

Mika Tajima

Elizabeth Dee

Looking back to the moment when utopian modernist abstraction began slipping into utilitarian office environments, Mika Tajima's austere yet glowing installation inhabited an equivocal territory, somewhere between art and function.

Tajima assembled four sculptures out of used, prefabricated modular wall panels purchased from a telemarketing center that had recently gone bust. Originally designed for Herman Miller in the 1970s as part of its Action Office System, the panels are rectangles of stretched fabric in colors such as rust, vermilion, bone, and denim. Although Tajima restretched and repainted the wrinkled, faded, or damaged portions of the fabric, she left visible the imperfections—scratches and dents—in their metal framework. Instead of creating work enclosures, the rectangular, free-standing pieces surrounded nothing.

There were also several vintage ergonomically designed kneeling chairs, upholstered to match the panels. This furniture masquerading as sculpture (or vice versa) could be moved around, al-

lowing viewers to participate in the exhibition's configuration.

On the walls, a series of paintings made by spraying the inside of cheap Plexiglas box frames were hung in an irregular grid. Diagonal slashes and atmospheric clouds of color conjured up the interrupted portions of rooms and buildings once depicted on classical Japanese screens.

Playing off the ideal of social harmony and universal redemption promised by Russian nonobjective painting and de Stijl, Tajima pulled the material traces of faded hopes for a transcendent workplace back into the gallery, reformatting them for contemplation rather than labor. A bit of sublimity returned to these utilitarian planes of color, but the remnants of their sojourns in everyday life remained.

—*Elizabeth Kley*



Mika Tajima, from "Furniture Art" series, 2010, spray paint and acrylic, installation view. Elizabeth Dee.