

## GALLERIES



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### Max Dean

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BY DAVID BALZER   January 14, 2009 21:01

#### EDITORIAL RATING:

To Jan 31, Tue-Sat 10am-6pm.  
Nicholas Metivier Gallery, 451  
King W. 416-205-9000.  
[www.metiviergallery.com](http://www.metiviergallery.com).

Kinetic sculptor Max Dean might be best-known for his technologically sophisticated works – above all his Robotic Chair, which, like a larger, autonomous child's thumb toy, deconstructs and reconstitutes itself. But he always begins with, and appears to want to promote, concepts of directness and simplicity. A new, informal collection of works between 1971 and 2008 at Nicholas Metivier

makes this clear; many efforts, such as 1971's Balloon Box (a crate that, when opened, coughs up an ever-expanding polyethylene membrane), are propelled by basic, repurposed motors (here, from a vacuum cleaner) and, crucially, by the viewer's touch.

The interactivity of the works varies, from early-'90s drawings concealed within sheets of Mylar and revealed by a press of the hand, to 1973's Saw Box (demonstrated on opening night), a five-and-a-half-foot-tall, and more than a little frightening, contraption that cuts its top off with an interior chainsaw activated by noise levels in the room. Some of these are more successful than others. Saw Box, for one, is a forceful presence but a foggy concept, its feat of hidden, mechanized magic (an allusion to the classic lady-getting-sawed-in-half gag) seeming a goal in and of itself. Oppositely, 2001's So, This Is It, a clock with a video-monitor face that takes a snapshot of its beholder, which is then wiped away by the second hand, seems a superciliously blunt way to implicate viewers in themes of mutability and mortality. Better is 2000's Avery Stranded (After Babbitt) (pictured), a box containing a video screen showing an 1853 photograph by Platt D. Babbitt of a man marooned at the edge of Niagara Falls. The box has a sensor which makes the man disappear from the image as one moves farther away, and the effect is subtly peripheral and even poignant – in a sense obvious, but not in the loud manner of So, This Is It. (Whatever technology Dean has installed in the box it is impressively sensitive: on opening night, in a room full of people, it still worked like a charm.) Indeed, for Dean, the microchip seems fundamentally Newtonian and thus existential, its multiple-capacity magic a way to register presence: to respond to every action with an equal and opposite reaction.

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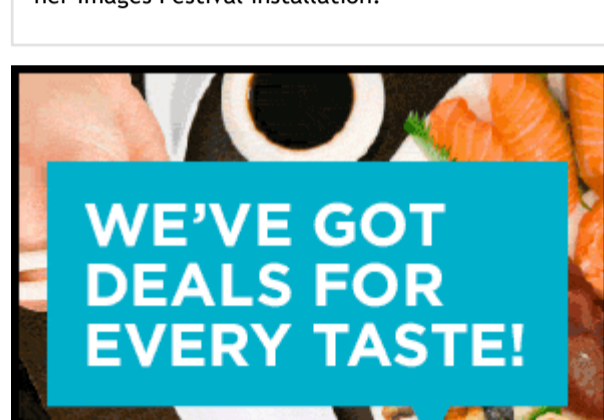


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