

Liam Gillick

BY JENNIFER HIGGIE IN REVIEWS | 09 SEP 96

Transforming the gallery into an elaborate waiting room, Liam Gillick's 'The What If? Scenario' proposes a model of the future as a 'parallel present', where possibilities are invoked with both a mock reverence for control and the playfulness of a hopeful bureaucrat.

Dominating the austerity of the first rooms are two ambiguous, minimal structures (The What If? Scenario) Discussion Platform (London) and (The What If? Scenario) Report Platform (all works 1996). Metal poles support the coloured perspex squares that create a semi-ceiling above the 'platforms', the size and colour of which was determined by the offcuts available. Like do-it-yourself modernist garden gazebos, they are intended to function as sites for meeting and talking. However, whereas the ...Discussion Platform was built to operate as a framework to discuss 'potential developments', the accompanying documentation recommends that the ...Report Platform be used more exclusively as a site for conclusions. The artist's tone of prescriptive irony is at odds with the light that floats through the coloured squares, casting the shadow of a delicate Technicolor grid onto the floor. Here, function doesn't follow form, it defies prescription it's usually determined by the chance meeting of personality with material. Complications lurk behind straight lines.

Along the walls, (The What If? Scenario) Communication Banners are contrasted with (The What If? Scenario) Mirrored Insulation Plate. The banners hang opposite each other, large, floating and glowing gold, gently lifting and rippling with the movements of air and people. Like Buddhist prayer flags (and what is a prayer but an invocation of the future?) they cast a warm glow over the cool architecture of the gallery space. In contrast, the grey metal of the 'insulation plates' reflect the audience back on itself, distorted and disembodied, unexpectedly evoking memories of graphite and drawing, like ghostly latter day Seurats. A strange relationship between the rectangular logic of hard-edged Minimalism and the abstract possibilities of the 'real' world is established everything might become something else.

A fugitive image for a fugitive future, (The What If? Scenario) Prototype Report is a book on the wall wrapped in tissue paper. The almost-visible picture on the cover seems to be a large cat or puma. The book looks like the report of a small town boys club. 'When and if...' Gillick writes, 'a real report is written, it may or may not look like this piece'. So time is a construct, or perhaps the future's a possibility that's already happened it makes me think of Bob Dylan singing 'Oh, I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now'.



Downstairs, because of the proximity of a small in-house group show in the next room, the visual impact of the arrangement of objects is less powerful the propositions are still engaging, but somewhat diluted. A blue ping-pong table is upended against the wall, covered in glitter and called a dining table: (The What If? Scenario) Dining Table (Second Version) 'an image of something beyond use' is a pretty, silly, cognitive disruption, begging the idea that purpose as a pre-determined condition is a state that deserves re-examination.

(The What If? Scenario) Isolation Screen, (two sheets of 'Rip-Stop', one orange and one red) covers one wall and, according to the documentation, serves to 'change the acoustics of the space very slightly. It deadens the sound and makes it easier to engage in quiet conversation'. Whether it works or not, do voices need to be quiet to encourage communication? How do the emotive, abstract qualities of colour influence a contemplative environment? Who or what would improve with isolation the audience or the object, the idea itself? And why? Can the future be talked into being?

A picture is an amalgam of time, an object made in the past and about to be re-invented in the mind of whoever's thinking about it. (The What If? Scenario) Scenario (by Gillian Gillick) comprises three simple pen and ink drawings of a beach, a house and a basement, described by the artist as 'a series of basic images of "what could be" rather than of pictures of things that "are"'. From this perspective, the drawings render absurd the notion of any finite realisation there's so much space between the lines, but what happens there? Like the future, the meaning of an image is something both constantly fixed and infinitely deferred, a static object in a state of flux, as contradictory as the person looking at it.

The idea that the present is constantly in the process of becoming the future is not a particularly original one, but Gillick turns a platitude on its head by playing off verbal expectations against visual assumptions. It's sometimes hard to resist the authority that words have in a gallery and the artist pretends to make it easier for us with his 'looking without tears' brochure. But in presenting us with objects that resist rather than illustrate its dry tone, he ultimately leaves the audience no option but to take control of the decision making. The saddest life is the one where the deferral of the future functions as a comforting abstraction, where the 'what if' scenario is the one most constantly played. Gillick proposes nothing so bleak. His vision is a hopeful one: a wish for a greater animation of the present, where the intrinsic component of any experience is allowed both to defy description and accept responsibility, where Minimal edges might blur into figuration, and simple objects might mutate into something that has no bearing on the argument or discussion at hand.



