

MIKA TAJIMA MATRIX 177 AFTER LIFE



JUNE 1 - SEPTEMBER 3, 2017
WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

AFTER LIFE

In MATRIX 177, an illuminated space responds to the sentiment of future human expressions modeled by computer algorithms. Natural language processing and sentiment analysis generate a future modeled after life itself. The rise of such predictive technology in areas such as the military and e-commerce underlines how speculations of the future radically shape our perceptions, desires, and decisions in the present.

The elements in the exhibition track the production of an embodied subject as both a target of ortho-architectonic control and the soft governmentality of computational life. Integrated technologies control our bodies and lives in increasingly seamless ways. After Life is a contemplation of an escape from a life thoroughly scraped and decoded.

At the center of the exhibition is a hanging light installation comprised of globally networked LED lights controlled by a computer linguistics program. The color and intensity of the lights shift in real time to algorithmic predictions of future human sentiment. Mining the most recent language used on social media drawn from thousands of actual texts, the program uses the raw input of shared observations, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of individuals to generate artificial future expressions. This is visualized as both language and color in the exhibition, appearing as streaming text on a flat screen monitor and the glowing color ranging from orange to violet—emitted from the bulbs, providing the only light source in the exhibition.

The changing light conditions create a shifting viewing experience of the paintings and sculptural elements. A bench-like form—similar to the designs now ubiquitous in airports, cafés, and bank lounges—is situated like an island in the exhibition. Carved from traditional walnut and perforated with hot-tub jet nozzles, the sculpture Social Chair resembles the cluster-based furniture systems found in collaborative workplaces. The spa nozzles puncturing the sculpture escalate how these design forms seek to condition the body and structure social space.

In the shadows of the exhibition, transparent paintings on the wall reflect the light and objects in the exhibition while remaining concealed from full visibility. These ambient paintings are subtitled with the names of deserted, remote islands. They become the embodiment of the unreachable, unscrapable, and not yet knowable.

MIKA TAJIMA
INSTALLATION VIEW WITH *NEGATIVE ENTROPY AND MERIDIAN*
ALL WATCHED OVER BY MACHINES OF LOVING GRACE,
PALAIS DE TOKYO, PARIS, FRANCE, 2017
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, 11R, AND TARO NASU
PHOTO: FLORIAN KLEINFENN



My recent work invokes technologies developed to control and affect the body, focusing on techniques that shape bodily experience of space and time in a built environment where work and leisure spaces have meshed. This is a space where the human body comes into tension with the machinist body and its

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It's what's happening.

The tag line of Twitter—“It’s what’s happening.”—refers to the real-time commentary provided to users by the online news and social networking service. But today, access to “the present” is being displaced by the desire to know “the future.” So, what’s *really* happening? Through technology, various methods of automatic identification and data capture (AIDC)—from bar codes to google searches—obtain and analyze personal information to predict and promote future human behavior. A space embodying a “future modeled after life itself,”¹ is the essence of artist Mika Tajima’s site-specific MATRIX installation *After Life*.

Tajima’s engagement with predictive technology began with an interest in our industrial past and older technologies that have sought to affect the body and the way in which we live our lives. Over the past decade, in a continually evolving body of work, Tajima has investigated the territory of the body in relation to different built environments and technologies, which aim to control human activities. In 2011, the artist created an installation of sculptures titled *A Facility Based on Change*² made with repurposed elements from an original 1970s Herman Miller Action Office, the first modular cubicle-based office system designed to maximize worker productivity and shape social interaction.³ Tajima reconfigured the walls into a closed system of work spaces by altering the intended open forms into inaccessible four-panel cubes or by

MIKA TAJIMA
A FACILITY BASED ON CHANGE, 3, 2011
PANELS, CANVAS, ACRYLIC, SILKSCREEN, PAPER, PINS, CLIPS
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, 11R, AND TARO NASU



lining them up against the wall. She also repainted the original blue-gray panels in distracting vivid monochromes, subverting the quiet performance-enhancing environments.

Tajima's anti-Action Office installation included her recurring *Furniture Art* paintings and seating elements in the form of balans[®] chairs, which encourage correct sitting posture. In 1979 Norwegian industrial designer Peter Opsvik invented the balans[®] chair specifically for the sedentary desk worker. Today, "We now spend about 55 percent of our waking hours sitting at our work desks and dinner tables, in our cars or on public transport, or in front of our many screens. And it's seriously affecting our health,"⁴ as stated on the manufacturer's website. On rocker rails, the kneeling chair—a progenitor of ergonomic task furniture—shapes the body to find its most progressive and productive position. The artist used the balans[®] chair again in her 2014 exhibition *Total Body Conditioning*,⁵ where she undermined the anthropomorphic chair's function by stacking two chairs together in a configuration reminiscent of a circus balancing act performed by a pair of contortionists, drawing on the extreme lengths taken to maximize human potential.

