

ARTFORUM

By Annie Godfrey Larmon

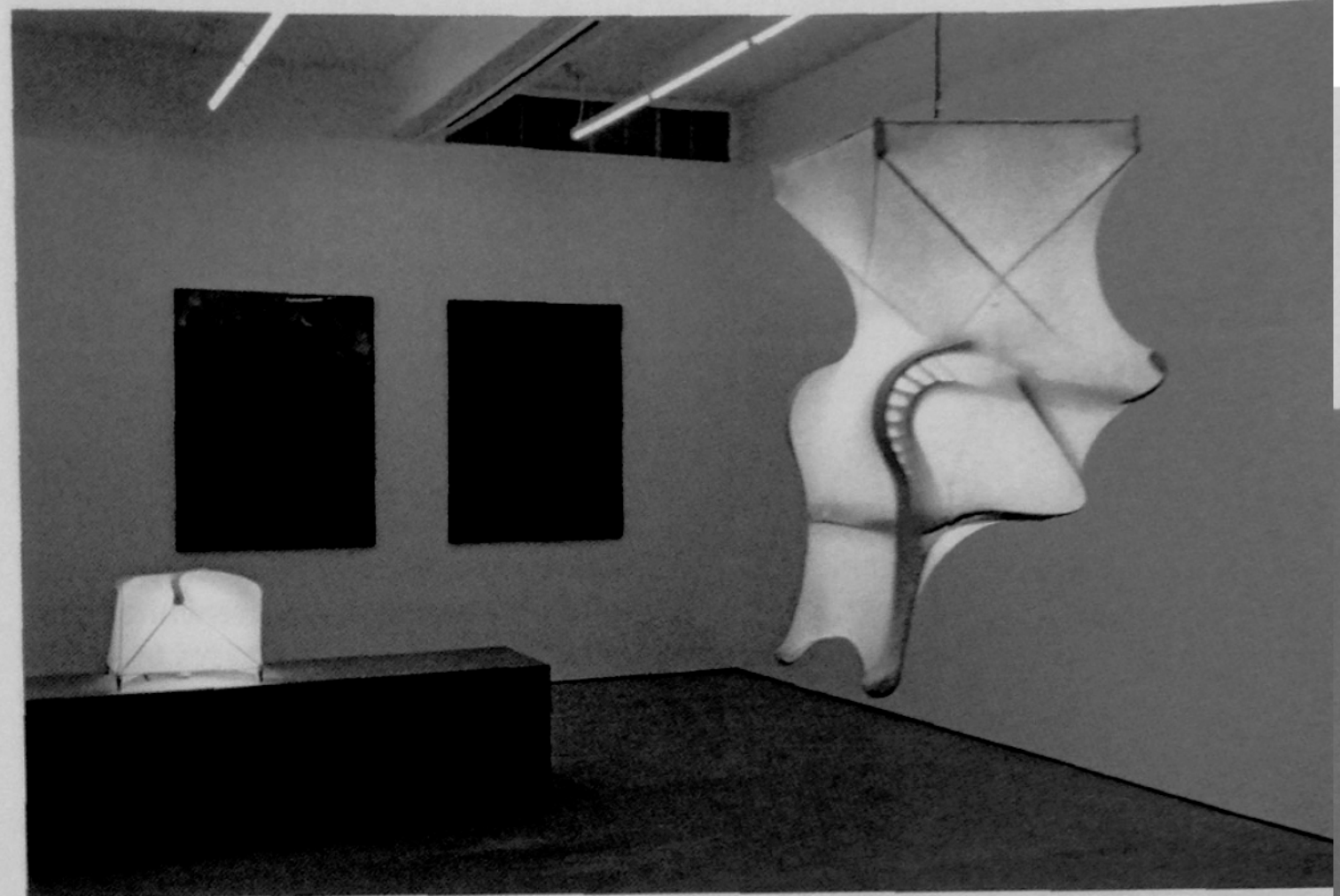
Mika Tajima

11R

If cyberspace is, as novelist William Gibson once described it, a “consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators,” then Mika Tajima translates the side effects of this collective trip into impractical biotechnical objects. The three series that were on view in the artist’s second exhibition at 11R continued her project of cannibalizing the cool rationalism of modernist design in order to reflect the precariousness of subjects in the networked, performance-driven, and speculative world of late capitalism. In past works, Tajima revealed the ways in which the utopian promise of Herman Miller’s 1968 Action Office disguises its inherently regulatory function; here she turned to the furniture company’s more recent contributions to ergonomics, and to the conditions of immaterial labor that would make their *Embodiment* desk chair—from which Tajima borrowed this exhibition’s title—a paragon of industrial design.

The exhibition spanned two galleries, each flooded with pulsing or stuttering light emanating from four of the artist’s “mood-light sculptures” from 2016. Each of these works—drawn from the series “Meridian,” 2015—is composed of a retooled Herman Miller *Setu* ergonomic desk chair and a Wi-Fi-enabled LED bulb entombed in cocoon resin. The lights respond to streams of data in real time: For example, *Meridian 4* and *Meridian 5*, installed in the east gallery, were linked to aggregated Twitter feeds, forming a suite with an HD monitor that live-streamed tweets collected from London and Cairo. A custom

program quantified the intensity of the tweets’ emotions, and, every four seconds, the intensity values were averaged and translated into a color spectrum. *Meridian 4*, an awkward shape suspended from the ceiling, responded to London’s aggregated affect, swelling from deep royal blue to hot magenta, while the smaller, tentlike *Meridian 5*, set atop an oblong white oak pedestal, represented the stream from Cairo.



Surrounding these sculptures were four large-scale textiles from the series “Negative Entropy,” 2012–. To produce these works, Tajima recorded audio at the offices and factories of a Jacquard loom card cutter, a textile designer, and a systems engineer at a data center. She then translated the human and machinic sounds into digital spectrogram images that were woven with a Jacquard loom in vivid palettes ripped from activewear brands Nike and Lululemon; the results read like hypnagogic interpretations of Anni Albers textiles.

In the west gallery, the mood lights *Meridian 6* and *Meridian 7* tracked sentiments pertaining to the average global feeling about the commodity of gold—that most material, most concrete embodiment of economic value. These lights shifted in brightness from that of candlelight to that of artificial daylight according to real-time fluctuations in gold prices from different exchanges around the world, setting aglow seven inky-black acrylic panels from 2015 that lined the gallery walls. These panels, from the “Furniture Art” series, 2011–, were sprayed with an atomized enamel mist that was only revealed when caught with light—or, rather, when the sentiment toward gold changed. As though alchemically touched, the works served as mesmerizing philosopher’s stones for the global economic imaginary.

As I stood cloaked in the fluorescent glow, it occurred to me that these are irksome objects, but in each of them the artist doubles back: Where she deploys individual tweets to humanize the type of labor that might be performed in a *Setu* chair, she also demonstrates how easily emotion can be usurped, packaged, and, ultimately, monetized. In the “Negative Entropy” works, the disposition and expression of the producer that’s invisible in the industrial product is still completely inaccessible to the viewer; the voice is rendered as an unintelligible abstraction in commodity form. These are somersaults of alienation. But rather than coming to rest on the insidious impact of immaterial labor and its systems upon our bodies, or on the psychological ramifications of hitting the “consensual hallucination” too hard, Tajima gives us a seductive choreography of affects.

—Annie Godfrey Larmon

View of “Mika Tajima 2016. From left: *Meridian 7*, 2016; *Meridian 6*, 2016; *Furniture Art (Possession Island)*, 2015; *Furniture Art (Annobón)*, 2015. Photo: Charles Bento