



Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, USA

'Disassociate' was the inaugural exhibition of New Humans, a Brooklyn-based collaborative that produces art installations, videos and sound recordings that stem from founding member Mika Tajima's art practice. The show comprised two installations, which functioned both as autonomous art works and as elements of the performances that punctuated the month-long presentation.

In the main gallery a series of double-sided silk-screen paintings made by Tajima were mounted on thick plywood panels and spread erratically throughout the room. Most were set on rolling wheels, while some leaned against the wall. A few were mirrored and created spatial displacements between the frames. Their palette, inspired by a San Francisco public transport station, conjured the palettes of the late 1960s – pale oranges, burnt siennas and peach hues, contrasted with light grey, dark grey, black and white – yet Tajima's elegant and pristine execution felt contemporary and glamorous, not dated or nostalgic. So too did her choices for the paintings' formal compositions: decorative tessellations of champagne glass bases and Charles Eames shell chairs, obfuscated at times by bold, thick stripes and expressive swaths of paint. In the rear gallery these deluxe elements reappeared as ready-made sculptures: a stack of chairs precariously tilted next to a towering pyramid of champagne flutes. Overhead, a compressed soundtrack by New Humans founding member Howie Chen crackled and droned, and its tremulous presence enlivened the space.

Performance is a fundamental part of all New Humans projects, and these objects were employed only insofar as they could assume a functional role between, and during, active

productions (as a result, the very dense installation did not feel extraneous). To begin with, the mobile panels were used as bulletin boards and supports for a variety of silk-screen prints by New Humans and invited colleagues. José León Cerrillo made slick graphic renderings of a clunky public sculpture in Mexico City; Vito Acconci crookedly hung an argumentative word poem, Swiss painter Philippe Decrauzat scattered around the space numerous copies of a record he created with New Humans via a largely online collaboration, and New Humans distributed logo posters throughout the space, branding the environment with the collective's insignia.

In turn, the modular parts were also employed as literal barriers for sound and people during two New Humans shows, the first with Acconci and the second with C. Spencer Yeh. In his first performance since 1978 Acconci read a poem with a cadenced and aggressive voice, his words heated, sexed and hard. Meanwhile, New Humans' own concert of fuzzy crashing sounds provided a sonic overlay that was both complement and competitor. With Yeh, a radical acoustic violinist who also works under the name Burning Star Core, Tajima choreographed the demolition of the back gallery as a sound piece. As she dragged a mountain of chairs into a tower of glasses, Yeh played his wild and edgy strings, Eric Tsai worked the drums and Chen sampled and replayed the noise in real time.

In both instances the group performed within the panels-cum-partition walls, a staging that temporarily recalled scenes from the installation's inspiration: Jean-Luc Godard's film *Sympathy for the Devil* (1968), which captured the Rolling Stones recording their eponymous track in a studio separated by cubicle-like structures. In its

veritable likeness, the durational sound elements of 'Disassociate' were comparable to previous New Humans performances where Tajima's installations directly quoted artists she admired, as with the Dan Flavin-esque fluorescent 'stages' she built in years past.

In contrast, however, the extended exhibition was New Humans' first public opportunity to play with the intermissions between shows and for Tajima to explore ways her sculptural props could function independently. What emerged was a dynamic body of work that treated Godard as a collaborator in *absentia*, and his film as the *mise-en-scène* for Tajima to map her own practice on. As her own work was subsequently layered with other artists' visual and aural output, the group history within each object became inseparable from its autonomous parts. In turn, the viewer served as a surrogate performer who navigated the series of specific, durational installations, changing with date and time.

*Sympathy for the Devil* was filmed in the wake of the May 1968 riots in Paris, and Godard caught the Stones at a moment of hedonistic self-destruction, just before Brian Jones, marginalized throughout the recording, took his leave. A statement about art and revolution, New Humans underscored its notion that partnerships are a series of human negotiations that can be antagonistic, awkward and strange. New Humans describe the tracks of *Disassociate* (2006), their latest album release, as 'destabilizing into undulating segments and then finally shattering into a series of interlocking parts'. As with their installation, discord is embraced and turned into the principle of production and reception.

Katie Stone Sonnenborn

New Humans in performance with C. Spencer Yeh 2007 Documentation of performance

Vito Acconci in performance with New Humans 2007 Documentation of performance

