

REY AKDOGAN

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Rey Akdogan in conversation with David Muenzer
Artforum, August 2017

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500 WORDS

Rey Akdogan

08.01.17



View of “Rey Akdogan,” 2017, Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles.

Rey Akdogan's works touch on invisible standards and everyday objects, such as crash rails, in order to mine emotional reactions and systemic analysis. The latest exhibition of concise gestures by the New York-based artist is on view at Hannah Hoffman Gallery in Los Angeles through August 26, 2017.

I AM INTERESTED IN MOTION, our everyday lives, and how we move through space. Each of my works extracts elements from much larger systems. And usually they are standard systems that perform specific tasks in our everyday lives. A standard is something that—if it works well—we don't usually register. It is not an evident part of our visual universe. For instance: You go into a supermarket. You just want to get a bag of carrots, and they look fantastically orange there. You bring them home. You unpack them. Then, all of a sudden, they are not so orange.

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The plastic they're wrapped in is tinted, and the supermarket's light had an effect; both of these layers react, and they become something—an environment.

The French cleats used in the exhibition typically exist between an artwork and a wall. Yet, they have a strange quality when you extract them from their normal function. They become visible. French cleats have a specific shape. They have two parts, with standard interlocking angles and types of wood. It's all very specific. Usually the visible edges of a French cleat are painted to match the color of the artwork it supports, to make the cleat less visible. In the "Faction" works at Hannah Hoffman, I wanted to reverse the application of the paint, by placing it on the angles and surfaces of the cleat that are usually unexposed. But there are actually functional cleats behind the "Faction" works too; there are cleats holding the cleats in a stack. That's how they are.

On one of the long walls at Hannah Hoffman I replaced the gallery's usual matte white paint with a high-gloss commercial paint typically used for machinery or architectural facades. The visibility of the wall was alienated; it became mirrorlike. This type of paint also yellows over time if it is not exposed to sunlight. The standard UV-filtering properties of the gallery will set this process in motion.

There was a period when I had to spend a lot of time at the hospital, sitting in waiting rooms for hours and hours. They are such strange environments. I was looking around and saw these odd things projected slightly from the wall, almost like trompe l'oeil objects. I thought, What is this? Then, I started noticing them everywhere. They're in corridors; they're in elevators; they're found throughout public buildings and institutions—universities, post offices, you name it.

Some of the works in the show are these objects called "crash rails," fixtures with specific measurements that protect walls from scratches and marks. They usually have to be approved through all sorts of administrative offices. They also have to be sturdy in a specific way. I'm interested in how their varying physical appearances are largely determined by how they operate. That sort of operational abstraction is what holds together the construction of ambience.

— As told to David Muenzer

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REY AKDOGAN

Kavior Moon, “Rey Akdogan, Hannah Hoffman Gallery”
Artforum, December 2017

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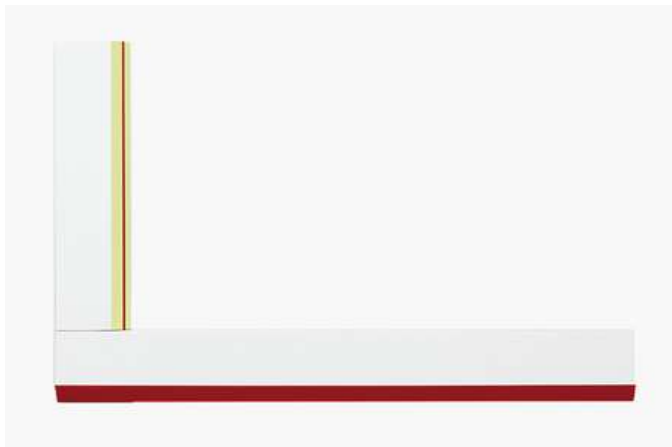
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Rey Akdogan

HANNAH HOFFMAN



Rey Akdogan, *Faction* #20, 2017, acrylic paint, wooden French cleat, 15 x 24 x 3/4".

