

## Aaron Flint Jamison

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

Aaron Flint Jamison's first exhibition at Miguel Abreu opened in July—an off time in the art world—and much else about the exhibition was also “wrong.” There was no opening, for example; in fact, when I visited the show, which was located at the gallery's Orchard Street space, I had difficulty even opening the door because there was a motion sensor controlling the lock that I managed, unintentionally, not to trip. Inside, conventions were similarly askew: There was no checklist, and though a press release appeared online, the gallery website had an intentional glitch in it, making this document virtually impossible to find. (Needless to say, images were similarly suppressed.) The space itself was largely empty, the lights dimmed, the gallery's signature bookcases emptied, and the office desk notably absent. The only thing on display (besides the emptiness of the gallery itself) was a single sculpture affixed to the center of the ceiling. Crafted out of purple heartwood and cedar and kitted out with hydraulic arms—the type one might affix to the inside of cabinet doors—the work maintained a profoundly strange and inscrutable air. I wanted to push it and pull it but thought better of it. The thing refused virtually all games of visual association. The next day I described it to someone as looking like an enlarged model of a Peugeot pepper grinder with a cutaway view. That was the best I could do.

I might not have seen anything else had someone at the gallery not casually tipped me off to the fact that there was more downstairs, in

the space typically used as the gallery's private viewing room. There, one found a desk fashioned out of materials similar to those used in the sculpture upstairs, except that it integrated computer parts and a screen delivering a live feed from the internet of the gallery above—providing surveillance that substituted for the gallery attendant's usual view from the absconded desk. (I had missed the heat-sensitive camera hiding in the upper corner of that room.) There was also a massive apparatus, a doppelgänger of sorts of the ceiling sculpture, again made of similar woods. This was one part of a closed, self-regulating system comprising grow lights, fans, and exhaust tubes painted a fantastic, gummy black. Each day as the gallery closed at 6:15, an attendant placed a sheet of black paper in the machine, where it spent the night exposed to the glare of the grow lights. If the machine got too hot, a heat sensor inside cooled things off. It is an art machine in the tradition of Jean Tinguely's Meta-matic drawing sculptures, perhaps, but the feel of the thing is different: Customized, luxurious, artisanal yet technical, it is something like the best, most stylish home-alarm system money can buy. Moreover, the results produced by the machine, titled *Breathers*, 2015, lack all mark of spontaneity, bearing only faint traces of their lightening, like the fabric of an old couch exposed to the sun. Given out for free at the end of the show, these ejected sheets function more like eerie souvenirs than like works of art.

If this work presented itself as a self-enclosed system, that was also true of the show as a whole—this is an art that really doesn't need you. And yet you are somehow implicated within it: caught on its cameras, trying (somewhat comically) to open its doors. Whereas artists such as Daniel Buren and Michael Asher have investigated the ideological and economic realities governing the gallery and museum, Jamison focuses on the various gadgets and monitors that regulate one's experience in these spaces while relating them, more broadly, to our society of control. Everything is painfully encrypted here and yet at the same time prone to leaks and malfunction. What parts are working? What is connected? Where is the information? How will it get out? Is the whole thing a decoy to distract you from seeing something else?

In her 2014 book *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*, architectural theorist Keller Easterling compares the infrastructure of today's world—from our airports to our credit cards, and the way all of this is standardized—to one large operating system. This, too, seems an apt description of Jamison's curious art. While too mysterious to align itself with any kind of programmatic position, his work is nevertheless deeply invested in ideas of program, which is to say, how things run. While there are suggestions of cracks and fissures, jams and dislocations, they mingle with—or run up against—an obdurate opacity. One wonders about the day when these competing forces will come to a head.

—Alex Kitnick



Aaron Flint Jamison,  
*Breathers*, 2015,  
multiple sheets of  
black paper, each  
40% × 26 1/2".