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Untethered at Eyebeam

By [Sascha Pohflepp](#)
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A couple days ago, [Eyebeam](#) in New York City opened what by some has been called their best show so far. It is titled [Untethered](#), and was curated by visiting fellow Sarah Cook to be "a sculpture garden of everyday objects deprogrammed of their original function, embedded with new intelligence and transformed into surrealist and surprising readymades". Many pieces are from Eyebeam's fellows, residents or affiliated artists while a few external people were invited to participate as well.

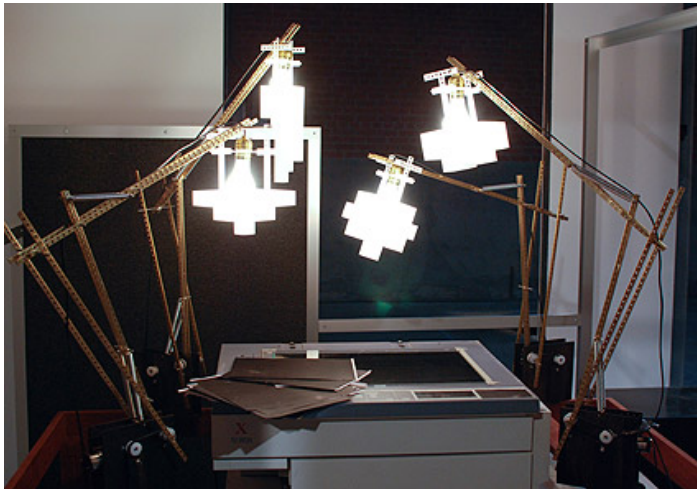


Dead Star

The show works well as the open-plan warehouse on Chelsea's 21st Street is being transformed in a wonderland of white plinths with obscure objects on them, many of which invite to be touched, looked at, and discussed about as in all cases, their traditional function has been tampered with in one way or the other.

In Sarah's words: "a show of objects that have been tinkered with, invented, and allowed to be "generative", that is, open to experimentation and other use. Untethered presents a deliberate reference to [Jonathan Zittrain](#)'s notion of "tethered appliances", technologies, such as iPods, or that contain proprietary software and are tied to single uses or networks."

As the range of modifications is wide, here's a few examples and favorite pieces.



Xerox Astronomy and the Nebulous Object-Image Archive

[Joe Winter](#), an Eyebeam alumni, has created a beautiful solar system called [Xerox Astronomy](#) and the Nebulous Object-Image Archive, which centers around a photocopier. The piece consists of the machine, sitting in a sort of cubicle and several robotic light sources, moving around it. The machine keeps making copies which somewhat resemble a photo of a night sky. For Joe, "the sculpture at once models the movements of distant bodies and presents itself as the primary object of observation, creating a self-reflexive, self-imaging media production system". A very interesting take on science as narrative and it's dependency on the frameworks that the production of what we consider to be factual knowledge is happening in.

[Kelly Dobson](#) of MIT Media Lab is showing her responsive hacked technologies, including [Blendie](#), Toastie and a vacuum cleaner, all of which are part of her *Machine Therapy* series. It's a well-known project, but it's still incredibly strong in the way that it establishes a link between an arbitrary appliance and its users

(and their bodies). Plus the videos are too hilarious not to be watched again:

