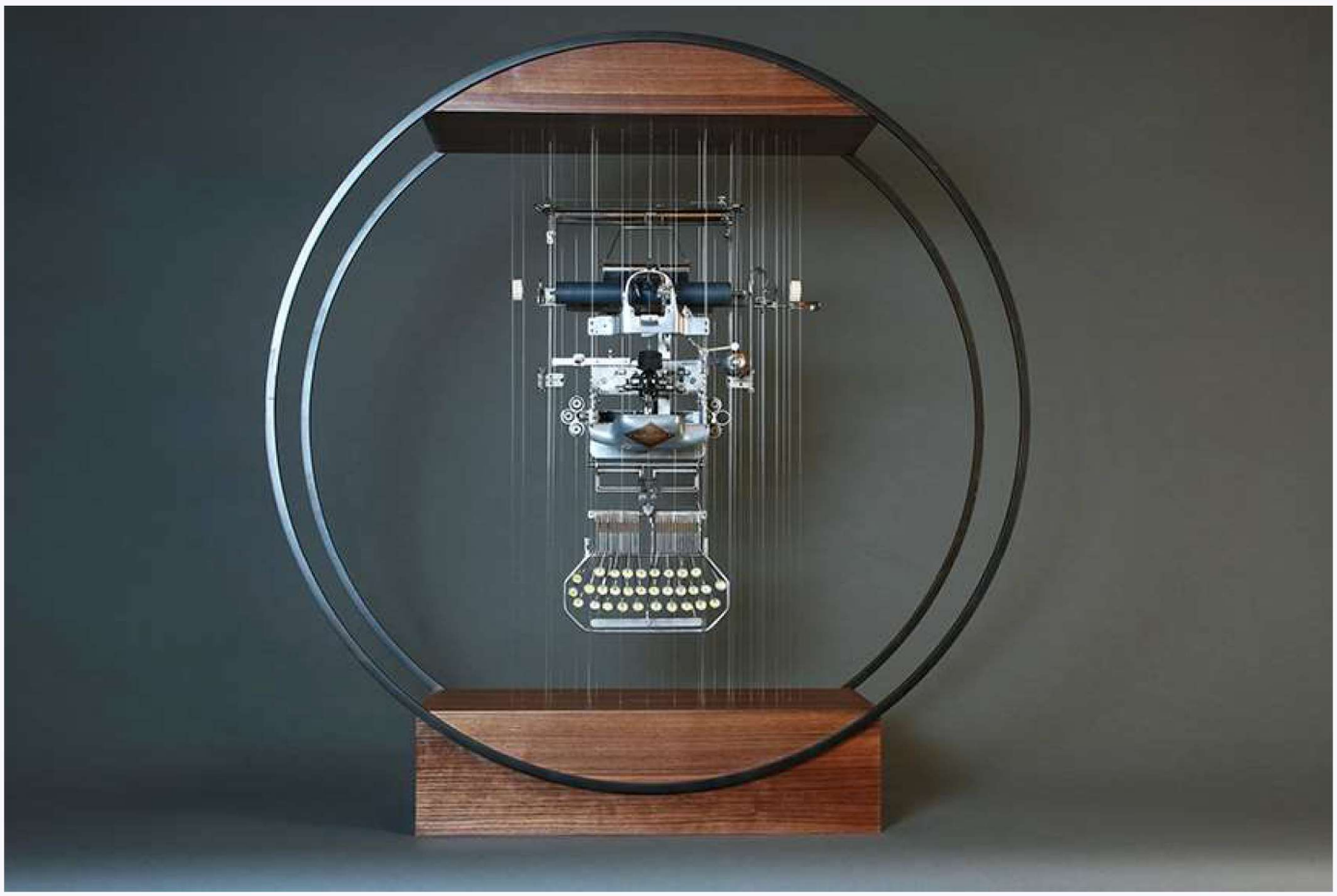
ON VIEW | INTERVIEW

John Peralta at George Billis Gallery



"Blickensderfer No. 8" (2018). Blickensderfer No. 8 typewriter (c. 1910), steel, wood, mono-filament. Image courtesy of the artist.

By Danielle McCloskey, contributor

On view at New York's George Billis Gallery from December 11th through January 19th is the work of sculptor John Peralta. Utilizing the "exploded-view" diagrammatic technique commonly employed by engineers, Peralta unveils the inner mechanisms and inner beauty of mechanical objects.

