

Protocinema

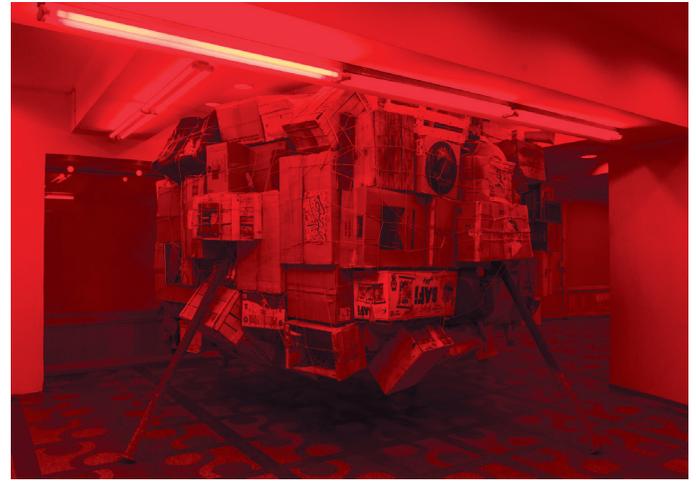
Mike Nelson *Projektör* (*Gürün Han*)

MIKE NELSON
Projektör (Gürün Han)
2019
Mixed-media installation, dimensions variable.
Partial installation view of “Projektör (Gürün Han),” Istanbul, 2019.
Courtesy the artist; Protocinema, Istanbul; Henry Moore Foundation, Leeds; Alserkal Arts Foundation, Dubai; and Galleria Franco Noero, Turin.

In a modest public square halfway between the banks of the Bosphorus and Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar is a bronze sculpture of a draper showing off an unraveled bolt of fabric. The statue commemorates a figure once common among the neighborhood’s hive of textile businesses, which now sell imported, mass-produced clothing. This shift was provoked by Turkey’s 2000–01 economic crisis and later compounded by the boom of competing businesses internationally and the advent of new production technologies. Just steps away from the statue is another testament to these transformations: the largely empty *Gürün Han*, a building that used to be the textile industry’s epicenter in the city.

Underscoring the building’s position on the brink of obsolescence, Mike Nelson rendered the site a living sculpture, subtly intervening in 16 derelict shops on the seventh floor with videos of the city’s streets, shot on the artist’s phone from the backseats of taxis and then flipped 90 degrees, as well as arrangements of objects found on-site. Collectively titled *Projektör (Gürün Han)* (2019) and commissioned by Protocinema, the videos and installations were inspired by Jean-Luc Godard’s science-fiction film *Alphaville* (1965), about a government agent who sets off to destroy a mind-controlling computer that has taken over the titular town—layering past, present and future, and conveying the anxiety that surrounds technology-driven progress.

These themes were made explicit from the immediate sense of disquietude that arose from the spatially discombobulating venue, with labyrinthine corridors and



the lack of marked distinction between Nelson’s project and the other sparse, still-functioning businesses. From the dim hallways, the only ways to tell that a room contained an artwork were the windows, tinted by the red lights emanating from the rooms or plastic sheets attached to their surfaces, and the sounds and flashing projections of Nelson’s videos. Upon entering the spaces, visitors encountered various found materials, often arranged so that it was hard to tell whether they had been left like that by the previous tenants, or if the artist had deliberately positioned them as such. In a former clothing shop that was flooded in crimson fluorescent lighting, for example, bags of plaster were strewn across uneven floorboards, while piles of glass and wood leaned against the walls showing different substrata, and a single chair faced the windows bearing red filters. While the color red was an apparent artistic device, providing a navigation guide by way of a unifying, formal thread that extended into some of the other spaces, it was actually chosen by Nelson for its associations as an aposematic signal for danger. The piercing red lighting temporarily upset visitors’ eyesight, heightening one’s disorientation and, in turn, sense of anxiety.

With limited sunlight penetrating the premise as a result of its design, *Gürün Han* is divorced from real events occurring in the outside world; within this building, various

artifacts from different eras create an environment in which linear time has collapsed. For example, a calendar from 2008, layered atop one from 1978, hung by the door of one of the abandoned enterprises. Electricity meters across the floor were frozen in the 1980s and ’90s. Nelson’s gestures intensified this effect, with layered anachronisms evident throughout the installations. He screened his videos on antiquated television monitors and projectors from different decades that pixelated and discolored the views of Istanbul’s streets to varying degrees. In one room, a mistuned radio endlessly emitted white noise from the center of a retro-spaceship-like sculpture made of cardboard boxes and wooden crates. The hefty assemblage was suspended by three, slim metal poles, bent at the ends, suggesting the structure’s imminent collapse, as if echoing the fate of the building.

The spatiotemporal limbo, designed to disorient, inadvertently made visitors wandering voyeurs, sparking a mutual curiosity and perhaps friction between them and the building’s occupants. This monitoring between the viewers and tenants evoked the current unease within societies with regard to technological advances that facilitate surveillance. With his deft handling of space, material and context, Nelson conjured an anxiety inextricable from change.

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