New York-based artist Rey Akdogan recently described her practice as motivated by a fundamental interest in "motion, our everyday lives, and how we move through space." Although these concerns were not immediately evident in her latest solo show at Hannah Hoffman, the more time one spent immersed in the exhibition, the more conscious one became of the dynamic relationships between one's own moving body, the installed objects, and the surrounding architecture of the rooms. The experience was an intensely phenomenological one, as mundane objects that would have normally remained hidden in plain sight became palpably present.

Akdogan's sculptures make subtle references to practical uses and public spaces far beyond gallery walls, often implementing standard support devices that one might purchase from trade catalogues or hardware stores. In the main room, for example, were four striking wall-mounted pieces from the artist's "Crash Rail" series, 2015-. Each work consisted of two or three black powder-coated aluminum bars—five to eight inches in height and two to eight feet in length—that were hung parallel to the ground. These objects were, literally, crash rails: long, sturdy barriers installed along corridors to protect walls from damage. The rails' original function was emphasized by their below-eye-level placement and the works' titles, which list, in simple fashion, the model numbers of rail and paint color used (for example, *CRA 200F [RAL 9005, RAL 9005, RAL 9005] solid #18*, 2016). While the crash rails cheekily associated the white-cube space of the gallery with the antiseptic ambience of hospitals and other institutional environments, their industrial quality and repetition of elemental geometric units brought to mind Donald Judd's serial Minimal works. However, whereas Judd placed his objects in orderly systematic progressions—"one thing after another," as he put it—Akdogan had arranged her crash rails asymmetrically, enlivening the otherwise sterile environment with a spirit of formal play.

Works from Akdogan's 2017 "Faction" series hung in a smaller, adjacent room. The apparatus employed here was the French cleat, a thin wooden plane with one edge cut at a forty-five-degree angle. Commonplace in homes as well as exhibition spaces, French cleats are used in pairs to invisibly secure items such as cabinets or artworks to a wall. The cleats were coupled (with the exception of one stacked threesome that sat on the floor, propped up against a wall) and situated in unexpected junctures near the tops, sides, and bottoms of the room's walls. The flat faces of the cleats were largely painted white, matching the walls behind them, while their angled edges were variously painted vivid reds, yellows, and blues. This bold color palette ensured that, rather than disappear into a supporting role, the French cleats in the "Faction" series took center stage. By calling attention to these props, the artist destabilized the notion of the gallery wall as a zone seemingly free from the constraints of physics.

Perhaps the most incisive comments on the constructed illusion of the stability and stasis of the exhibition space (on which art institutions and markets depend) were the most subtle: *Slit drape [rosco-solid black]* and *HHG [north wall_001Brilliant-FPE]*, both 2017. *Slit drape* consisted of two dark vinyl ribbons that fell from ceiling to floor in the gallery's main room. Drafts of air occasionally stirred the lightweight strands, alerting one to shifting air currents caused by moving bodies and opening and closing doors. For *HHG*, Akdogan turned a standard protective measure on its head in order to realize the work itself: An entire gallery wall was painted in a specially chosen high-gloss paint that gradually yellows when not exposed to ultraviolet rays. This meant that the UV-protective film on the gallery's skylights, intended to prevent the discoloration of artworks, ironically ensured that the exact opposite would happen to *HHG*. The incremental yellowing of the wall, along with its reflective surface, which captured the fluctuating goings-on in the space,

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provided visible markers for the passage of time—demystifying yet another fiction of the gallery as unchanging and impervious to external forces.

—*Kavior Moon*

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REY AKDOGAN

Eva Diaz, "Rey Akdogan, Miguel Abreu Gallery"
Artforum, December 2012

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Rey Akdogan MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

Who didn't move to the Big City for the nightlife? Or at least the *idea* that it's there for you if you want it? Well, prepare to be happy: Rey Akdogan's show "night curtain" was open to the public from dusk to midnight. Accordingly, it took full advantage of an often-ignored truth of metropolitan art-viewing, one that the night hours at Palais de Tokyo in Paris have exploited to great effect for years, and that the lines out the door for the occasional late nights at New York museums demonstrate: People love to see art after the sun goes down. Doing so changes the whole texture of the viewing experience. Being able to wander into Akdogan's exhibition after dinner, instead of having to rush in before the 6 PM end of a typical gallery's "business hours," made for an entirely different and in many ways preferable kind of art spectatorship, one colored more by leisure and reflection than by the workaday world of commerce and productivity.

