

emotional aspect of the artist's project. The ladders and handrails were the scaffolding needed for moving about in a spatial and temporal continuum between present, past, and future. And Gosmaro left her fingerprints on the bronze surfaces of the handrails precisely to indicate the uniqueness of her passage in time, the tactile memory of an event. In these works the body was always involved: ascending, descending, walking, singing. But the artist also suggested the presence of an inner movement, one that is never linear, of feelings and emotions, and she reminded us that creative processes are based on such movements—as nightingales, neuroscience, and Pasolini, each in their own way, all explain to us.

—*Ida Panicelli*

*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

## MILAN

### Latifa Echakhch

KAUFMANN REPETTO

With her exhibition “The After,” Latifa Echakhch led us into the memory of a collective rite, transporting us, in an era of social distancing, to the scene of some just-concluded event, perhaps a concert, in a remote place, perhaps a forest. In a gallery whose walls and floor were completely covered in black, she staged an encounter between two new groups of works,

all from 2020: five sculptures, *After 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5*, which she created using theatrical lighting trusses, and three paintings of sunrises, two of them diptychs, all titled, like the series they comprise, *Sun Set Down*.

In the first instance, the metal components usually used to support stage lights stood out like rigid Minimalist simulacra, sometimes resting against the walls, sometimes overturned on the floor—in other words, no longer arranged according to a “functional” logic. On each of them, moreover, were signs of possible human presence, whether real or imaginary: a leather handbag, a pouch, a jean jacket, a shopping bag, a hooded sweatshirt, a purple shirt. The show's title corroborated the suspicion that the scene represented the aftermath of a performance: time to strike the set and maybe have an afterparty.

On the walls, the yellows and oranges of the paintings were strikingly luminous. The artist created them using an unusual technique somewhat reminiscent of fresco: After applying a layer of black paint on the canvas, she covers it with concrete about a quarter of an inch thick, then she paints over this substrate with saturated acrylic colors. Once the materials have dried, she removes sizable areas by scraping into the concrete. In her previous paintings created via the same method, viewers could clearly recognize the painted subjects, but the new ones deconstruct the representation—of a sunset in each case—to the point where we are invited to fill in the imagery as we wish.

What once again comes to the fore in Echakhch's practice, particularly in these new works, is the dichotomy between gesturalism and

formal harmony. In the paintings, one's attention migrates to the gray portions where the color has been forcibly removed, revealing the tracks of the putty knife used to scrape away some of the concrete. Between exaltation and threat, the action of removal—the destruction of the twilight landscape—seems to castigate the beauty of nature even as it reverberates with nostalgia. In the sculptural structures, the left-behind bags and items of clothing also seem to serve as warnings from the artist: They are not casually draped over but knotted to the beams, like memories that will not leave us alone. Take the gold evening gown of *After 2*, for example; the artist installed it to one side, in the only area of the gallery in shadow: the darkness where the boundaries between the walls and floor disappeared and the lighting trusses seemed to rest in a cosmic void. I wonder if the painted landscapes might not be a wake-up call for the fate of our planet. And yet this aesthetic of the relic is presented with tremendous equilibrium, striking a pleasing balance.

Ultimately, the artist's ability to create unexpected settings was translated here into an effort to remain conceptually on that subtle line between contraries (gesture and form, image and abstraction, destruction and creation) that is like a mountain ridge where the past has left its traces and the future—in other words, the expectation of an “afterward” that reverberated in the show's title and in the wordplay of *Sun Set Down*—has yet to appear. Without those verbal cues, one might have read everything very differently. And why not? The end of something can lead to a new, unanticipated scenario.

—*Veronica Santi*

*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

## VIENNA

### Gaylen Gerber

LAYR

When you apply a noise-cancellation filter to an audio file you are editing—whether of speech, birdsong, or a symphony—and set the threshold too high, the resulting sound becomes strangely fragmented. Much information disappears, and the soundscape is transformed into a distorted and unfamiliar, yet oddly fascinating, terrain. If there were a spatial equivalent of such extreme acoustic filtering, it might have looked like this exhibition by Gaylen Gerber. The show consisted of two paintings, both *Untitled*, and a group of objects, all of which were simply called *Support*. The works in both groups were undated, though the press release said that the paintings were made in the late 1980s and early 1990s, while the objects were from recent years.

The paintings were gray monochromes on canvas. The subtle variations in the surface of each piece suggested that they were painted with brushes and that the paint was not evenly applied. The *Support* group included sculptural works placed on large pedestals made of plain MDF—among them an iron rooster, a taxidermied coyote, busts in marble or bronze by minor nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists—and a nineteenth-century copy of a work by eighteenth-century Dutch flower painter Jan van Huysum in a gilt frame. The selection of these artifacts evoked a slightly eccentric antique shop. All were uniformly covered with gray or white oil paint, which erased the materiality and texture of their surfaces, giving the sculptures a plaster-like homogeneity (with the exception of the poor coyote, which looked dejected, its fur drenched and sticky with paint) and the painting a peculiarly plastic solidity. The picture was almost completely effaced by this impersonal gray, although traces of it were detectable if one looked carefully, while any distinction between canvas and frame was completely obliterated.



Latifa Echakhch, *Sun Set Down*, 2020, acrylic paint, concrete, vinyl, and fiber on canvas mounted on aluminum, 78¾ × 59½". From the series “Sun Set Down,” 2020.



View of "Gaylen Gerber," 2020. Photo: Gaylen Gerber and Paul Levack.

