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Art Gallery Shows to See in May

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Installation view of “Tromarama: Upon a Machine,” in which computer programs convert text into code that activates instruments. via Tromarama and The Kitchen; Photo by Kris Graves

The Indonesian collective Tromarama has made a name for itself with artworks that cleverly transform social media posts into more abstract and symbolic outputs. For example, “Contract” (2025) used posts on X tagged #force to prompt the playing of infrasonic recordings of twitching muscles, which emanated from speakers embedded in Korean instant noodle cups.

For their first solo show in New York, Tromarama — formed by Febie Babyrose, Herbert Hans and Ruddy Hatumena in 2006 — has turned their attention to artificial intelligence. “Upon a Machine” consists of a series of melodicas, soprano recorders, microphones and lamps that are connected via tubes, wires and quotidian objects like ladders, lawn chairs and mops. A screen features an A.I.-generated, karaoke-style video interpretation of the comic “The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck.” Computer programs convert the text into code that activates the instruments and lights in real time.

If that explanation still leaves you a bit confused — well, me too. There's a lot, probably too much, going on here conceptually, and the wall text obfuscates more than it illuminates.

But the art is nonetheless engaging. The piece is a sprawling, sonic Rube Goldberg machine that emits music so delightfully deranged — ghostly whistles and long, grating chords — I couldn't help but laugh. (Knowing that it's loosely inspired by the Disney classic "When You Wish Upon a Star" makes it even funnier.) Whatever the piece is meant to signify, it reads as an apt metaphor for the creative sloppiness and mundanity of A.I.

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