Akdogan's show contained various spatial nodes that explored subtle shifts in light conditions, underscoring the phenomenology of

viewing objects and spaces in those twilight to midnight hours. Outside the gallery, a pink light was placed in a doorway adjacent to the gallery's main entrance, mirroring the site of an existing yellow light flanking the other side of the entry, an intervention so understated it risked being overlooked. Indeed, viewers were likelier to notice the pink glow on the way out, after their attention to color and light had been heightened by Akdogan's barely-there work.

Inside the gallery, a slide projector spun through a series of slides made of theater-lighting gels and semitransparent plastic packaging. These "compositions" play abstraction against real-world materiality, and ephemeralize as mere afterimage every few seconds when the carousel moves forward. Partitioning the projector from the back portion of the gallery,

a screen of sepia-toned PVC vertical blinds hung from floor to ceiling—the curtain of the show's title. The resultant "room" the curtain created was nearly empty but for a stack of sandblasted glass light diffusers resting on the floor, a discreet step light situated near an electrical outlet (like those used for visibility in darkened theaters), and a group of white aluminum fan blades that leaned against a wall and mimicked the striated form of the night curtain in abbreviated fashion. Overhead, a giant industrial fan slowly whirled, producing a slight flicker effect.

The components of Akdogan's work incite myriad connotations—movie theaters, manufacturing spaces, supermarkets, etc.—that refer these things back to their human uses. Because the anthropocentric nature of these objects is always foregrounded, the act of seeing them becomes an experiment in narrativizing the social preconditions—a night curtain pulled aside to invite us in—that make possible the specific experiences of visual acuity they provoke.

—Eva Díaz

Rey Akdogan,
Artikelgruppe (detail),
2012, ceiling fan,
PVC-strip curtain,
industrial halogen
lights, sandblasted
glass diffusers,
aluminum fan blades,
light with Lee 748 and
Lee 238 lighting gels,
dimensions variable.



REY AKDOGAN
Alex Kitnick, "Rey Akdogan"
Artforum, Vol 50, No. 7, March 2012.

