eyes adjust to the darkness, a small video comes into view, tucked beside the outdoor unit. A pine tree sways in the wind. A gaze lingers, fixed upon it. In an era where electricity is both nature and the lifeblood of machines, only the tree remains truly *natural*, the voice we hear the only human one.

*“...in the end, we all have to say goodbye to each other. And it’s not just about people. It is about places and things as well. Everything fades away, withers, and eventually disappears, never to return. In fact, the entire world [...] [and] our universe will vanish into nothingness.”*

A nihilist’s confession, it seems. But then, another voice:

*“...nothing ever truly fades as it seems, and everything remains just as it is. Changes are illusions…”*

How do we reconcile these two opposing statements?

Edwidge Danticat, writing about literature that grapples with death, observed that writers create stories of death to make sense of it. This video, then, feels like both a pre-written obituary—whether for himself or the planet—and a refusal to stop creating. Creation as a long detour, wrestling with the meaning of time left, searching for hope in what fades. Perhaps this is why Lee has spent years fixated on the motion of the pendulum. His past works have often incorporated text alongside sculpture—*Manifestation*, a poem reassembled on a physical object, and *Dream Manifesto*, inscribed on paint resembling rusted iron, both echo the voice in the video. A body that vanishes, a body that remains. What changes, what holds.

The conjunction ‘And’ in the exhibition’s title, *Time And Machine*, invites us to linger on the relationship between the two. To follow this thread on my own terms, I want to bring in two seemingly unrelated things: yoga and music. In yoga, the body moves from one *asana* to the next in continuous flow, each transition guided by breath. A body becomes a desk, then a downward-facing dog, then a tree, then a pigeon with an open chest, then a triangle. The movement of the machine we call a body generates flow and energy. (Not to mention that Lee’s pendulums, too, move by air pressure, as if the machine itself were inhaling and exhaling.) In music, sound and time are not separate, nor does sound merely occupy time. Instead, notes push and pull at one another, one setting off the next like dominos, forming melody. Imagine the black, round notes on sheet music as punctures through which a needle pulls a transparent thread. That thread weaves through the holes, and what moves along it is what we call melody. The motion of sound creates time, a flow.

The ecological theorist Timothy Morton introduces the term *hyperobjects* to describe entities that exist beyond the scale of human time. He writes that, in an ontological sense, the future of the future is *beneath* the past. In other words, time is nonlinear, stratified, and experienced in potential. If *Time And Machine* is futuristic in any way, it is in how Lee’s pendulum never settles—forever oscillating between inside and outside, essence and appearance, opening up an unfamiliar sense of time. *Time And Machine* takes the two words that form “time machine” and splits them apart, wedging an ‘And’ in between. In doing so, Lee moves away from the idea of machines as vessels that transport us through the past and future as fixed points. Instead, he suggests that time and machine were never separate to begin with; it is the machine’s motion itself that generates time—reshaping it, making us feel its presence.

We each have a sense of the abyss we long to reach—we have already seen it. That day, climbing the carpeted wooden stairs of the clock tower, I was searching for the time my family drifted through. So, if you, too, have a quiet longing for something deeper, I hope you step into *Time And Machine* with that desire. Lee invites us to descend further into the dark, to find that what we left behind is still there, still moving. His pendulum breathes, and in its motion, it reflects us back.

\*This essay was written based on conversations with the artist during the preparation of his solo exhibition, *Time And Machine*.