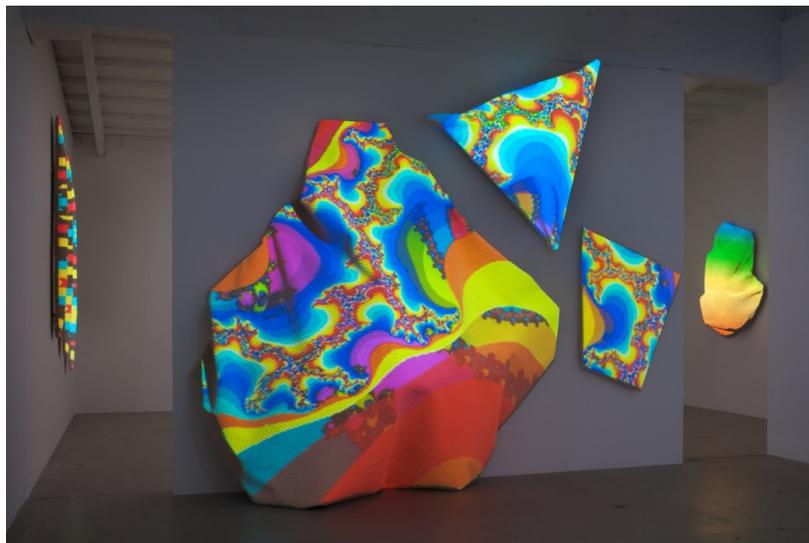


CARETS AND STICKS

Gimme Pizza and a Screen Saver *Animal Charm at China Art Objects*

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Lava lamps weren't originally meant to symbolize psychedelia and "grooviness." In fact, "an ad in a 1968 edition of the *American Bar Association Journal* touted the "executive" model—mounted on a walnut base alongside a ballpoint pen." (1) Yet, soon, the lamps were sprinkled across American bedrooms next to black light posters and bongos. Sales of the lamps have surely dropped over the years, and Mathmos, the company responsible for the lamp, has branched out into other lava themed products. Namely, screen savers. The screen savers are basically what you'd expect: colorful animations that mimic the ebbs and flows of the wax inside a lava lamp. Their sensual forms become mesmerizing catches for the eye, while providing ambient mood lighting, much like the original lamps.

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Animal Charm's recent show, *Hot Shot Tuscan II*, at China Art Objects utilizes their home-turf medium of video, yet the work is arguably situated closer to the camp of sculpture than video (if we're splitting hairs). The show consists of four wall constructions, all made of a standard domestic carpet. Some of the carpet constructs are straight forward shapes – ovals and triangles – while others are more expressive and undulating. Projected on each form is a video, which has been cut out to fit the sculpture it illuminates. The videos undulate and move across the visual field, slowly gliding geometric patterns and gradients take the stage, then a floating slice of pizza or a pineapple graze through the digitized landscape, throwing off the meditation by sprinkling a recognizable object into the otherwise abstract color fields.

The most sculptural piece (pictured left) had the least amount of movement in the video, yet held my attention the longest. What first seemed like an ominous static red glow from the projector soon made way to a subtle orange, and then blue. The piece captivates and tests patience simultaneously. Viewing the work in the unlit gallery space was reminiscent of a moody lava-lamp-lit apartment; a certain mischievous energy floated about the space. I almost half expected a joint to be passed around, or some soft blues tunes to be playing on a distant record player.

This exhibition announces a turning point in Animal Charm's oeuvre. This is no secret, as the press release (after mostly describing the work the pair are known for) writes, "this is the first solo show of object-and-projection-based work." By projecting videos onto constructed objects rather than a built gallery wall, a new context, conversation, and intentionality emerges. The gallery is clearly away of this exciting shift.

Yet I would argue that the triumph of this exhibition lies not in the shift towards the dimensional, but the one towards abstraction. Granted, the pair started collaborating in the 90s by mining old VHS tapes for footage, today every 12 year old you-tuber worth his weight in bit-coins has access to the technology needed to splice two video clips together. Perhaps with the advent of social media, a certain charm (no pun intended) of the duo's spliced videos began to wear off. But hey babe, the times they are a-changin, and Animal Charm's use of abstraction here opens the work up to a broader array of art historical and cultural references. Oldenburg, Turrell, and Joseph Albers are evoked, while You Tube, and 90s nostalgia humor fade into the background. Yet still, these digital videos maintain a nuanced wit – a whimsical and sly humor exists in the work, yet is not outright. And the slice of pizza that floats through a geometric landscape brings in the token cultural nod (The Olsen's viral video "Gimme pizza" comes to mind).

In short, *Hot Shot Tuscan II* is a bold step for Animal Charm into a contemporary art conversation that moves away from reliance in nostalgia. Rather, an intentionality of form is determined through the specific sculptural forms and digitally rendered videos. The show demarcates HERE and NOW instead of THAT and THEN. Maybe next, a screen saver is in order...what, too nostalgic?