

23 June – 3 September 2001

Kim Adams Marla Hlady

The Power Plant
Contemporary Art Gallery
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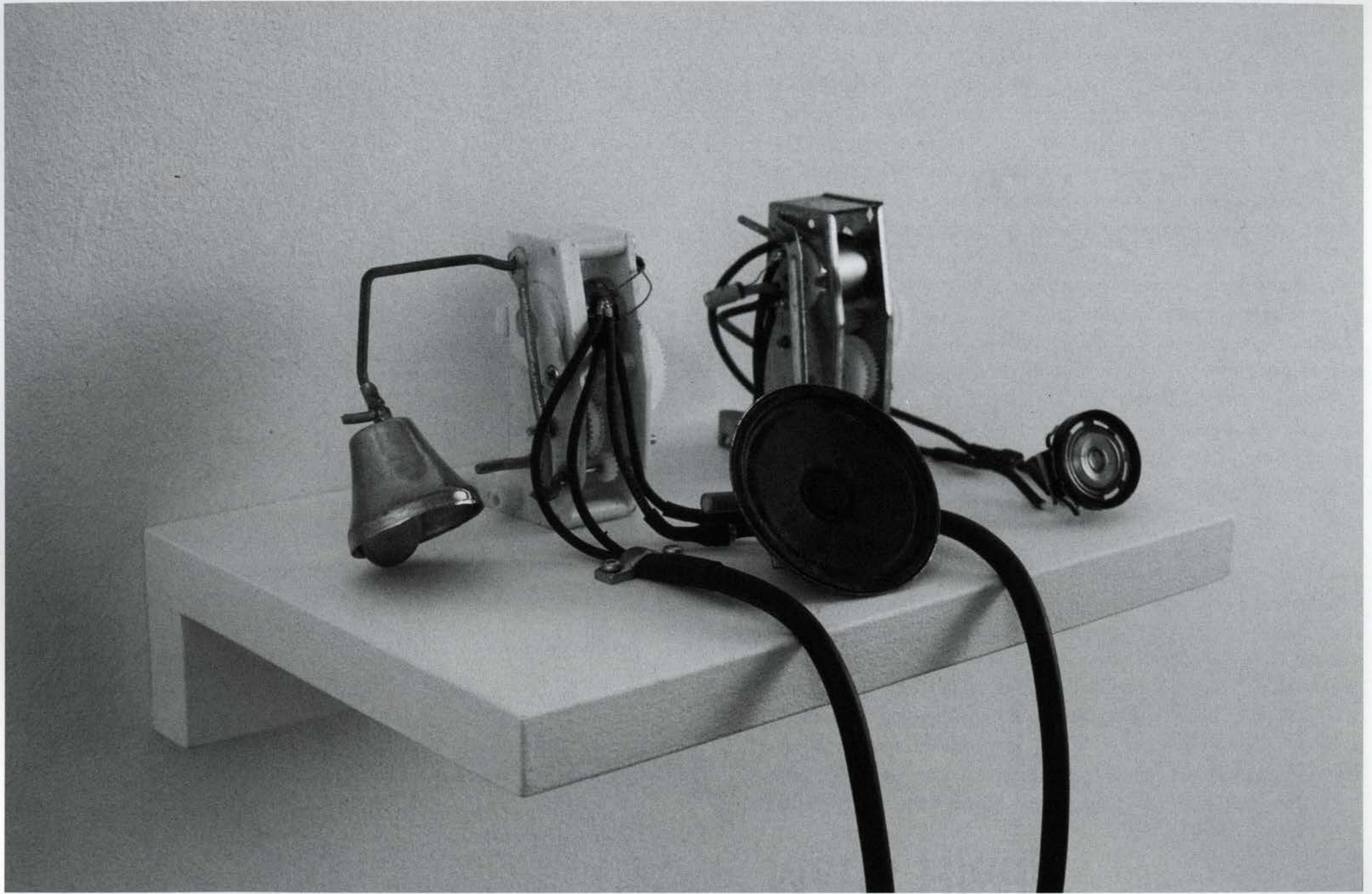
Waltzing Matilda, 2000. 3 wig machines (wigs, Styrofoam, bondo, paint, machines), wood cabinet, 3 CDs, stereo with speakers, misc. electronic equipment. Variable dimensions. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Marla Hlady

We usually see Marla Hlady's works before we hear them. Clean-lined and rigid in construction, at first glance they appear to us as foreboding mechanical devices lying in wait. The sound and action begin as we enter the space or turn the works on with the flip of a switch. Whether it be a squeak, a wheeze, a rat-tat-tat or a cacophonous fusion of familiar tunes, the sounds that issue forth are bound to sculptural form. This relationship between sound and form, immateriality and materiality, consistently operates as a key concept in Hlady's work. Her exhibition at The Power Plant includes a selection of small sculptures, a room-size installation and a new work created especially for the exhibition.

The untitled "shelf" works from the *Amusement Machines* series, created between 1996 and 2000, consist of the stripped-down innards of small battery-operated toys. Displayed in pairs, the works are called into action by flipping each mechanism's on/off switch. Whether conceived as sad and sweet or angry and awkward, the movements and synthetic sounds of these naked little machines move in and out of synch according to our manipulation of the switches. Hlady's *Amusement Machines* try their best to appear lifelike, but with all their gears exposed, we become all too conscious of our own power over them and the man-made systems by which their actions and sounds are made.

In *Waltzing Matilda* (2000) the device producing the sound is hidden from view. The work again explores a relationship between sound and form, and presents us with an invitation to physically respond. Approaching *Waltzing Matilda*, we watch through the window of a small gallery as three brunette wigs of varying lengths and hairstyles twist and turn in erratic patterns. Stepping through the door of the gallery, we encounter the distorted sounds of three melodies being played simultaneously. The room is empty, but for these three "waltzing" wigs. Each of the wigs reacts individually to three versions of the song *Waltzing Matilda* (here



1920-1930 Telephone Assembly

Untitled (shelf work from the *Amusement Machines* series), 1996–98. Stripped-down mechanical toy, wood shelf, misc. hardware. Approx. 16.5 x 24 x 16.5 cm. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

performed by June Tabor, Tom Waits and the Pogues), their movements triggered by crude electronics that respond to the melody. The long, empty space of the installation beckons us to waltz along with these faceless Matildas.

The starting point for the audio in Hlady's new work, installed for the first time at The Power Plant, is a soundproof wooden box. For this piece, the artist incorporates another folk song, *She Moves Through the Fair*, as performed by the English singer Anne Briggs. The lyrics tell of a young woman's untimely passing. Hlady remarks that what attracts her to the song is as much the lyrics as the formal qualities of the melody. Funneled from the box through a system of copper tubes, the song is embedded into the piece and is transformed through its passage and interaction with the sculpture. Microphones at the end of each copper tube are used to amplify the resulting sounds. Here, Hlady asks us to conceive of sound as a material substance, one that can be considered as integral to sculpture as wood or metal. A skillful negotiation between the concrete and the formless, *She Moves Through the Fair* offers us an obscured translation of sorrow through its binding together of sound and sculpture. X.E.

A complimentary exhibition of Hlady's drawings is on view at The Gallery, University of Toronto at Scarborough, September 19 – October 26, 2001. Please call (416) 287-7176 for more information and directions.

The Power Plant gratefully acknowledges the support of its Members and the following organizations that helped make this exhibition possible:



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