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MIKA TAJIMA

Tajima meditates on the obsolescence of offices

By Drew Toal



There's something profoundly uncomfortable about Mika Tajima's exploration of the office environment as a reality-simulating performance space at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery. Besides the obviously depressing existential connotations of living life anchored to a sterile cubicle, this feeling is given wincing immediacy by the ergonomic kneeling chairs found interspersed throughout the space. (These questionably designed vintage pieces were once made to help properly train a person's body for the perpetual slouch of desk work.) However unnatural, they are in any case the perfect vantage point to take in Tajima's colorful repurposing of the Herman Miller Action Office System—itself a remnant of workaday life in the days before the Internet.

Tajima scavenged and altered these large wall fixtures—which originally came from a now defunct telemarketing center—as a way of illustrating how the traditional office space no longer reflects our high-speed professional existence. It's a make-believe world where the standard furnishings and layout actively frustrate us with their resolutely static, functionally prehistoric nature.

"Furniture Art," the accompanying series that lines the walls of the gallery, is arranged in disjointed patterns and reflects a bygone industrialized age with its hard edges and jarring tones. The haphazard placement,



reordering and repainting of these old 9-to-5 set pieces seems to promise a way out for those of us hemmed in by the outdated workplace-design strictures of the 1970s; a way to manage, in Tajima's words, the "symbolic representation of reality."

The office as we know it may very well be doomed to go the way of Blockbuster Video, Friendster and any other communal space not able to quickly adapt. Mika Tajima makes an intriguing case, though, for ways to think about replacing it.