While the sides of the *Untitled* paintings were left unpainted, exposing the white canvas, the sides of the *Support* painting were fully coated by the same gray that covered the rest of the piece. This suggested that while Gerber has continued to explore the underlying structure of artworks by subtracting a significant amount of information (color, texture, even dates), his investigation was chiefly pictorial in the earlier years. It subsequently became more object-focused as it grew to encompass the entirety of our material culture—paintings being treated no differently from anything else.

What appeared to be even more crucial was Gerber's examination of the act of artmaking. The exhibition text asserted that the untitled paintings were in fact still lifes "painted in three values of gray on gray grounds." The nuances in their surfaces could easily have been unrelated to any representational intent, simply accidental unevenness of application. Similarly, while the checklist included the provenance and author of each artifact used to make a *Support*, these objects had been rendered invisible, so it was not possible for visitors to tell if the pieces said to be in marble or bronze were really made of these materials; for all we knew, they could have been reproductions coated in paint. But even though the artist's word could not be verified, we accepted it as true and essential to the integrity of the exhibited works. So much of an audience's experience of an exhibition is based on trust.

Especially if the artist's statement about the works was itself understood as performative, Gerber's exhibition was a very successful performance about artmaking. The absurdly prominent pedestals could be thought of as stages. Through the filtering-out of many common markers of differentiation between individual objects, what initially appeared to be a fairly straightforward painting and sculpture show revealed itself as a theatrical demonstration of how artworks' meanings are produced and a test of the limits of trust in the artist-audience relationship.

—Yuki Higashino

## DÜSSELDORF

### Ei Arakawa

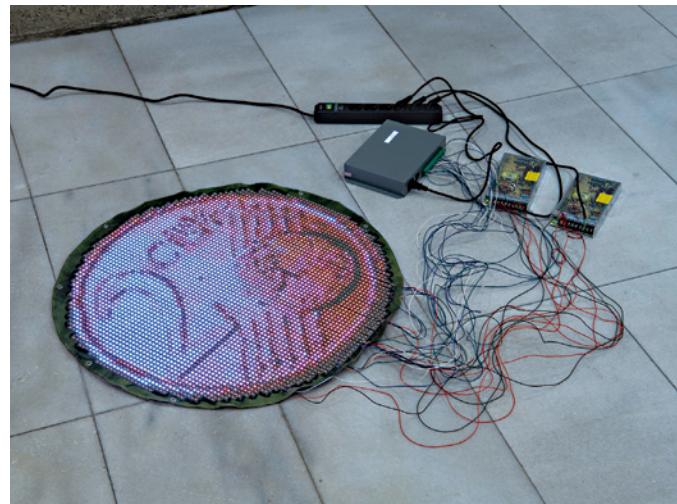
GALERIE MAX MAYER

In the art world as much as anywhere else, the pandemic and its attendant economic crises have done the most damage to those who rely on their labor, rather than capital, for their livelihood. Like other performing artists, Ei Arakawa felt the full brunt of the lockdown as social-distancing enforcement closed nearly all venues for his work. Approaching the financial details of his art practice with refreshing

candor, the artist's excellent recent show "Fees & Nerf" was as much an exercise in emotional and financial bookkeeping as a nimble pivot to potentially more pandemic-proof areas of practice. The gallery space was divided up with crude barriers made of wood and sheets of clear plastic picked up from a Japanese restaurant during the mid-pandemic install. In the spaces between were five round digital displays, mounted on the wall or lying on the floor. Composed of individually visible LEDs rather than crisp LCD panels, they emitted a low-definition glow, which, along with an intentionally added flicker, complemented the grainy Brutalist walls of Max Mayer's handsome new gallery space. This modernist jewel box once housed the gallery of Alfred Schmela, the legendary dealer of Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, and the Zero Group—what better place to mull over the art world's fraught conceptions of value?

The digital displays showed small coins in various currencies. Lengthy titles linked them to the per-minute honorarium that the artist, by his own calculations, received for one of his past performance works. In a work called *Single's Night* (*Duration: multiple times in total of 3 hours, & approx. 80 hours on preparation, Honorarium: 1,000 GBP, 0.20 GBP per minute*) (all works cited, 2020), a copper profile of Queen Elizabeth II referred to the 0.20 British pounds the artist earned for a minute of work on a presentation at Tate Modern in London in 2012. The brass- and silver-colored European maps visible in the piece titled *How to DISappear in America* (*Duration: multiple times in total of 9 hours, & approx. 60 hours on preparation, Honorarium: 3,500 EUR, 0.72 EUR per minute*) were related to the 0.72 euros Arakawa received for a minute of work on a sprawling musical he co-organized at the Ninth Berlin Biennale in 2016. A collaborator on that project, writer Dan Poston, also joined Arakawa and Tokyo-based composer ZALA to make a song called "Family Dollar (Social Capital)." Here, it reverberated at regular intervals from a smaller screen in a corner of the exhibition space. Jumping between sweet synth pop and thrash metal, it is sung from the point of view of a personified coin, but in direct reference to the artist's recent biography. In words that are equal parts goofy and poignant, a cracking, high-pitched voice meditates on the emotional connections between global and personal financial crises while making poetic references to recent economic hardship in the artist's family. The video accompanying the song is a digital slideshow presenting the foreclosed-upon Arakawa home in Fukushima, Japan, and discarded equipment from a now-bankrupt family business. As usual, the affective power and reach of money is best understood by those most reluctant to structure their lives around its accumulation.

—Gregor Quack



Ei Arakawa, *How to DISappear in America* (*Duration: multiple times in total of 9 hours, & approx. 60 hours on preparation, Honorarium: 3,500 EUR, 0.72 EUR per minute*), 2020, LEDs, hand-dyed fabric, grommets, controller, SD card, power supplies. Installation view.