We asked John to talk a bit about the process behind his work:

Danielle McCloskey: *How do you pick the objects in your exploded sculptures? Do you make the displays they sit in as well?*

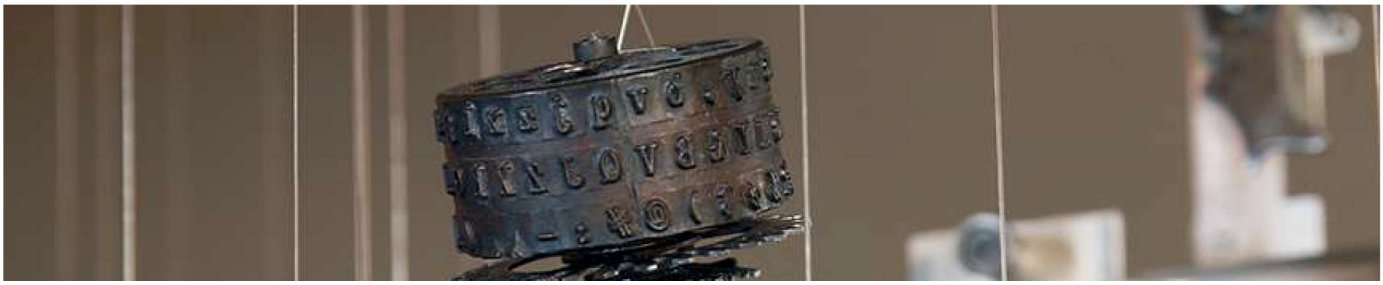
John Peralta: The objects I choose in my work are typically early 20th century icons of utility and invention – picture your grandmother's Singer sewing machine, the Underwood typewriter your grandfather used in the war, or the 8mm projector your parents showed their home movies on. On the other hand, some are more recent and culturally significant pieces, like a Fender Stratocaster guitar or an early model Macintosh computer. Regardless of their vintage, they all share a common formula of complexity, ingenuity, cultural significance, and great aesthetic design.

Once I've chosen an object that interests me, I spend a lot of time examining it and picturing how I want to present it. My aim is not to create a precise reproduction of an exploded diagram, but an artistic interpretation that incorporates cubist and other geometric perspectives. Once I've decided on the configuration and presentation, I disassemble the entire mechanism and restore the condition of each part. I then lay them all out on my workbench roughly as I want them and take measurements. I use these measurements to fabricate the display structure out of wood, steel, aluminum and/or other materials. In most case, I also install internal LED lighting. Finally, I start to suspend the individual pieces using steel and fluorocarbon mono-filaments. My exact techniques I'll keep to myself, but every component presents a unique challenge to suspend and align in just the right way.

DM: *Some of your work will be on display in New York this month - please talk about them and why you chose them to sit together in this show.*

JP: For my December New York show, I've chosen a total of five to six pieces which I feel demonstrate some of my best and most interesting work. They also represent a wide range of subjects and technical challenges.

The Blickensderfer typewriter is an iconic early American typewriter. It was among the earliest true portable machines. It was revolutionary for its elegant and simple design, having only about 250 parts, compared to about 2,500 parts in other comparable machines. It also featured a unique key arrangement, which arguably made better sense, but unfortunately never caught on. This particular piece, circa 1910, is a rare, all-aluminum body model.



"Blickensderfer No. 8" (2018). Blickensderfer No. 8 typewriter (c. 1910), steel, wood, mono-filament. Image courtesy of the artist.

This Keuffel & Esser Surveyor's Transit, circa 1920-1950, is emblematic of the enormous public works projects of the last century. Such tools made possible mankind’s most ambitious achievements. Consummately utilitarian, they were not only engineered for precision but were beautifully designed as well.

"Elevation" (2017). Keuffel & Esser surveyor's transit (c. 1952), wood, steel, latex, mono-filament. Image courtesy of the artist.