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Rey Akdogan

ALEX KITNICK

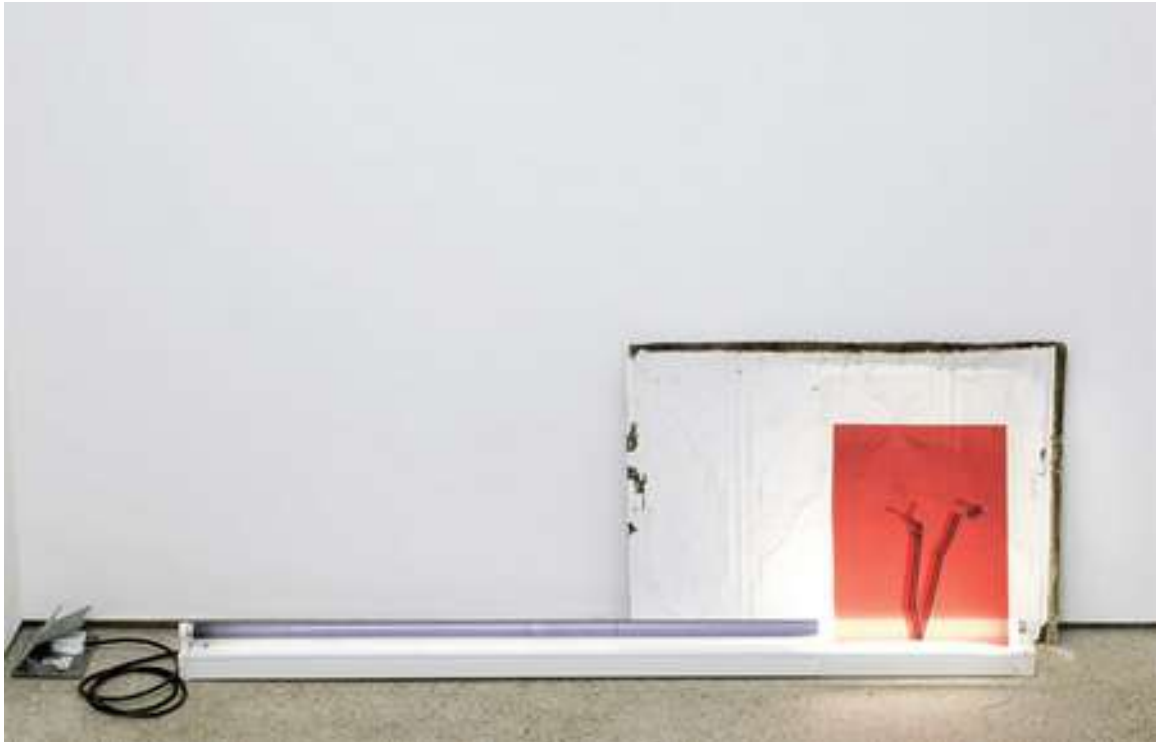


Rey Akdogan, *AWC*, 2011, poster, paper, scenic paint, cotton string, lighting gel, tape, 94 1/2 x 26 x 7".

FOR AN UNREALIZED 1937 PROJECT, Fernand Léger proposed to bathe Paris in colored light. “I asked for 300,000 unemployed to clean and scrub the facades,” the artist recounted in his 1946 essay “Modern Architecture and Color.” The goal was to “create a white and luminous city,” and “in the evening the Eiffel Tower, like an orchestra-leader,” would play “the most powerful projectors in the world upon the streets.” Léger conceived of his project, collectively scaled in both production and reception, as a way to trump the alienation of modern life by maximizing its effects. “What, in the end, makes advertisements so superior to criticism?” Walter Benjamin had asked some ten years prior. “Not what the moving red neon sign says—but the fiery pool reflecting in the asphalt.” Following Benjamin, Léger imagined a media architecture that would turn advertising’s seductive surfaces toward other, “postcritical” purposes. Color had the power to alter environments, create ambience, and mobilize affect, and all these things were crucial if art was going to maintain its relevance in the face of an increasingly overwhelming commercial culture. If Léger’s project envisaged the co-optation of advertising’s techniques in order to exceed them, however, today such tactics have been assimilated to more ambivalent ends. In her recent book *Kissing Architecture* (2011), Sylvia Lavin describes how “color, reflection, pattern, and texture” have now transformed architecture into a complete “sensory apparatus” that responds to “the full range of affective demands made by culture.” Rather than provide a respite from current forces, or an attempt to collectivize them, architecture, too, now contributes to an environment that bodies forth sensation at all times.

In the past few years, the artist Rey Akdogan has begun picking apart our contemporary mediascape by examining the connections between ambience and affect, and their relationship to color and collectivity, in a studious, idiosyncratic, and poetic manner. Armed with devices borrowed from the worlds of stage design, commercial photography, architectural scenography, and the everyday—among them fluorescent rods, lighting gels, and various forms of packaging—she has put together assemblages that literally objectify the elusive elements of environmental stimulation while never quite cohering into things sturdy enough to be called sculptures. In *AWC*, 2011, for example, various items simultaneously come together and stand apart in a tentative encounter. A sheet of crinkled yellow lighting gel is suspended on the wall with magnets while a cylinder of black kraft paper and a rolled-up poster reading ART WORKERS WON'T KISS ASS stand on the floor as if ready to be laid out or shipped off. Taking its title from the Art Workers’ Coalition, the work strikes an uneasy balance between the desire for a politicized role for artmaking and its embeddedness in contemporary design. Similarly, the title of *Yanber 12850*, 2011—an illuminated fluorescent light positioned at the base of a wall next to a vintage pressed-tin tile and a host of other props including “Cinegels,” lens tissue paper, and colored plastic—has a geopolitical association: It is taken from the name of a Costa Rican company that produces packaging for bananas and other produce. Where Dan Flavin used similar materials to create environmental and immersive installations full of exalted halations and radiant glows, Akdogan lays her materials bare, treating them more like castoffs and leftovers of some larger project. Her interest is not in enveloping the viewer but in allowing him or her to regain a modicum of critical distance. One is invited to gaze at the devices of theatricality from a welcome remove. As part of her investigations into the mechanisms of contemporary visual stimulation, Akdogan has also produced several sequences of handmade slides that she displays with the help of a standard Kodak projector. Though using photographic technology as her support, Akdogan creates these projections without the involvement of any photographic technique. Pulling apart a standard 35-mm slide, she creates a composition within its aperture that she then clicks into place by fastening the cartridge back together; no glue or adhesive is used. Fusing the haptic and the optic into shallow

