

During Frieze Week, Artists Examine the Effects of Technology

From mining materials for electronics to a connection to colonialism, these exhibitions offer another viewpoint.

By Keridwen Cornelius

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During Frieze Week in New York, three artists are exploring the environmental and psychological reverberations of our relationship with technology. The Ethiopian artist Elias Sime delves into the consequences of overextracting metals to make smartphones, laptops and batteries. Mika Tajima gives form to the vague sense of unease many people feel in this disembodied digital era. Clarissa Tossin takes viewers on a journey from the Amazon to outer space to reveal how technology is interlaced with colonialism.

Amid the race to develop ever-advancing technologies, these artists' works offer a chance to slow down and reflect. As Sime explained: "We do need technology, but it is also taking away from who we are as humans. Maybe we should stop for a minute and talk and start thinking, 'Where do we go with this tomorrow?'"

Mika Tajima

Throughout Tajima's Frieze Week exhibition at the Hill Art Foundation, "Super Natural," which opens May 3, gold foil trompe-l'oeil hot-tub jet nozzles shimmer like constellations on the walls. The configurations represent acupressure points on the body's meridian lines, or energy passageways, according to traditional Chinese medicine. They also connect the dots between her artworks' themes. As Tajima explained, these diagrams depict human bodies flowing with vital energy, but they are as disconnected from flesh and blood as our projected personalities on social media or the images we transmit through video calls.

With this visual metaphor, Tajima, who lives in Brooklyn, describes the discombobulating sensation of living simultaneously carnal and computerized lives. "I've been thinking a lot about the split between our physical selves and our digital representations," the artist said during a video call. "We're living in a very disembodied moment."

Tajima also incorporates hot-tub jet nozzles into several sculptures to reveal the invisible pressures placed on us by technology and capitalism. "Technology is constantly chasing us and our data," she said. The artist lamented the ways companies compress our complexities into market-ready categories, pursue us with personalized ads, and try to shape our desires, activities and bodies. Her sculptures offer an antidote.



“Pranayama (Figurine, 2, Rose Quartz),” a 2024 work by Mika Tajima, includes bronze hot-tub jet nozzles. Mika Tajima, via Pace Gallery; Dawn Blackman

She places the nozzles on a rose quartz monolith, wood carved to resemble an emerging human figure, and glass shaped like half-formed heads. By attaching nozzles to organic materials, some seemingly caught mid-transformation, Tajima is anchoring technology-stressed viewers to the physical world. She said she was sending a message that we could free ourselves from algorithmic categories and express “expansive possibilities.”

In another work, Tajima recorded a group sound bath meditation, then converted a digital image of the sound waves into an enormous weaving. “I’m reversing this feeling we have now that everything’s dematerializing,” she said. By turning a fleeting, indescribable communal event into a tangible textile, she reminds viewers that “you are here, and you can experience something that isn’t on a screen,” she explained.