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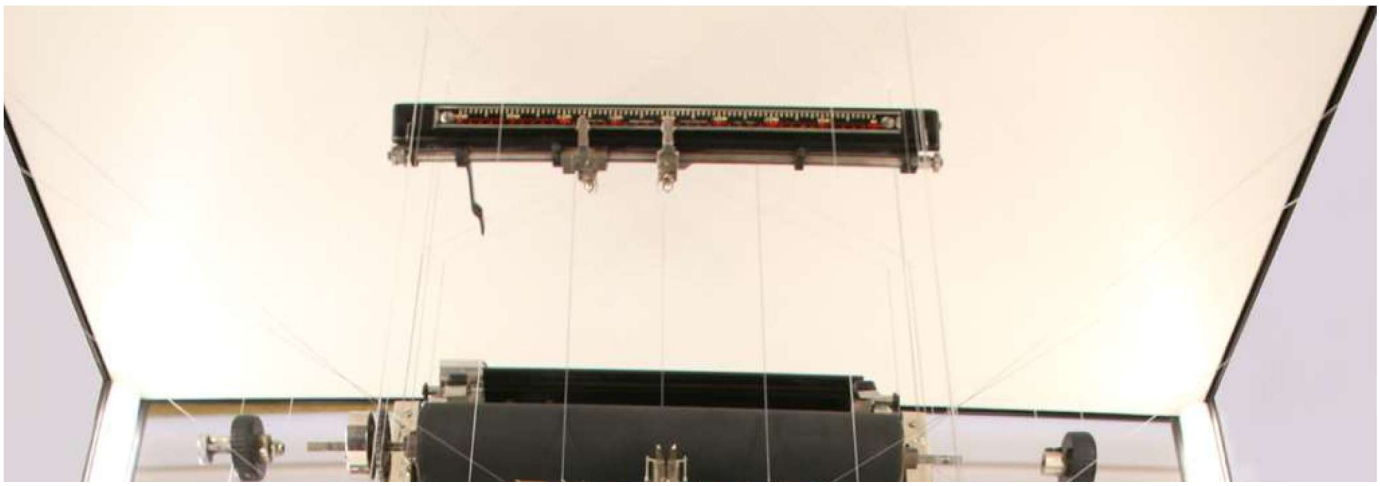
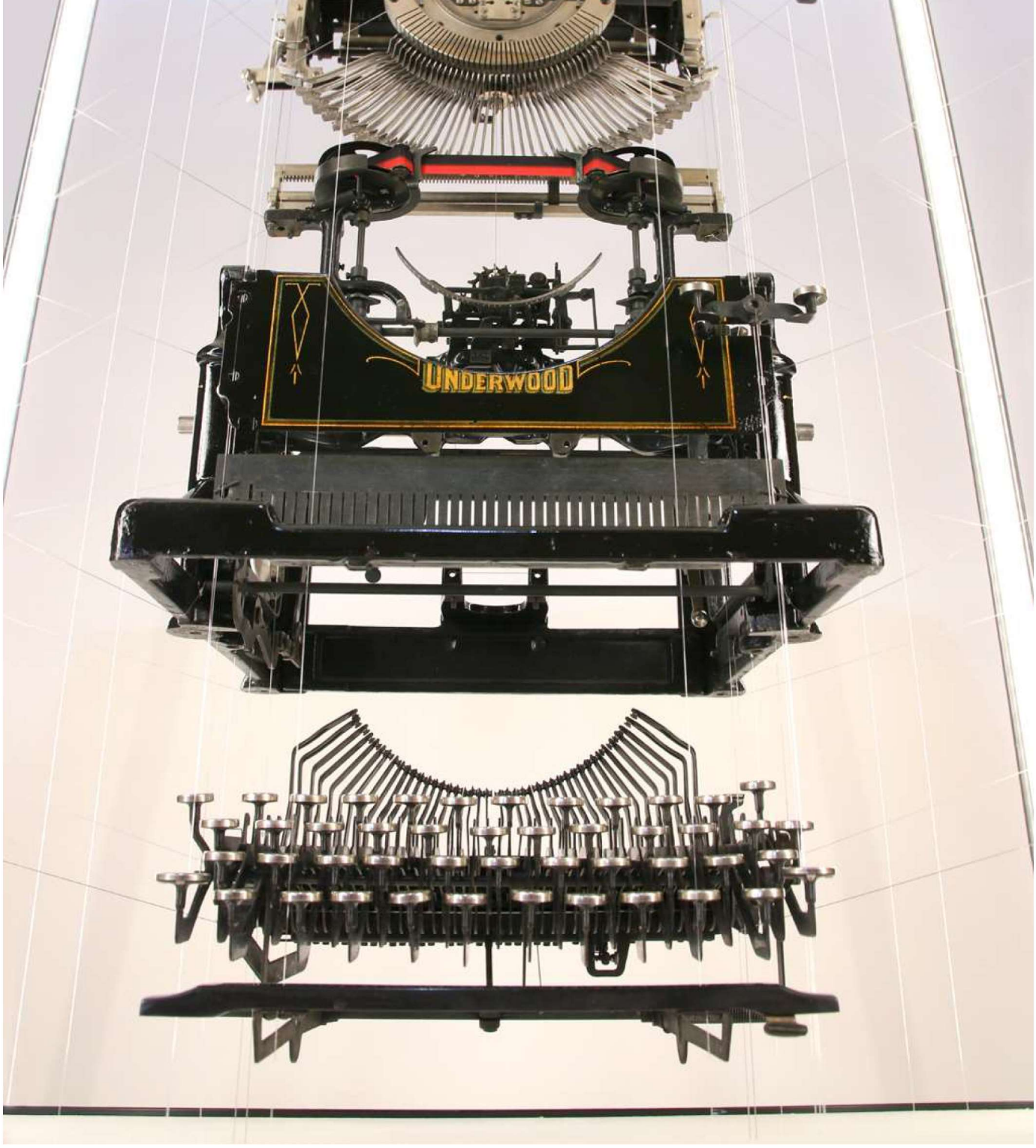
When most people think "classic typewriter," they picture something much like the Underwood No. 5. The reason being that it was the most successful typewriter design in history. Appearing shortly before 1900, the Underwood established the stereotype of a typewriter until the introduction of the IBM Selectric in 1961. When the Underwood was first introduced, it was one of hundreds of competing and extremely varied typewriter designs. But by 1920, almost every typewriter imitated the Underwood.





