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Richard Aldrich
Installation view of "Once I Was…,"
Bortolami Gallery, New York, 2011

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Mika Tajima
Installation view of
The Extras, × Initiative,
New York, 2009

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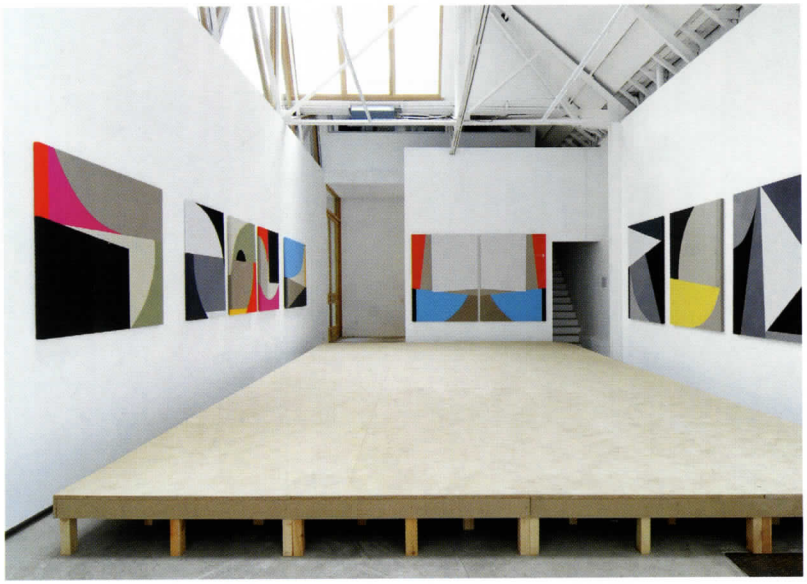

Sarah Crowner
Installation view of "Ballet Plastique," 2011
Paintings and wooden platform,
dimensions variable

5.28 In 2007, Richard Aldrich (b.1975, Hampton, VA) wrote of his mostly abstract paintings, which reflect on the process of their genesis and the conventions that determine it:

> These paintings are meant to become props in an ongoing production that aims to present a series of systems that interact with one another. They are not metaphor, nor allegory, but prop. The objects created are specific in themselves, but that specificity is not pertinent to the workings, that is the form of the interactions that can take place, of the systems. These systems are not about a balance or a thought, a final idea or an idealized end, nor a perceived direction, but rather a body in which things are happening.... What is important is that the work sets up a sort of stage in which the viewer is responsible for navigating themselves around.

Aldrich is keen to supply his paintings with a written, even narrative, passage, through manipulations of the insipid form of the press release, from which the above quotation was taken. In so doing, he registers how meaning might be extraneous to the painting, despite the materiality of the work (some of his canvases are incised to reveal the stretcher or wall, while others are decorated with objects that become interchangeable with brushstrokes).

If painting is illuminated here by textual accompaniment, elsewhere it is determined by installation. With curator and artist Howie Chen (b.1976,
5.29 Cincinnati, OH), Mika Tajima (b.1975, Los Angeles, CA) founded the New Humans in 2003, to produce sound work (using physical materials, piercing drones, static, and low bass frequencies)—among other interventions mounted with a larger cohort of collaborators—within the parameters of her own shifting multimedia practice. The elements she includes in her works are paintings, props, stage markers, and functional structures, though not simultaneously. A notable case is *The Double* (2008), presented at The Kitchen in New York, and at the Center for Opinions in Art and Music in Berlin. Tajima conceived of a room bisected by double-sided freestanding panels on wheels, which suggest painting in their planarity and sculpture in their dimensionality, while referencing Robert Propst's Action Office designs commissioned by Herman Miller to foster productivity and conviviality (in fact, they have become markers for alienated labor.)

In addition, Tajima has repurposed the modular units in many exhibition contexts. In *The Extras* (2009) she proposed wooden painting panels as human surrogates amid a scene redolent of a construction site or production set,

while for a 2011 show at Elizabeth Dee Gallery in New York she juxtaposed workspace dividers, ergonomic kneeling chairs, spray-painted wall-bound décor, and a performance by two contortionists; the last strained against these ciphers of efficiency while at the same time flaunting the results of a punishing routine. In concert with Charles Atlas (b.1958, St Louis, MO), Tajima occupied the main space of the South London Gallery for *The Pedestrians* (2011). Over a ten-day period, the exhibition area became a rehearsal venue, film set, and installation, supporting a program of performance, music, video, lecturing, painting, and sculptural tableaux—all of which were negotiated by viewers, who were guided through the space on a walkway.

Sarah Crowner's (b.1974, Philadelphia, PA) collage-like, sewn geometric paintings appropriate schemes from Victor Vasarely, Lygia Clark, and others, in their part-by-part seamed constructions, and also serve as backdrops for unscripted actions in the gallery, with some even suggesting theater curtains opening to an empty stage. "Ballet Plastique" (2011), at Galerie Catherine Bastide in Brussels, featured a raised plywood platform—clearly, a stage—on which visitors climbed to inspect the paintings. For "Acrobat," a show of the same year at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York, Crowner exhibited small wooden sculptures, envisioned as theater models, or, less specifically, proposals for subsequent incarnations. Indeed, this permissiveness was borne out in her painted backdrop for a Robert Ashley opera at the Serpentine Gallery, London, in 2012. **5.30**

Given these destabilizing relations, one might assume that painting has lost any sense of boundaries or coherence. Yet the flip side of these negotiations of borders is that they are being redrawn, for it is a stable—or at least stable enough—definition of "painting" that allows for and even makes meaning of such deconstruction. To act on painting, as opposed to using it to transmit content, represent narrative, and so on, is to endow it with a self-reflexivity capable of producing painting about painting, as the final chapter will describe.