The exploration of kinetic sculpture is at the core of Lois Andison’s practice. Although she also makes multidisciplinary works using video and text, it is her juxtaposition of movement and conceptual gestures that create a sense of wonder. Her use of kinetic elements ties her to other pioneers in the field of kinetic art and technology from Jean Tinguely to Rebecca Horn and Norman White (who she studied under at OCA, now OCADU), but she chooses to create works of art that inhabit a much more personal and pensive space. Less shambolic than the work of many of her male peers, her projects take form as elegantly refined minimalist objects. Yet as thoughtful and considered as her works can be they also exhibit an absurdist sensibility underlined by the artist’s use of unexpected gestures and wordplay. Her best works subtly interrogate our perceptions of meaning and gender, while at the same time revealing the potential for empathy between engineering and aesthetics.

relay
The floor’s the limit is a three-channel video installation depicting three young women: Kerry, Alyson and Caitlin. This striking triumvirate was filmed rollerskating throughout an empty gallery, specifically the Olga Korper Gallery in Toronto. Although all similarly attired in black, from hair colour to attitude, they do not conform to typical stereotypes. The combined videos are a deliberate response to the imposing circumstance of the gallery itself as well as a determined shout out to girl power. The unexpected incursion of rollerskaters amidst the four white walls of this secular temple demonstrates a clear sense of empowerment rather than any semblance of objectification. While the gallery certainly frames and in a sense limits each performance, the actions and personalities of the individual performers remain unimpeded and largely unscripted.

Part of an ongoing series succinctly titled afterworks, each work is based on a readymade by another worldfamous 20th century artist. Inspiring, after picasso II merges the readymade assemblage Tête de taureau (1942) by Pablo Picasso with a sculpted porcelain flower acknowledging Georgia O’Keefe. When the viewer approaches a motion sensor the bull’s head so that it gestures much as the enaged animal would. Suggesting a decapitated rodeo bull the mirrored glass horns fruitlessly attempt to gore the viewer or dispatch the O’Keefe from plain sight.

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good grief, bad grief is rendered in neon, once commonly used for commercial signage. Alternately flashing the catchphrase ‘good grief’ followed by it’s opposite, the blinking neon evokes the opening and closing of a linguistic circuit and is purposefully reminiscent of the probing wit of American conceptualist Bruce Nauman, who also uses neon in a poetic and beguiling way.

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Long a target for send-ups and rip-offs, Andison’s remake is remarkably proactive. Rather than copy the single wheel, she pairs it, then activates the assemblage using motors and motion sensors. Once the first wheel begins to rotate it smoothly leans over as if kissing its mate, transforming its kinetic energy to its neighbour and causing it to spin for a short while before the inertia wears off. Following an approach similar to that used in solving man ray’s obstruction, nudging marcel makes no attempt to overturn the radical necessity of the original but once again manages to nurture the readymade impulse by returning a semblance of the objects original, albeit inverted function as a set of bicycle wheels that function in tandem.

Andison integrates these seemingly incompatible elements into an intrinsically cohesive whole that begins to level the playing field. Her ongoing attempts to generate a balance between grace and precarity is a singular quality found in many, if not all of her artworks regardless of media. Andison retains an unapologetically poetic sensibility in her work and her combination of readymades, wordplay and kinetic elements suggest both strength and vulnerability.

— Ivan Jurakic

2. Marcel Duchamp remade multiple versions of his pivotal Bicycle Wheel, including a third version (1951) in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and a sixth version (1964) in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

Artist Biography
Lois Andison is a Canadian artist who has exhibited nationally and internationally in Toronto, Montréal, Lethbridge, Mexico City, Boston, Buffalo and New York. Her work can be found in private and corporate collections including the National Gallery of Canada, Bank of Montreal and the Donovan Collection. She is an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Waterloo and lives in Toronto. Lois Andison is represented by Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto and Art Mûr, Montréal.

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All images courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery. Cover photo (front and back covers): the floor’s the limit, photos: Lois Andison and Jade Rude. Interior photos: michaek cullen.

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