

# ARTFORUM

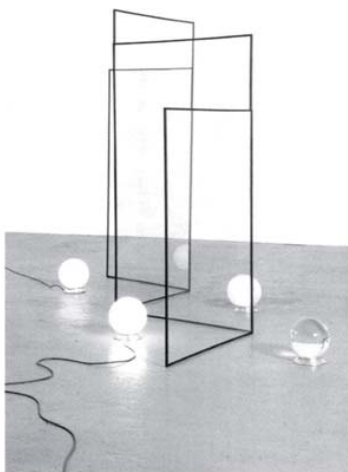
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## Alicja Kwade

HARRIS LIEBERMAN

Alicja Kwade's exhibition "The Heavy Weight of Light" had a laboratorial cleanliness appropriate to its outward focus on scientific phenomena. In a precision-tooled array of sculptural-sensorial tableaux, the Berlin-based artist tested a variety of ideas about our understanding of the innate qualities of materials and our interaction with objects in time and space. But if walking through the gallery felt at times like flipping through a physics textbook, there were enough moments of magic in the exhibition that even the less rational, more instinctual viewer would have found something worth puzzling over. In fact, "real" scientists would likely have had a tougher time with it than most, given the fact that Kwade unabashedly lets her subjectivity intrude.

In the show's titular installation, lengths of various materials—wood, copper, glass, bronze, MDF—appear, against our better judgment, to share equal physical flexibility. What Kwade has done is give each rod, plank, or sheet a ninety-degree kink and arrange it side by side with the others along one wall. Slumping onto the floor as if melting under the lights, they collectively suggest the hard-won results of an industrial



Alicja Kwade, *Matter of Opinion*, 2012, steel frame, crystal glass, sandstone, two Art Deco lamps, cable, lightbulb, dimensions variable.

second to the thing itself. Anyone who's tried going a day without checking his or her watch (or, more likely, cell phone or computer) will understand how addicted we are to marking each passing hour, minute, second.

In the rear gallery, the anxiety provoked by these twinned works was multiplied in an installation consisting of eight classic pocket watches dangling from the ceiling on gold and silver chains. Each timepiece is also wired to an amp and speakers, the resultant out-of-synch chorus of unnaturally loud ticking making for another simple but surprisingly affecting memento mori. There's a surreal edge to this work, too, but one that is, again, pleasingly understated. And formally, it's rather delicate—the sound isn't so intensified as to become a deafening joke, while the visual impression of the dangling chains and wires has an elegant linearity.

*Matter of Opinion*, 2012, is a more complex affair, a kind of smoke-and-mirrors setup in which a folding screen made from large sheets of steel-framed glass interrupts and confuses the reflected and refracted images of two globular lamps with doubles made from crystal and sandstone. It takes a few circuits of the installation to figure out what's "real" (*reality*, as the saying goes, is the only word that should always be used in quotation marks) and what's not. Here again, sculpture becomes demonstration, a show-and-tell around perceptual phenomena that carries just enough poetic weight.

—Michael Wilson

designer's mission to bend (literally) any substance to his or her whim. One imagines a variety of processes having been applied to yield this incongruously consistent result. It's a satisfying technical exercise that also underscores the artist's surrealist bent—think of Dali's creation of gooey pocket watches and other such games that involve making stuff do what it shouldn't.

Timepieces, as it happens, recurred throughout the show. Two 1930s institutional wall clocks hung facing one another, one running so slowly, it may as well have stopped altogether, the other nightmarishly fast. Though they were obviously doctored, such is the trust we still tend to place in this type of device—especially when they carry a strong association with the schoolroom—that they make us feel unsettled nonetheless, as if time itself had gone askew. The map may not be the territory, but when it comes to chronology, measurement is a close