

# MIKA TAJIMA & JEAN-PASCAL FLAVIEN

A life-size hot tub in luscious shades of gradient orange and purple installed vertically on a gallery wall took center stage in Kayne Griffin Corcoran's two-person show featuring New York-based Mika Tajima and Berlin-based Jean-Pascal Flavien. Both artists create deceptively simple, playful artworks that operate within clearly defined systems, which act as allegories and sites of discourse for society's complicated organizational tenets concerning public and private space and individual and corporate environments.

The irresistible, candy-colored sculpture, a seductive and appealing work by Tajima entitled *Epimelesthai Sautou (Take Care)*, 1 (2014), served as the organizational nucleus of the exhibition. Its title references an ancient Greek adage that loosely translates to "take care of yourself," thus relating to the work's subject, the modern hot tub, which was initially invented in the 1950s for therapeutic purposes before being introduced to the masses later as a means of recreation. A complementary piece, *Social Chair* (2016), had the quirky, deadpan appeal of a readymade in the form of a double-sided tête-à-tête, which could ostensibly seat four people were it not for the spa-style jet nozzles jutting out all over. Initially, the two pieces seemed communal and inviting; and yet, ultimately, their uselessness denied such a sanguine reading.

In her series of reverse-spray-painted acrylic-panel paintings entitled "Furniture Art" (2016)—named after early 20th-century composer Erik Satie's "Furniture Music," a term he coined for ambient background music—Tajima demotes her own work to the pejoratively decorative. Though her work is seen as art in the context of a private gallery, where one "experiences" the discreet object through quiet, careful contemplation, Tajima posits that a simple change of environment—into a dentist's waiting room, for example, or a corporate office—could alter its meaning. More specifically, such a change may deem her work meaningless, or the visual equivalent of white noise or Muzak.

Tajima's "Negative Entropy" (2012– ), a series of Jacquard loom weavings whose designs are based on wave forms of various recorded sounds (ranging from voicemails to the din of a data center), was similarly preoccupied with the sublimation of independent, analog art forms into the conformist, corporate domain. Many of the sounds from the series were recorded in corporate spaces, and the substrate of the weavings is made of acoustic baffling felt, a material commonly found in office buildings to absorb ambient noise. As the baffling felt does with noise, and the business setting with artwork, do corporate environments also dampen the individual? Perhaps not always: Tajima's weavings are singularly unique and beautiful, reclaiming



and reversing the anonymity set out in the "Furniture Art" series, at times memorializing the voice of specific individuals she encountered in the recording process.

Looping back to Tajima's *Epimelesthai Sautou*, philosophers such as Plato, Socrates and Epicurus each interpreted the titular phrase to have a different meaning, variously advocating exercise, writing and dialogue as methods of caring for oneself. In the 1980s, French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) researched and developed the phrase to mean "practices of the self," emphasizing writing as an act of creating one's identity. Relatedly, Jean-Pascal Flavien's *statement house (temporary title)* (2016), a winsome pink structure placed in the courtyard of the gallery, had two screenwriters determine the daily goings-on of the installation by scripting them on Twitter for the exhibition's duration. The bubblegum-colored abode was sparsely furnished with a simple plywood bed and desk, with aluminum and wood tiles in the shape of the house's floor plan hung on both the building's interior and exterior (similar pieces were also interspersed between Tajima's works inside the gallery). Visitors' reactions, ranging from quizzical to apathetic to participatory, were quietly observed or actively encouraged by the screenwriters, then later incorporated into the work through printed text and photo tweets.

The constant activity and collaboration around *statement house* were, in some ways, an idealistic version of the corporate structure deconstructed in Tajima's work. Whether there were many participants or none other than the screenwriters, *statement house* represented a communal work in progress—perpetually in flux as people came together and branched off, to take care of themselves and each other.

JENNIFER S. LI

## MIKA TAJIMA

*Epimelesthai Sautou (Take Care)*, 1  
2014

Thermoformed acrylic, spray enamel  
and aluminum, 198 x 198 x 81 cm.  
Photo by Robert Wedemeyer.  
Courtesy the artist and Kayne  
Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles.