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Hyundai Commission 2016: Philippe Parreno, Anywhen: The Tate's Turbine Hall comes alive in a brilliant use of public space



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We all become players in the puppet master Parreno's electrifying world, writes Ben Luke



BEN LUKE | Monday 3 October 2016 | 0 comments



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The Turbine Hall is alive. Lights pulse as melodies, drones and beats play; screens and speakers descend in formation; a light moves along an arcing rod across the space. Even the numerous inflatable fish - three different species - seem to behave as if they're more than balloons, descending as well as ascending, swimming through the space, lurking in undercrofts, resting on the carpeted floor.

The cavernous space has, in the words of the French artist Philippe Parreno, become an automaton. It's controlled by a lab at the back of a space, complete with large flasks and tubes linked to a computer system. Micro-organisms growing here will help define the sequence of events in the Turbine Hall through a "bio-reactor", we're told.

Parreno has tapped into the essence of this great public space: he knows people come here to hang out and be entertained as well as intellectually and spiritually nourished. To emphasise the point, a film shown on a screen that periodically descends from the roof to the floor features a ventriloquist, Nina Conti.

She has no puppet but instead intones an oblique monologue - her mouth is unmoving, her voice echoing through the space. "The machine is animal," she says at one point. "The mask is the first automaton," she adds. As she speaks, beautiful images of a squid appear on the screen, with sublime close-ups on its eye and its tentacles. At moments, it appears to be dancing for us. Is this the ventriloquist's dummy? The monologue ends ominously: "There's no way to stop me; the upcoming tragedy."

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Parreno is a master of manipulating the exhibition space, and he uses the full length and height of the Turbine Hall brilliantly. And we viewers are manipulated, however willingly, as he drags us back and forth, up and down in his all-consuming environment. We, too, become players in this puppet master's electrifying world.

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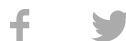
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