"Letters to Clarence" (2017). Underwood typewriter no. 5 (c. 1917), wood, steel, latex, mono-filament, LED lighting. Image courtesy of the artist.

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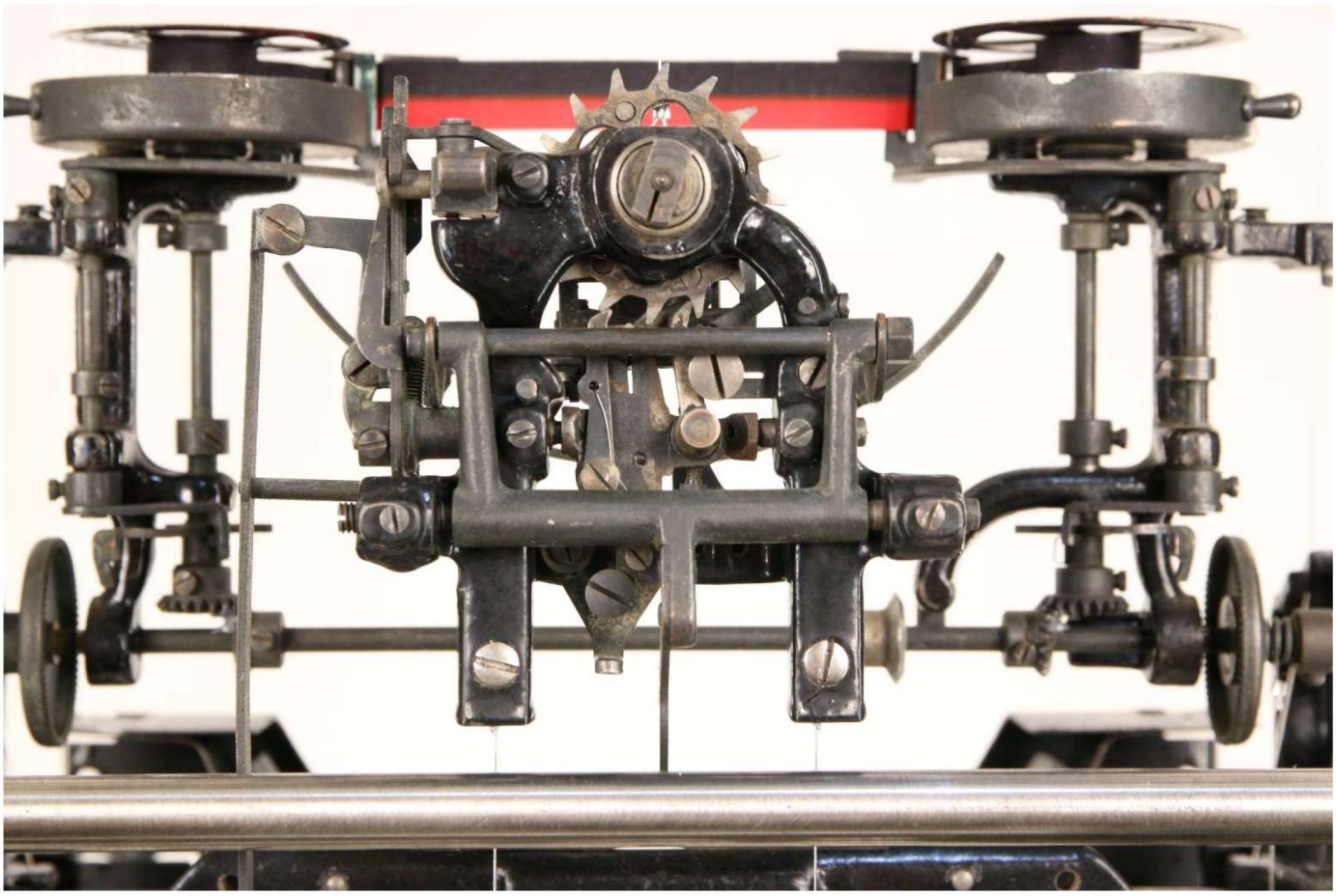

