

Flash Art

REVIEWS

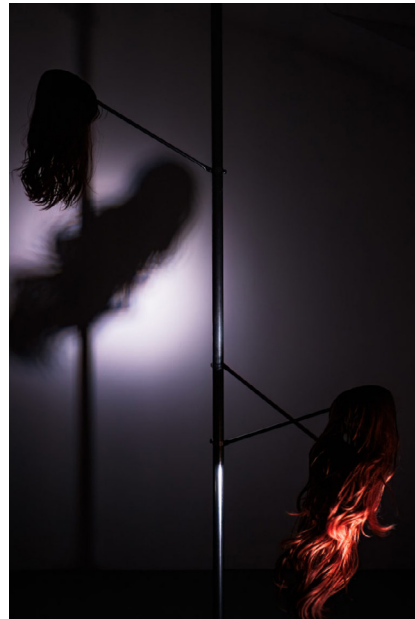
13 November 2025, 9:00 am CET

Anna Franceschini "NIGHTS OUT" *KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS / Vienna*

by Robert Bergmann



Anna Franceschini, "NIGHTS OUT."
Installation view at KUNSTVEREIN
GARTENHAUS, Vienna, 2025.
Courtesy of the artist and
KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS,
Vienna. © kunst-
dokumentation.com



Anna Franceschini, "NIGHTS OUT."
Installation view at KUNSTVEREIN
GARTENHAUS, Vienna, 2025.
Courtesy of the artist and
KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS,
Vienna. © kunst-
dokumentation.com

The darkened windows appear like black holes. From the outside, nothing can be seen. The façade resembles a dodgy nightclub more than an edgy art space, and the entrance leads into a run-down interior. Cut off from sunlight, it is easy to lose track of time. In Anna Franceschini's solo exhibition "NIGHTS OUT" at KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS — curated by Attilia Fattori Franchini and Ilaria Gianni — kinetic sculptures impart the story of an everlasting night at a club. Three dancing poles driven by motors haunt the room. On each pole, three wigs whirl through the spotlights. Two blondes and a redhead dance an endless shift. The machine-sculptures are titled simply *Blonde 1*, *Blonde 2*, and *Redhead*(all 2025): feminized machines suspended between seduction and efficiency, constantly renegotiating their pose within the economy of gazes.

I first met Franceschini last January, when she first visited the space in preparation for the exhibition. Later, once the works had been installed with the engineering team, we spoke about how, as the wigs spun faster, the hair seemed to dissolve into pure motion. Attached to the poles at different heights, the wigs unfold like individual frames of a dance, each capturing a phase of a non-discrete movement, brought to life by rotation — like the flickering cycle of a zoetrope. As a precursor to cinema, the zoetrope laid the groundwork for the film projector. Through mechanical rotation and the stroboscopic effect of its slits, the device creates the illusion of fluid motion, embodying cinema's most

elemental principles: light, movement, duration, and composition. No wonder Franceschini devoted a 16mm film work to this haunted machine: *IT'S ABOUT LIGHT AND DEATH* (2011), shot in a taxidermy workshop using only a strobe light. In this Viennese “play,” the machines transform into moving images — a living cinema without screens or actors.



Anna Franceschini, “NIGHTS OUT.” Installation view at KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS, Vienna, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS, Vienna. © kunst-dokumentation.com

In their apparent autonomy, the artist’s sculptures seem to constantly negotiate their role between work and leisure, mechanics and rhythm, function and play. This tension evokes another kind of “dark room”: the so-called *lights-out* manufacturing facility. In a society obsessed with efficiency and optimization, where functionality is synonymous with labor, Franceschini’s works recall the eerie reality of production halls where machines manufacture other machines in total darkness. These spaces are driven by

an insatiable efficiency, no longer reliant on the regeneration and recovery of the human body.

While the installation clearly engages with the context of the club, music is most striking in its absence. No DJ set is needed to get these machines in motion; the only audible sound is that of their motors. For the artist, the sequence of gestures performed by the machines inevitably conveyed the logic of a true dance floor. While developing the choreography, she tried to sense which dance track might best translate into technical movement, and we spontaneously began exchanging club music and putting together a playlist with all-time classics such as *L'amour toujours* (1999), *Sandstorm* (2000), and *Rhythm Is a Dancer* (1992). The latter led us to Denis Lavant's ecstatic dance of solitude at the end of Claire Denis's *Beau Travail* (1999). Franceschini's attempts to manually transfer each beat — without the aid of translation software — reminded me of the rotoscope, the film animation technique developed by Max Fleischer in 1914, in which a live human performance was filmed, projected, and traced frame by frame to compose a fluid sequence of images. In "NIGHTS OUT" Franceschini tries to embed the musical patterns within the machine's dance steps. The machine is thus controlled by the desire to reproduce them perfectly. Yet the sculptures cannot succeed, and the limits of the machine's expression become visible. They fall into a mechanical stutter, as in a ritual of possession, only to then whirl around again, far too hastily.



Anna Franceschini, "NIGHTS OUT." Installation view at KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS, Vienna, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS, Vienna. © kunst-dokumentation.com

The combination of trance-like repetition, frenetic shaking, and headbanging in a mosh pit is reminiscent of both the ecstatic dances of the Shakers — a millenarian Christian sect — and the raw energy of a punk rock concert. These elements converge in Dan Graham's speculative video essay *Rock My Religion* (1984), where Shaker rituals are presented as precursors to the rock genre and to the ecstatic dancing of American youth to amplified sounds, intended as acts of liberation from social control. As Kodwo Eshun writes, "It moves from the morning light of the Shaker residences to the barely legible darkness of the mosh pit."^I The rough, grainy materiality of Graham's video — its noise and vibration — gives the medium a physical presence. This same condition resonates in "NIGHTS OUT," where the sculptures' movements repeatedly succumb to their technical nature. A constant interplay between bliss and stuttering, the familiar and the

uncanny, posing and collapse, runs throughout the work. The soundtrack generated by the machines' motors is a twisted version of what Throbbing Gristle once called "Industrial Music for Industrial People." As if attending an industrial music concert, Franceschini's sculptures transform mechanical noise and movement into ecstasy, labor into beauty — *travail* into *beau travail*.

^I Kodwo Eshun, *Dan Graham: Rock My Religion* (London: Afterall Books, 2012), 34.