

TRANSACTION
ABSTRAITE

CHARLES ATLAS

MIKA TAJIMA

COMMISSAIRE DE L'EXPOSITION
CLAIRE STAEBLER

DU 19 FÉVRIER AU 26 MARS 2011
NEW GALERIE

TRANSACTION

CHARLES ATLAS/MIKA TAJIMA



MIKA TAJIMA / NEW HUMANS
installation view
Disassociate, 2007
silkscreen, canvas, acrylic
paint, silver leaf, paper, pins,
wood, wheels
vue de l'installation
Disassociate, 2007
sérigraphie, toile, acrylique,
feuille d'argent, papier,
pointes, bois, roulettes
dimension variable

In 2009, Mika Tajima and Charles Atlas inaugurated their joint-exhibition at SFMOMA through a series of performances. For *Today Is Not a Dress Rehearsal*, Charles Atlas filmed and edited in real-time the footage of the rushes of live performances that are simultaneously projected in the exhibition space, using the sculptures and surfaces of works by Mika Tajima. Since the 1970's, Charles Atlas is considered the pioneer of the medium "media-dance" (in collaboration with Merce Cunningham) and fictional choreographic-documentary. Mika Tajima makes installations combining texts and images, screen-printed panels, collages and mirrors, as so many potential film sets, recording studios or offices, spaces regularly activated by performance. Mika Tajima's mobile sculptures are animated by their versatility, and can serve as barricades, billboards or projection panels, partitions or monochrome back-screens. If Mika Tajima invents spaces with different performative possibilities, Charles Atlas invents unprecedented performances for the camera. *Torse*, *Blue Studio*, *Fractions*, *Channels/ Inserts* are all steps in developing an ingenious method that emphasizes the physical separation of the body inside the frame. Favoring methods of super-positioning and collage, Charles Atlas uses fragmentary forms to signify presence and absence. Experimentation, accident, improvisation, artifice and reality appear as common ground between these two artists.

United for the first time by their respective works at the New Galerie, Charles Atlas and Mika Tajima constantly renegotiate their oeuvre. The exhibition *Transaction Abstraite* (abstract transaction) manifests the invisible thread of a conversation in flux, taut between dance and abstraction, filmed performance and performative space, form and formlessness or order and chaos. While some of Charles Atlas' films show actions shot in the 1970's, Mika Tajima's installation is activated by a solo performance on the opening night of the exhibition drawing on her involvement with *New Humans* - her collective founded in

2003 that mixes action and experimental music. While maintaining their individuality, the works exhibited in the context of *Transaction Abstraite* (abstract transaction) react to one another and refer to questions of portraiture and painting, of sculpture and abstraction, of film and fiction, but never in the same space-time. Charles Atlas' videos experiment with manifold montage rules and perceptibly surpass beyond the frame. Similarly, Mika Tajima's work participates in the reorganization of the physical gallery space and, at the same time, refers to the active potentials that exceed these structures. Converted into a space of transit, but also a cinematic and plastic space, the New Galerie deploys unexpected resources.

Using films, videos, projections, installations comprising multiple screens, Charles Atlas makes the image in motion, the moving image, his unique mode of expression. The artist seeks to test the limits of documentary and fiction, to capture transient events and a certain authenticity with the camera. His two films *Nevada* and *Floor*, presented as part of *Abstract Transaction* (*Transaction abstraite*), are precursory developments of "media-dance", and they introduce the themes that Atlas will continue to explore. Filmed in 1974, *Floor* is based on movement, flatness and depth. A man, the dancer Douglas Dunn, appears, partially or entirely, and disappears from the frame. He performs a series of movements by drawing a circle on the ground, forcing the viewers to follow him as their gaze fluctuates inside and outside the frame. The reference to Caillebotte's painting *Raboteurs de parquet* highlights the pictorial potential of this video, its qualities of composition and plasticity.

Dance, drawing and abstraction are incorporated into the video *Nevada*, in which again Douglas Dunn performs a series of movements with a board found randomly in the street and whose shape is reminiscent of the state of Nevada. Initially filming a tight shot, followed by a broader one, the performer tests all modes of activation of

ABSTRAITE JIMA



MIKA TAJIMA / NEW HUMANS
AND CHARLES ATLAS

Today is Not a Dress Rehearsal
performance view at SFMOMA, 2009
performance au SFMOMA, 2009

this form in space. As an introduction, the offset framing of the board leaning against a wall, opens *Nevada* with an abstract and geometric composition.

Santa Fe, Tokyo, St. Croix, Moscow... Mika Tajima's series *Furniture Art* (2009) echoes *Nevada*. The subtitles of each transparent frame, spray-painted and composed of geometric grids, connote a geographic area. The psycho-geography of intimacy represents different possibilities of exploration for these two artists. Charles Atlas' video installation *Plato's Alley* (2008) ends with a storm of numbers emerging out of a grid, spinning on a black background and preceded by a count of 1 to 6. Employing an abstract and minimal vocabulary, *Plato's Alley* overplays the new media "card", with its gradually rising voltage, and effects echoing the beginnings of the digital video-art. Spaced over time, the three proposals each illustrate their time and reflect Charles Atlas' continuing quest for freedom and control.

Nicolas Bourriaud wrote in *Postproduction*, that the forms produced by Liam Gillick still seem unresolved, suspended. They maintain ambiguity regarding their share of "finished" and "incomplete". In a similar spirit, Mika Tajima's installations often give the impression of being in transit or in progress; however, the status of the objects are put into further question in her work. The presence of ladders, building materials, sand bags, construction lamps, and bricks, accentuates the feeling of a space in (de)construction. In 2008, as part of the Artissima fair in Turin, Mika Tajima and New Humans orchestrate *Dead By Third Act*, confirming the permeability between her visual and sound practices, between the visual and the performative. Taking the Fiat Lingotto factory as the frame, this performance draws its energy from the site's history, as symbol of futurism, productivity and architectural modernity. In *Dead By Third Act*, a methodically destroyed car becomes a way to materialize through a cathartic gesture the dissolution of the industrial society in one of its own ideological

and practical spaces. The production of contradictions is at the heart of Mika Tajima's process. She seeks to divert, to deconstruct the established order and instill a continuously persistent underlying violence.

Also presented at the New Galerie, *The Extras* is a module, wood storage unit in which several of Mika Tajima's works are simply stored in rows as if they just came out of a gallery's backroom. Installation, de-installation? Mika Tajima, once again, defies the usual expectations of the public in an installation that seems interrupted. The works, stored as potential inventory or abandoned surplus both disclose the working conditions of a young artist and reveal our contemporary condition. As *The Extras* explores the impact of surroundings on the reception of a work, *Abstract Transaction (Transaction abstraite)* poses another question, namely how to comprehend an exhibition in which the workshop, the studio, the stock, the gallery and the office converge in a single space?

Claire Staebler
traduit par Frances Perkins