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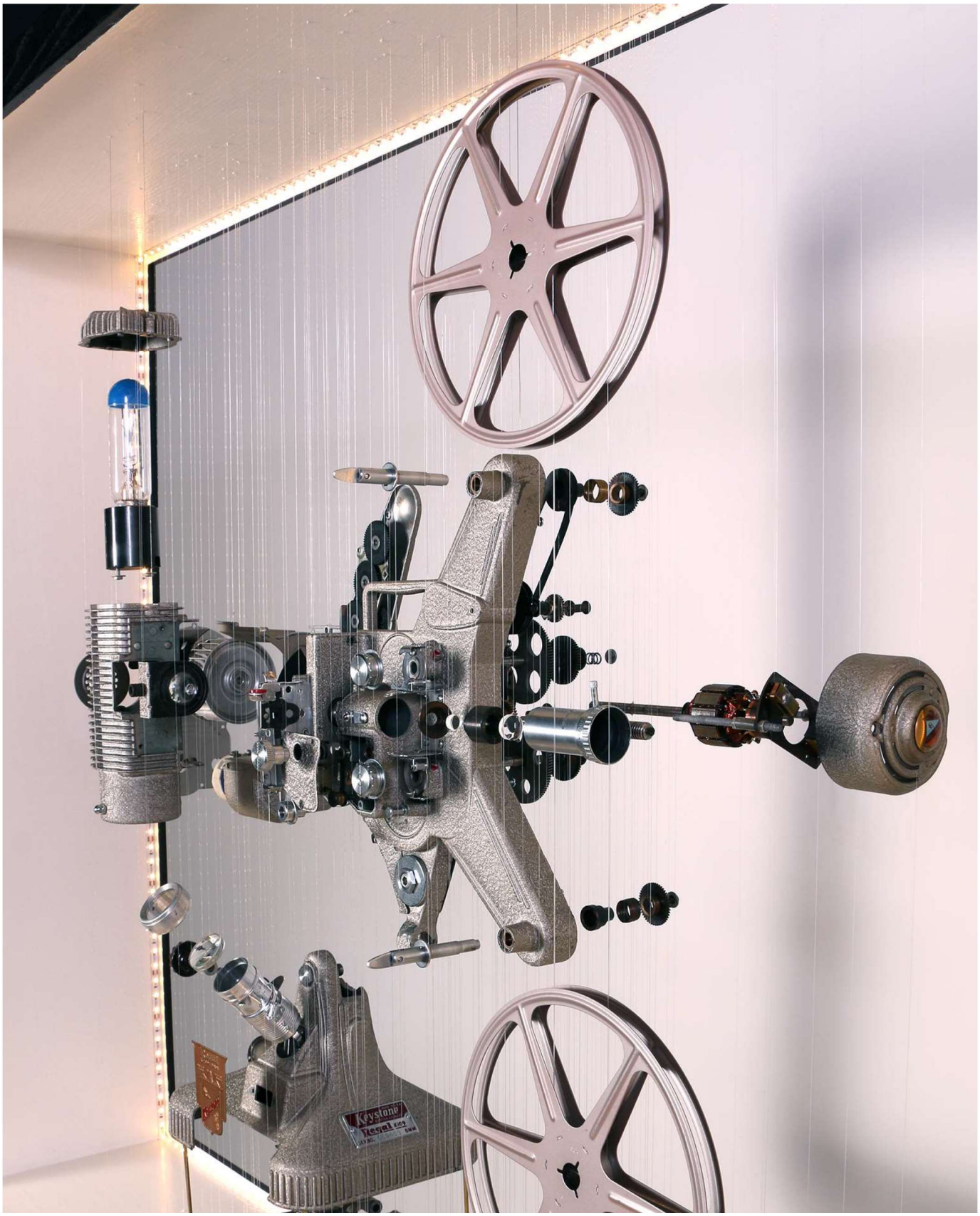
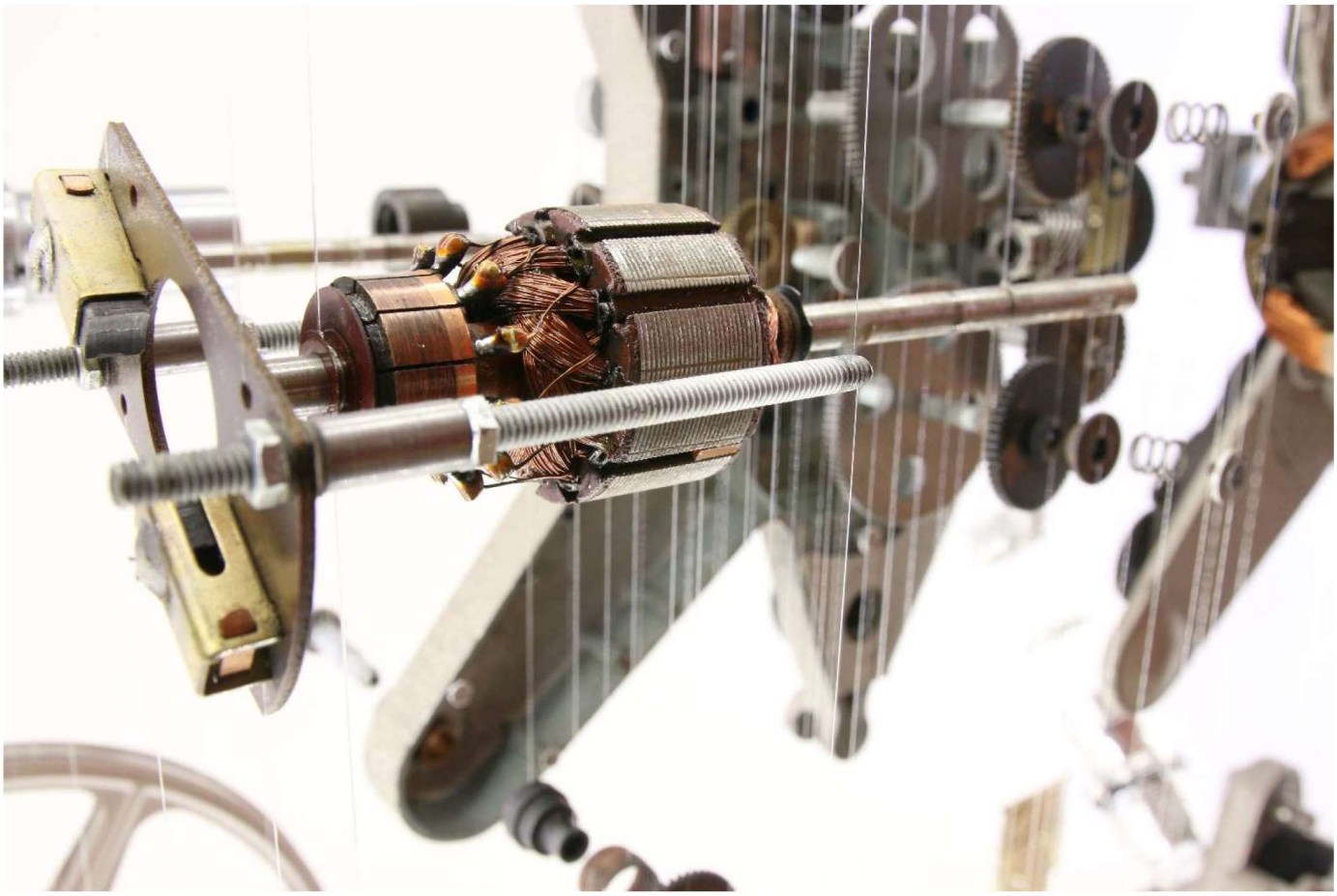
When Keystone, Bell & Howell, and other companies first began manufacturing silent film cameras and projectors, movies were still a novelty. Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin “flicker shows” still played in movie houses. In 1953 Keystone released the Regal K-109 8mm silent film projector, subjecting us to countless hours of shaky family vacation movies and boring educational films in school.