Ergonomic chairs and social seating are recurring motifs in Tajima's work. *Total Body Conditioning* also included works from *Epimelesthai Satou (Take Care)*, a series of sculptural paintings made from Jacuzzi hot-tub forms. The series title invokes the

MIKA TAJIMA
UNTITLED, 2013
WOOD, FOAM, FABRIC
40 X 20 X 20 INCHES
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, 11R, AND TARO NASU
PHOTO: CHARLES BENTON, ART IN GENERAL



MIKA TAJIMA
EPIMELESTHAI SAUTOU (TAKE CARE), 2, 2014
SPRAY ENAMEL, THERMOFORMED ACRYLIC, ALUMINUM
78 X 78 X 33 INCHES
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, 11R, AND TARO NASU
PHOTO: CHARLES BENTON, ART IN GENERAL



ancient Greek idea to “take care of oneself,” a suitable reference to the hydraulic bath’s intended therapeutic applications as well as its more common associations with luxury, leisure, and social activities today. The hot tub, which inscribes the shape of human users into its abstract form, speaks to how all zones of life—leisure, fitness, social, and work—have meshed into one space. Painted with high-gloss industrial automotive paint in abstract compositions, the monumental wall pieces betray awkward, bulky forms when removed from their functional horizontal orientation. Tajima includes a related sculpture in *After Life*. Designed to accommodate four sitters, *Social Chair* refers to the new modular designs of work spaces which denote the contemporary way of working “collaboratively.” Found in casual places and in transit—a public waiting area, café, or transportation lounge—casualization, integration, and in-transit mean work never stops. Made of hard walnut peppered with hot-tub jet nozzles alluding to invisible pressure, Tajima’s *Social Chair* makes apparent the contradiction of this new life mode as each seat faces away from the other.

In the 2016 exhibition *Embody*,⁶ the artist used the Setu Chair, a multipurpose office chair with a “kinematic spine”⁷ that was inspired by and resembles the human backbone, which supports the body. As life becomes more virtual and dematerialized, what form do we take? The artist deconstructed and reconfigured the chair parts, enveloped them in a translucent white cocoon resin, and presented them as

MIKA TAJIMA
SOCIAL CHAIR, 2016
WALNUT AND METAL
60 X 60 X 34 INCHES
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, 11R, AND KAYNE GRIFFIN CORCORAN
PHOTO: ROBERT WEDEMEYER



chandeliers and table lamps. Interior lights exposed the skeletal structures within them. Titled *Meridian*, the mood-light sculptures changed color in response to live data translated from Twitter feeds from London and Cairo, representing the input of many thousands of individuals from these locations. Using a custom analysis program, which registers and analyzes text as positive or negative numerical values, the scraped data was then associated with color—one representing positivity and another representing negativity. This was manifested in the room's light tone constantly shifting, reflecting the transmuted moods of London and Cairo. Tajima uses a similar program in *After Life*, her MATRIX project, but shifts from present time to the future. *Meridian (Future Sentiment)* presents predictive text output in processed language presented in real time on a flat screen monitor in the space.

After Life also includes the artist's *Furniture Art* paintings, featured in previous exhibitions, including *A Facility Based on Change*, *Total Body Conditioning*, and *Embody*. The name *Furniture Art* derives from *musique d'ameublement*, or "furniture music," a term coined by Erik Satie (French, 1866–1925), an early twentieth-century avant-garde composer. Like Satie's minimalist background music, Tajima's *Furniture Art* paintings serve as the backdrop for other activities and containers for atomized paint. The rectangular Plexiglas boxes, back-painted with thinly-layered spray paint, serve as abstract, reflective ambient elements in her installations. Subtitled with the

MIKA TAJIMA
ART D'AMEUBLEMENT (FURNITURE ART) (SEMISOPCHNOI), 2017
SPRAY ENAMEL, THERMOFORMED ACRYLIC
43 X 33 X 2 INCHES
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, 11R, AND TARO NASU



names or geographic locations of uninhabited islands off the grid, the *Furniture Art* paintings in *After Life* serve as a counterpoint to the open accessibility of contemporary life fully integrated with technology. By contrast, the remote places cited in the paintings are unknowable and beyond technology's reach.

