

# ArtReview

## Nina Canell: Hoarder's Fascination

Nathaniel Budzinski   Reviews   17 October 2024   ArtReview



Nina Canell, *Future Mechanism Rag Plus Two Grams*, 2024, installation view. Photo: Nick Ash. Courtesy the artist and Simian, Copenhagen

***Future Mechanism Rag Plus Two Grams at Simian, Copenhagen continues Canell's interest in how materials meet and change each other***

A series of eight sculptures by Nina Canell in this subterranean space play perceptual tricks on the viewer. Each piece is a variation on the same format: on the floor is a small frequency generator, like something you'd find in a laboratory, fronts covered in knobs and buttons, screens blinking with rapidly changing numbers (presumably showing the frequency each is generating). These are hooked up to small black plastic cylinders, also on the floor, vibrating softly from the frequency generators' signal. Attached to the cylinders are thin cords made of some humble material – string, shoelaces, wire, etc – fixed to the gallery ceiling and pulled taut like a guitar string. Along these suspended cords Canell has affixed various oddments that jangle from the vibrations of the cylinders below: *Tea Leaf Paradox* (2024) features fragments of tea bag labels; strands of glittery foil from party decorations adorn *Negative Hair* (2020); bits of copper wire tangled with bottle caps, pull-tabs from drinks cans, a seashell and more on the titular piece, *Future Mechanism Rag Plus Two Grams* (2020).

Canell has a hoarder's fascination with the alchemical potential of these lowly materials. Maybe there's a hope that all this detritus can be reenergised and made useful again, recomposed into something novel, valuable. At the same time, the work feels fleetingly provisional, about to fall apart: I go tip-of-the-nose close to *Pistachio Pangolin on the Continuous Fingernail Transmitter* (2020), fighting the urge to give its cord a little pluck. I can barely hear the faint clack-clacking of the pistachio shells and fake fingernails bouncing on the string. Which is when the perceptual trick happens: I stand back and can now hear how the rustle and buzz of each sculpture are made louder by echoing off the hard, whitewashed concrete surfaces of the gallery.

What at first seemed an effectively silent space – only filled with easily ignored, everyday ambient sounds: air-conditioning, distant traffic and so on – is charged by Canell’s sculptures producing a background white noise, making my auditory awareness of the environment acute. I scuff my trainer on the floor and the resulting squeak rips through the space. A fellow visitor whistles and the gallery seems to fill with piercing feedback.



*Negative Hair* (detail), 2020, string, foil, tape, cable ties, scraps, vibration generator, frequency generator, cables. Photo: Nick Ash. Courtesy the artist and Simian, Copenhagen

In the centre of the space is an eight-minute single-channel live-action video, *Energy Budget* (2017–24), looping on a large, horizontal screen of tiled LED panels. In it, we watch the gleaming white chassis of an unfinished car gliding along the assembly line of a sterile automobile factory. Soon, the chassis is eased through rotating columns of ostrich feathers that lightly brush against the car, soft organic matter polishing cold, hyperreal industrial shell. Made with regular collaborator Robin Watkins, it’s a far more sober and clinical affair than the surrounding sculptures, with their eccentric garden-shed-inventor aesthetics and playfully evocative yet slippery titles. But it echoes Canell’s interest in how materials meet and change each other. Rather than using sculpture as a way of anchoring material, placing the viewer as distinct from it all, Canell wants to show how all this seemingly still and silent stuff around us is actually in constant flux, and that organic creatures like ourselves are a material part of that mix.

Future Mechanism Rag Plus Two Grams at *Simian, Copenhagen*, 1 June – 1 September