"Fiat Lux II" (2016). Keystone Regal 8mm Silent Film Projector Model K-109 (c. 1953), wood, latex, mono-filament. Image courtesy of the artist.



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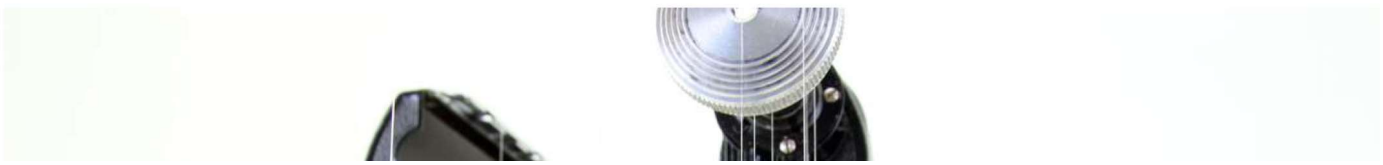
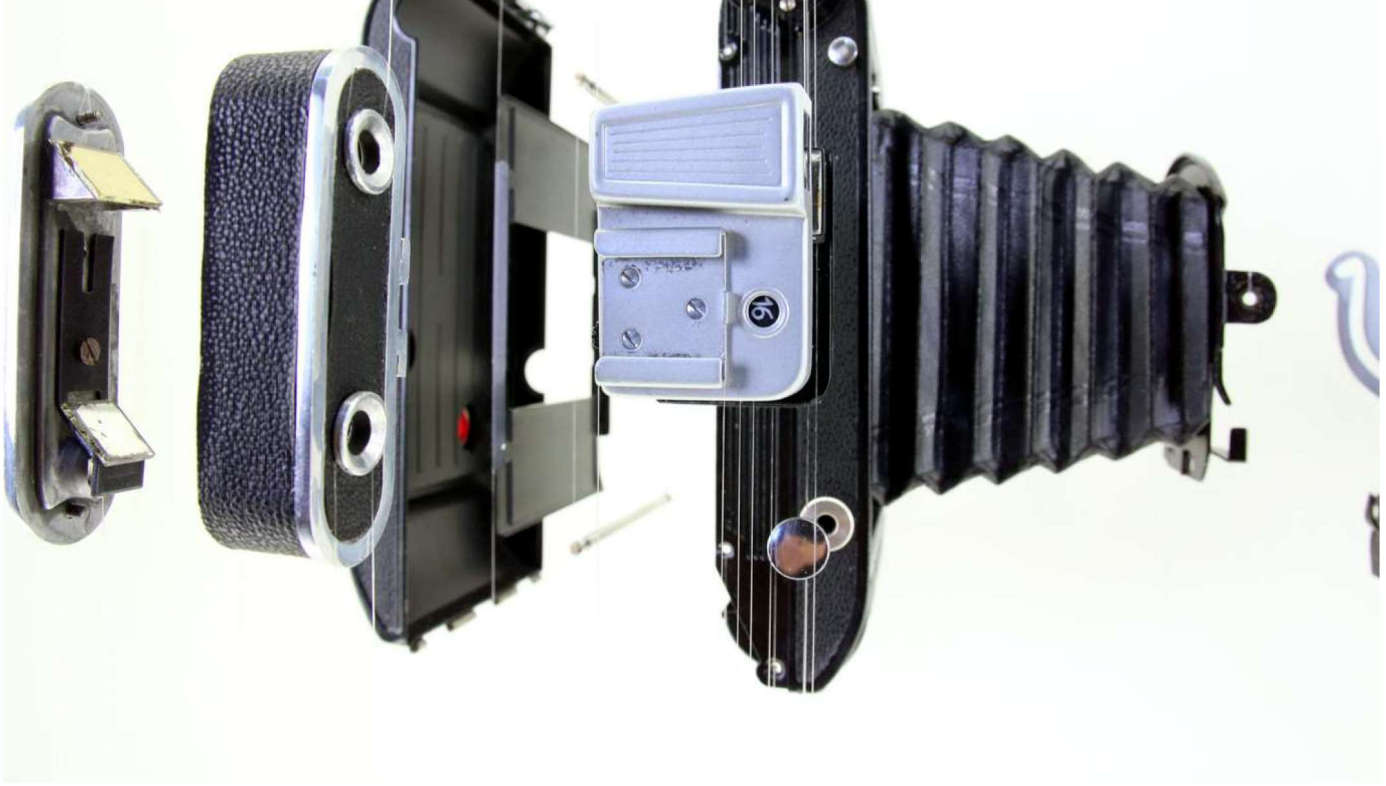
In spite of great technological advances in digital photography, manual film cameras have endured and continue to command a loyal following as an art form. The Baldafix was a robust and well finished folding camera, which was built in Dresden, Germany, and marketed in 1954. I chose this piece for it's simple, handsome design and complex optical mechanics, which are beautifully displayed when exploded against a stark white background.