reliefs, Akdogan creates a precarious tension between these two modes of apprehending. In addition to lighting gels, the objects that go into these tiny image-sculptures include various pieces of refuse, which, printed according to the CMYK color model, are not meant for projection. When light is shot through them, their colors change, producing alternate, if not opposite, effects. White turns into brown, and yellow fades into black. Material is pushed against the grain.



Rey Akdogan, *Yanber 12850*, 2011, fluorescent light, pressed tin, lighting filters, lighting gel, lens tissue paper, colored packaging, 19 3/8 x 36 1/4 x 10".

When these slides are submitted to the timer of the projector, they present a variety of permutations and variations as well as hiccups, gaps, and seams. In *Carousel #4*, 2010, red parallel lines cross and crumple, and a yellow grid closes in on itself, while the most recent of the slide pieces, *Carousel #6*, 2011–12, presents a vast assortment of geometric abstractions and bruised monochromes. (The latter is currently on view at Andrew Roth in New York, where the gallery's lighting sources have also been submitted to a series of alterations, modifying the colors and thus viewers' experience of the other works in the space.) One cannot absorb such works in a state of distraction, but rather is compelled to pay them special attention. In their dissection of colored material, one sees how the language of affect—the heightening of sensation—has become ingrained in everything from the smallest crevices to the largest habitats of our daily lives. By both blowing up and reducing these fragments of professional lighting equipment and late-capitalist detritus into studies of equal size, Akdogan exposes the pervasiveness of sensory technologies and effects, while at the same time seeking to divert them to different ends. Though her goal is perhaps the opposite of Léger's, in her insistence on projection Akdogan nevertheless hints at a form of public address—even if it can no longer be seen as an explicitly collective one. Rather than intervening in public, one now deconstructs from the inside, and among Akdogan's achievements is the opening up of new pleasures and forms of attention that result from this private pulling apart. Circumscribing her work's audience by showing her projections in

gallery settings (though she has also offered them for rent in a store), Akdogan addresses not a mass public impressed by spectacularly scaled color but analytic individuals focusing on it indoors.

Akdogan's response to this historical shift might be compared to her use of the antiquated technology of the Kodak slide projector in a way that is neither melancholic nor nostalgic, but rather forensic, engaging, and reanimating. In the carousel works, the translation of the small, concrete reality of a single slide into a larger image, for example, is crucial to their effect, yet at the same time they do not celebrate the photographic apparatus as much as they point to the importance of materiality at large. By creating a tension between physical things and abstract environments, Akdogan's work insists on the very materiality of the immaterial. If our current economy is one of experiences, in other words, they are nevertheless constructed ones—and ones that might be constructed differently at that.

Yet if Akdogan's art is itself posited as a mediation of two seemingly contradictory states—inhabiting the site where materiality and experience collide—it also suggests that its own condition is provisional and subject to revision. The artist's *Pamplemousse Rouge*, 2011, a pouch containing a drop cloth and colored packaging hanging from a wooden paint stirrer, makes the point explicit. It's a bizarre off-the-shelf kit, ready to go, yet at the same time totally dysfunctional. It offers tools to work with, but the variety of scales implied makes for a weird and slightly pathetic-looking package. Like much of Akdogan's work, *Pamplemousse Rouge* appears hesitant about the prospect of opening up and putting on a show, preferring to hang in a state of conflicted potential. If there is something of a mistrust of the power of affect in the artist's practice, it has its roots in a wariness regarding the uses to which it has been put by the experience economy. Like Léger, Akdogan has a desire to push through such techniques—to "right" them instead of simply critiquing them. If another world is possible, her work implies, it will have to be built from the ruins and scrap of the one in which we live. It will also have to be in color.

Alex Kitnick is a 2011–2012 fellow at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.