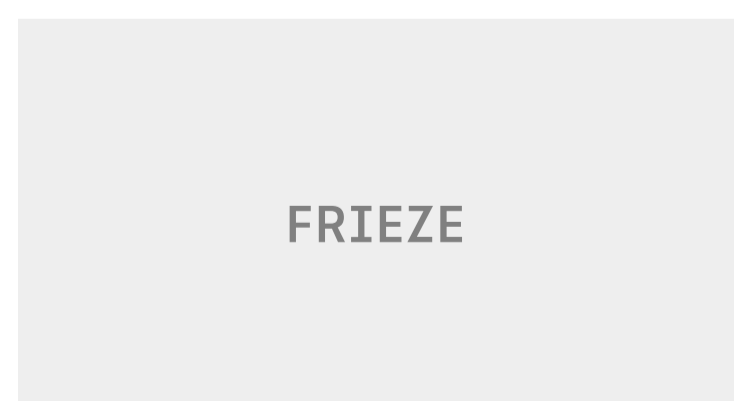
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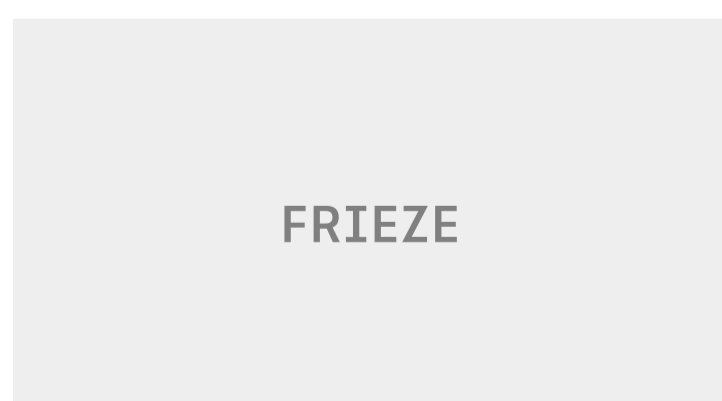
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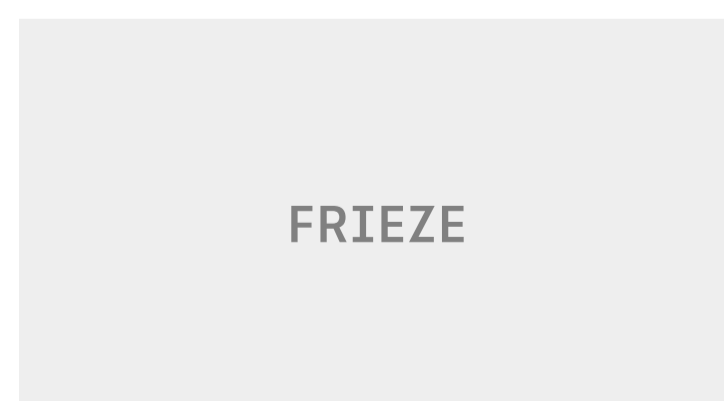
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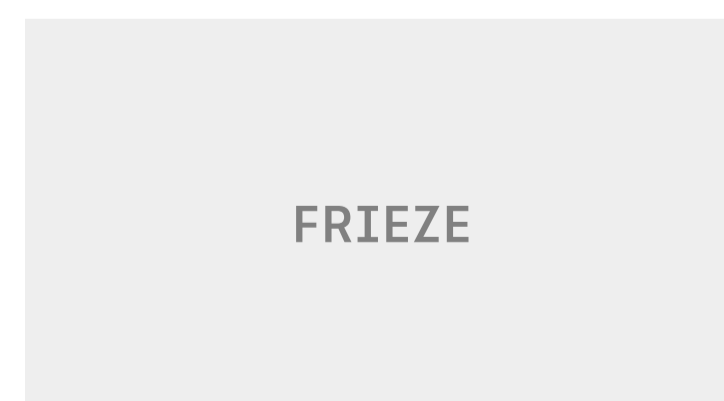
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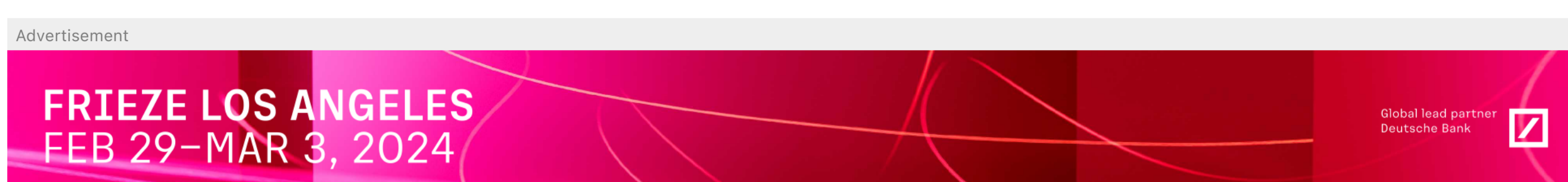
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