"Baldafix" (2016). Balda "Baldafix" folding bellows camera (c. 1954), wood, latex, mono-filament, LED lighting. Image courtesy of the artist.

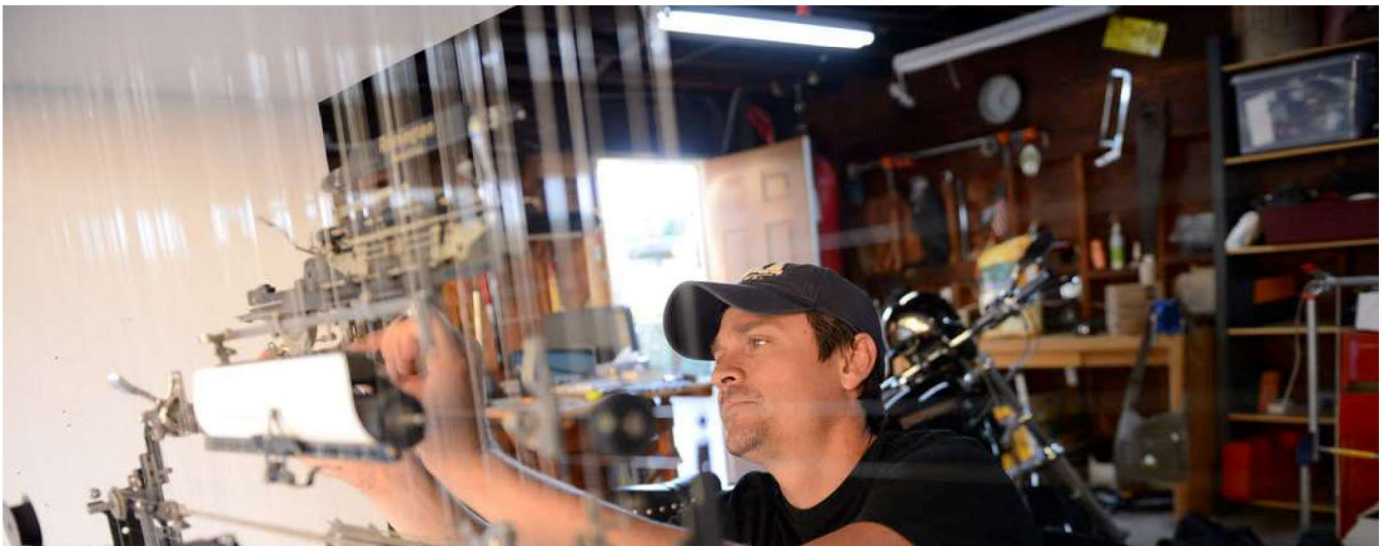




"Baldafix" (2016). Balda "Baldafix" folding bellows camera (c. 1954), wood, latex, mono-filament, LED lighting. Image courtesy of the artist.

DM: *What was the first object you disassembled that you found to be the start of your sculptural practice?*

JP: In 2004, while sitting for a haircut, I came across an exploded diagram of a bicycle on the back of a magazine. Although I had seen many such drawings over the years, I was suddenly struck by its fragile beauty, and imagined a three-dimensional version using a real mechanical object. Then and there I set my mind on doing just that. Living in a tiny apartment in Hong Kong at the time, I began searching through my junk drawer for an appropriately small subject and found a simple Westclox “Scotty” pocket watch from the 1960s. Using only a ruler and hand-powered drill, I devised a system for suspending the tiny parts just as I had imagined. That’s when I realized I had finally found a truly original creative outlet that combined my interests in art, design, science, and engineering.



John Peralta. Photo courtesy of the artist.
