

THE WEEK

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26 ARTS

Review of reviews: Art

Exhibit of the week

The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl

*Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Through Sept. 5*

Don't enter this group show expecting a simple nostalgia trip, said Chris Bergeron in the Milford, Mass., *Daily News*. A gathering of 105 works inspired by, and made from, 33- and 45-rpm records, it's no more about just the songs on those discs "than 'Heartbreak Hotel' was about Elvis's stay in a fly-by-night flophouse." The show, which originated at Duke University's Nasher Museum, arose from the curator's recognition that artists of varied interests were finding inspiration in a technology that lost its central place in the culture some 20 years ago. The best-known piece dates back further: It's a life-size group portrait in photomontage of the band Talking Heads, created by singer David Byrne and used for a 1978 album cover. More characteristic, though, is *Haunted by You*, a "deadpan but fantastic video" created in 2009 by Taiyo Kimura. Essentially, it "shows what happens if you use a chicken or an apple instead of a needle to play a record."

Not deep enough for you? said Jenna Scherer in *Time Out Boston*. Like the music it calls to mind, the exhibit often "isn't all that weighty"; it's "just kind of fun." The first thing we see is a "pop-



A 2005 work by the Dutch artist Jeroen Diepenmaat: *The magic of a beak meeting vinyl*

culture totem pole" of sorts: William Cordova's *Greatest Hits*—a towering column of stacked records—highlights the ridiculous degree to which these artifacts of mass culture have "taken on the significance of sacred icons." There's much else here to catch your eyes or ears: At one of the handful of listening stations, you can even pull a vinyl album from an artist-curated crate and drop the needle where you please.

My own skepticism was no match for the overall experience, said Sebastian Smee

in *The Boston Globe*. There's something magic about a record—the way a mute physical object can, when touched by a stylus, produce "such aural and emotional wonders." Once you see how many artists have been inspired by that phenomenon, it begins to look like "an all-purpose metaphor" for creativity in our time. Perhaps today's artists, feeling marginalized, foresee their own fate in vinyl's "dramatic obsolescence." Or maybe records simply reinforce their bedrock faith that a physical object, when afforded close attention, "can contain whole worlds."