

### Hot Tubs Get the Spa Treatment at Art in General – Plus: A Bauhaus Bonus!

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Courtesy of the artist and Art in General / Photograph by Charles Benton

Mika Tajima's painted hot tubs dress up Art in General (above), and the Drawing Center ships in Xanti Schawinsky (below).

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If you've always wanted to see a painted Jacuzzi, you're in for a treat.

You say you haven't always wanted to see a painted Jacuzzi? You say you don't know what a painted Jacuzzi looks like? Well, it's a curious sight indeed: the translucent shell of somebody's backyard hot tub, turned sideways and decorated in rainbow colors. A trio of them — one standing, two affixed to the wall like elephantine reliefs — form the centerpiece of "Total Body Conditioning," Mika Tajima's multisensory Gesamtkunstwerk of a show at Art in General. Commissioned by the arts nonprofit, the tubs are accompanied by an ever-shifting sound-and-light show, a series of jacquard fabric paintings (some shown before, at Eleven Rivington), plus a few floor and wall works. Almost everything here is rendered in rich ombré tones that shift like rainbows. It's like a futuristic spa with the glossy surfaces of California Finish Fetish.

The ostensible subject of Tajima's show is bodies — at work, at play, or relaxing — and her exhibition title has a Barry's Bootcamp ring. Much of Tajima's work to date has examined the body co-opted for capitalist ends, even as she has chronicled the decline of industrial production and the rise of cubicle-based intelligence economies. Past exhibitions include several decommissioned vintage Herman Miller desk units of the kind meant to make paper-pushing sexy.

Capitalist oppression is nowhere immediately evident at Art in General, where the assembled work speaks to beauty and the anthropomorphic strangeness of objects built for human bodies. Even the two sound loops pulsing through the gallery, one recorded inside a Toyota factory and the other inside a computer server room, have a relatively benign ambient lilt. If there is a message, it's subliminal.

The star turn here is the three acrylic Jacuzzis. Dynasty Spas lent the mold of a four-person hot tub currently in production, from which Tajima cast her clear acrylic bodies. Like cake molds, the resulting objects are both thin and very deep — it's where the water would go in a working spa. Tajima then sprayed each with the kind of enamel used on cars, but she painted them only from behind, leaving their shiny molded interiors to glisten. One, tipped on its side and angled toward the elevator, greets us as we enter. It's a shell of its formerly motorized self that resembles an oversize ear — what with its canals, stepped depressions, and pebbled bottom.

To take a hot tub out of commission is to sadden warm-jet lovers everywhere. And these are some of the most curious readymades you'll ever see, so massive and clunky and bizarre that they invite extended looking. (Here Tajima presents them in awkward aluminum armatures that one hopes will be finessed out of sight in their next presentation.)

There's a backstory here about how the brothers Jacuzzi invented their revolutionary pumps for agricultural applications and only later marketed them as water therapy. It fits well with Tajima's skepticism toward the industry of leisure. It doesn't hurt that the Dynasty Spas website verbiage blends the rhetoric of finance, health, and leisure: "With your purchase of a Dynasty Spa, you've made an investment in improving your health and your lifestyle." Perhaps we too will turn a Marxist eye toward such products and recognize the evils of a spa day. All that renewal just makes us more productive workers come Monday morning.

Xanti Schawinsky is the Bauhaus artist you've never heard of. A surprising solo exhibition in the Drawing Center's back room (where they're keeping the good stuff of late, it seems) acquaints us with two suites of the Swiss émigré's fantastical, sometimes fierce portrait heads made during and after the Second World War. No doubt Schawinsky — who fled Europe and landed at North Carolina's Black Mountain College with so many other artistic heavyweights escaping fascism — was in a dour, if not outright despondent, mood when he made these. Yet many are as much feats of imagination as warnings of the perils of war.

In the fantasy vein are Schawinsky's head drawings; these are faces made, Giuseppe Arcimboldo-like, out of the sum of so many other parts. In the 16th century, Arcimboldo formed faces out of the contents of the produce aisle — an upside-down pear standing in for a bulbous nose, an onion for a chubby cheek, and so on. Likewise, Schawinsky took the mass-market and manmade stuff around him — kitchen supplies, ribbon, jewelry — to form a series of types realized in our mind's eye when we step a few feet back.

Descendants of surrealism, these figures seemingly express psychic states — be it a medusa formed from a tangle of ribbon or a high-class dame made from an outstretched hand dripping with jewelry. These people are most definitely types, not individuals, but the artist is mining some fundamental truths.

Schawinsky, whose first name was Alexander but who went by "Xanti," studied graphic design and photography as well as set and costume design at the Bauhaus. You get a sense of his theatrical sensibilities in the "Faces of War" series here. Again, portraits arise out of the sum of their parts — in this case, tanks and cannons and warships. These are the fiercer group, but there remains a childlike sensibility, as if these were drawings for a slightly chilling children's book. That each face is set against a bright, multihued background further lightens their mood.

The Admiral transforms a warship into a bearded old man: The hull's drains form his eyes, choppy waves become his scruff. He ends up with an empty gaze set off by a Santa-like beard, which comes off as a decidedly mixed message. Aggression is held at arm's length, tempering the brunt of Schawinsky's angst.