After Life presents a stark vision of contemporary life—a room illuminated by the future feelings of a population, an unsuitable social arrangement, gradient mirrors, and machine-generated poetry. Contradicted by the alienating *Social Chair* and the impenetrable *Furniture Art* paintings, control is the focus of Tajima's critique. The artist draws attention to the reality of how we live our lives: while technology seeks to capture life, can we escape between the lines and out of view?⁸

PATRICIA HICKSON

Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art

MIKA TAJIMA

EDUCATION

- 2003 MFA, Columbia University,
School of the Arts
- 1997 BA, Bryn Mawr College
(Fine Arts/East Asian Studies)
- 1997 Post-Graduate Apprentice,
The Fabric Workshop and Museum
Apprentice Training

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *MATRIX 177: After Life*, Wadsworth
Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT
- 2016 *Meridian (Gold)*, Sculpture Center,
Long Island City, NY
Emotion Commune, Protocinema,
Istanbul, Turkey
- 2014 *Total Body Conditioning*, Art in General,
New York, NY
- 2011 *Pineapples and Pyramids*, Aspen Art
Museum, Aspen, CO
The Architect's Garden, UT Visual Arts
Center, Austin, TX
After the Martini Shot, Seattle Art Museum,
Seattle, WA
- 2009 *The Extras*, X Initiative, New York, NY
- 2008 *The Double*, COMO Centre for Opinions in
Music and Art, Berlin, Germany
- 2007 *Thin Line*, Circuit, Lausanne, Switzerland
- 2005 *Echoplex*, Swiss Institute/Contemporary
Art, New York, NY

COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 "Post Script" for *Book Machine*, organized
by Christophe Boutin and Melanie
Scarciglia, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
- 2009 *Today Is Not a Rehearsal*, with Charles Atlas
and New Humans, San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving
Grace*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France
- 2014 *Pier 54*, High Line Commission,
New York, NY
- 2013 *Roppongi Crossing 2013: Out of Doubt*,
Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 2010 *Interference*, Moderna Museet,
Stockholm, Sweden
- 2008 *Whitney Biennial 2008*, Whitney Museum of
American Art, New York, NY
- 2005 *Uncertain States of America*, curated by
Hans Ulrich Obrist and Daniel
Birnbaum, Bard Center for Curatorial
Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY;
travelled to Serpentine Gallery, London, UK;
Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo,
Norway; Reykjavik Art Museum, Reykjavik,
Iceland; Center for Contemporary
Art Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland; and Herning
Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2002 *Comfort Zone*, Fabric Workshop and
Museum, Philadelphia, PA

Born in 1975, Los Angeles, CA
Lives and works in New York, NY

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Meridian (Future Sentiment), 2017
HUE lights/bridge, monitor, programming,
cables, bracket, sockets
Dimensions variable

*Art d'Ameublement [Furniture Art]
(Boreray)*, 2017
Spray enamel, thermoformed acrylic
43 x 33 x 2 inches

*Art d'Ameublement [Furniture Art]
(Isla Santa Clara)*, 2017
Spray enamel, thermoformed acrylic
43 x 33 x 2 inches

*Art d'Ameublement [Furniture Art]
(Semisopchnoi)*, 2017
Spray enamel, thermoformed acrylic
43 x 33 x 2 inches

Social Chair, 2016
Walnut and metal
60 x 60 x 34 inches

All works courtesy of the artist and 11R, New York

Mika Tajima is represented by 11R, New York and
Taro Nasu, Tokyo.

GALLERY TALK

Mika Tajima, MATRIX artist
Thursday, June 1
6:30 pm
Free with museum admission to Art After Dark

Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of
Contemporary Art
Thursday, July 27
Noon
Free with museum admission

¹ Mika Tajima, *After Life* exhibition text, submitted by email to the author, April 3, 2017.

² The exhibition *Mika Tajima* was presented at Elizabeth Dee, New York, from January 8 to February 19, 2011.

³ I am indebted to Matthew Lyons for his essay "Islands in the Data Stream," in *Total Body Conditioning: Mika Tajima* (London: Black Dog Publishing in association with Eleven Rivington, 2015), 7-11. His essay informs much of the content in this short essay.

⁴ See www.varierfurniture.com that includes the philosophy of Peter Opsvik's balans® chair.

⁵ *Total Body Conditioning* was presented at Art in General, New York, from September 13 to October 25, 2014.

⁶ *Mika Tajima: Embody*, an exhibition of paintings, sculpture, and installation, was presented at 11R, New York, from February 13 to March 13, 2016.

⁷ See www.hermanmiller.com for this and additional details about the Setu Chair.

⁸ Mika Tajima in conversation with the author at 11R, New York, on February 20, 2016.

Major support for MATRIX 177 has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

The MATRIX program is generously supported in part by Jeffrey G. Marsted and Marcia Reid Marsted and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's Contemporary Coalition.

Additional support for MATRIX 177 has been provided by 11R, New York.

Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign.



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