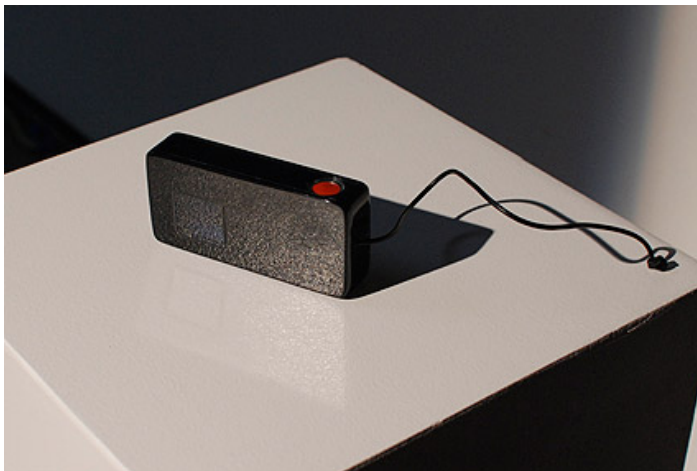
Blendie

[Germaine Koh](#) from Vancouver presents a work from her [Fair Weather Forces](#) series. As Eyebeam is at the tip of 21st street and thus very to the Hudson River, she installed a sensor for the current water-level which is remotely linked to a velvet rope barrier in the gallery. As the water changes, the height of the barrier will almost unnoticeably change and act as an ambient display for the natural surroundings of the built environment. (Especially interesting to watch since there was flooding forecast on the night of the opening.)



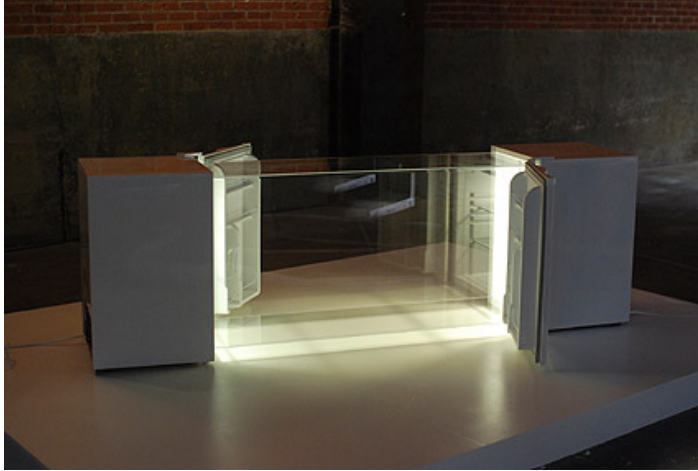
Fair Weather Forces (water level)

Sascha Pohflepp's (disclosure: that's me) [Buttons](#) is a camera that, instead of taking a photo, takes a moment. It then connects to the web to find someone else's photo that happened to be taken in the very same instant and displays it. The project aims to comment on photography as an increasingly networked practice and uses our trail of data to create a connection between two strangers on the basis that they did the same thing simultaneously: press a button.



Buttons

A highlight for me was [Michel de Broin](#)'s work. His piece *Great Encounters* consisting of two refrigerators, joined by a single piece of acrylic, results in "their solitudes uniting, through a canal connecting their inside worlds." His work questions the roles that we attribute to everyday objects and in doing so gives them sort of a new personality. The way in which that happens reminded me a lot of [Roger Ibars](#)' concise [Self-Made Objects](#). Another piece from the same series, which kind of became the eye-catcher of Untethered, is his piece *Dead Star*-a sculpture made from household batteries. All at the end of their life-cycle and previously used in all kinds of appliances, they slowly drain until there is no more energy in them. Although not on show in New York, his [Shared Propulsion Car](#) from 2005, a pedal-powered car, is great as well.



Great Encounters

And there's more. [Jessica Banks](#) created an interesting table as part of her Cubed series which is levitating on a magnetic field, there's [Thomson & Craighead's](#) Unprepared Piano that plays random MIDI from the web (and has the Star Wars theme as its Hello World), [Paul DeMarinis'](#) hacked metronomes Hypnica, [JooYoun Paek'](#)s bicycle disguise made of garbage bags, a chandelier by [Ayah Bdeir](#) and again Jessica Banks, [Hans-Christoph Steiner's](#) hacked PDA's, [Max Dean's](#) self-erasing clock and [Nor /d's](#) reactive architecture-photos of all of which you can find [here](#).

Show's up through October 25th in New York's Chelsea. For more information about the individual works, Eyebeam have also put [interviews](#) with all the artists online.

Related: [Interview](#) with Sarah Cook