

Mika Tajima makes hybrid artworks that blur traditional definitions and elude straightforward characterization. A single object — for example a double-sided, free-standing, silkscreened panel — is simultaneously aligned with the fields of painting, sculpture and architecture. Individual artworks are frequently repositioned for use in multiple projects, reflecting an inherently unfinished character and her preference for exploring the ‘means’ rather than the ‘ends’. Such was the case in the 2007 exhibition ‘Disassociate’ in which elements figured first as objects in the gallery, then as the backdrop for a performance and ultimately as visual components of a video. Other works are designed to be modular, allowing time, circumstance and personal preference to factor in their ultimate shape and design.

When working in two dimensions, Tajima builds out surfaces in an additive fashion that moves towards a third plane. Starting with a solid-coloured foundation, she superimposes elegant graphic tessellations composed of texts or patterns appropriated from myriad sources including Bauhaus design, modernist furniture and scientific diagrams. Some are covered with opaque Plexiglass and others with mirror, a material Tajima uses regularly as a means of extending into the physical space beyond the work itself. Others might host individual silkscreen prints pinned directly on top of the picture plane, or support small props scattered on the floor. As a result, Tajima nearly always denies her viewer full access to the visual information she has assembled, preferring to offer clues that hint at the complexity underlying each work. Such obstruction creates a tension between the visible and the hidden that is a hallmark of Tajima’s practice.

Like the architecturally scaled panels she conceived for *The Double* (an installation inspired in part by Mick Jagger’s 1970 cult film *Performance*), Tajima’s artworks often toe the line between functional objects (recalling studio, workshop or stage equipment) and sculpture, and in many, implied action lies latent. Louvered barriers, such as *Appearance (Against Type)* (2008), evoke theatrical sets, and a series of text ‘ladders’ (*Thin Line*, 2007) made from vertically oriented letters that serve as both rungs and rails, suggest physical engagement.

01



02

Some installations even assume the literal appearance of performance sites, inviting slippage between traditional categories of the visual arts (employed) and the performance arts (implied), as well as Tajima’s position as artist and the viewer’s place as performer.

Such designations are reversed, however, when Tajima uses her installations as sites for, and tools of, performance by New Humans, the collaboration she co-founded in 2003 with Howie Chen as a branch of her artistic practice. New Humans invite an ever-changing group of artists and musicians to participate in discrete projects and noise events that Tajima initiates, designs and often directs. For her, the unpredictable frictions of group endeavours become one more tool for leveraging modes of production and typologies of display. Like Tajima’s discrete artworks, New Humans’ initiatives comprise a series of interlocking elements that are firmly disassociated from any finite interpretations. The structure allows Tajima to infiltrate her own installations and challenge the hegemony of both the artworks themselves and her own role as an artist. [Katie Stone Sonnenborn]



03

04

**01** *The Double*, 2008

Silkscreen, canvas, acrylic paint, gold leaf, wood, mirrored aluminium, paper, pins  
8 parts  
Each 168 x 122 x 10 cm

**02** from left:

→ *Avoidance of Something*, 2007

Eames stacking shell chairs, champagne glasses  
152 x 46 x 46 cm

→ *Disassociate*, 2007

Performance

**03**

→ *Appearance (Against Type) 1, 2*, 2008

Silkscreen, MDF, wood, mirrored aluminium, Formica, acrylic paint, sandbags  
2 panels  
Each 183 x 183 x 76 cm

→ *Thin Line*, 2008

MDF, lacquer  
41 x 183 x 5 cm

**04** *Disassociate*, 2007

Silkscreen, canvas, acrylic paint, gold/silver leaf, wood, mirror, paper, pins, lights  
Sizes vary from 122 x 122 x 10 cm to 244 x 122 x 10 cm

