

Judith Kakon

Grisaille

June 6 - July 12, 2025

This new body of work by JUDITH KAKON evokes the artist's interest in vision, both as the literal act of viewing and the idea of imagination. Her investigation typically starts with common objects. A series of foldable ramps used to facilitate access through doors over stairs are altered, re-purposed, and lacquered.

Unlike many historic artists, whose intervention on common objects hinged on a change of scale (Oldenburg), material (Koons), recognizability (Chamberlain), context (Warhol), Kakon chooses subtraction and formalization. The ramps are almost identical to their real counterparts except for their systematic repetition and their compliance to a new and systematized palette: They are collaged together into polyptych of various grays; their functionality is compromised by being placed vertically. Moreover, Kakon cuts away large parts of the ramps, leaving squared holes where matter used to be.

The common object is imagined as something that leaves space for a different type of vision. The holes in the ramps turn them into frames rather than centers, enabling the viewer to see through. The destruction of their functionality is a subtraction and addition at once: By cutting a hole and placing the ramps vertically, Kakon implies they are useless in the world of mere utility but purposeful for the experience they bring about as artworks and framing devices. Unlike Cady Noland, holes are not bullet holes. Everyday objects don't conceal violence for Kakon as they do for Noland. She instead cares about indifferent things not only for their intrinsic formal potential – the banal becomes beautiful – but also for their inner ability to raise questions in the viewer: What does a dysfunctional ramp say about accessibility?

These works, with their gray palette or *grisaille*, reference medieval polyptych and foldable paintings such as the Ghent Altarpiece by Van Eyck (1432) or the Portinari Altarpiece by van der Goes (1475), which feature gray images on their exterior panels, perhaps paintings of stone statues. Vibrant colorful panels are reserved for the interior of the paintings. These muted outside images were used to build expectation in the medieval religious viewer, who could experience the awe of colors only upon the opening of the painting. Kakon's polyptych of common objects follow a similar process, although they steer away from religious contemplation and illumination, approaching a more skeptical, if not critical, attitude: What one sees through the hole is but a white wall, an image of emptiness. Yet, to paraphrase Cao and Schweber, the vacuum is something substantial, the scene of wild activities.

Kakon reflects on the ramps alongside monochrome red photographs of support structures such as scaffolding on buildings or religious statues. These photographs are a sublimated version of the ramps as they contain all of their elements: the act of vision is brought to the fore

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by the strong presence of the red filter on otherwise multicolor images; imagination is called upon with their slightly hallucinatory atmosphere; utilitarian objects such as scaffolding are aestheticized through photography not unlike the foldable ramps are through sculpture.

BIO

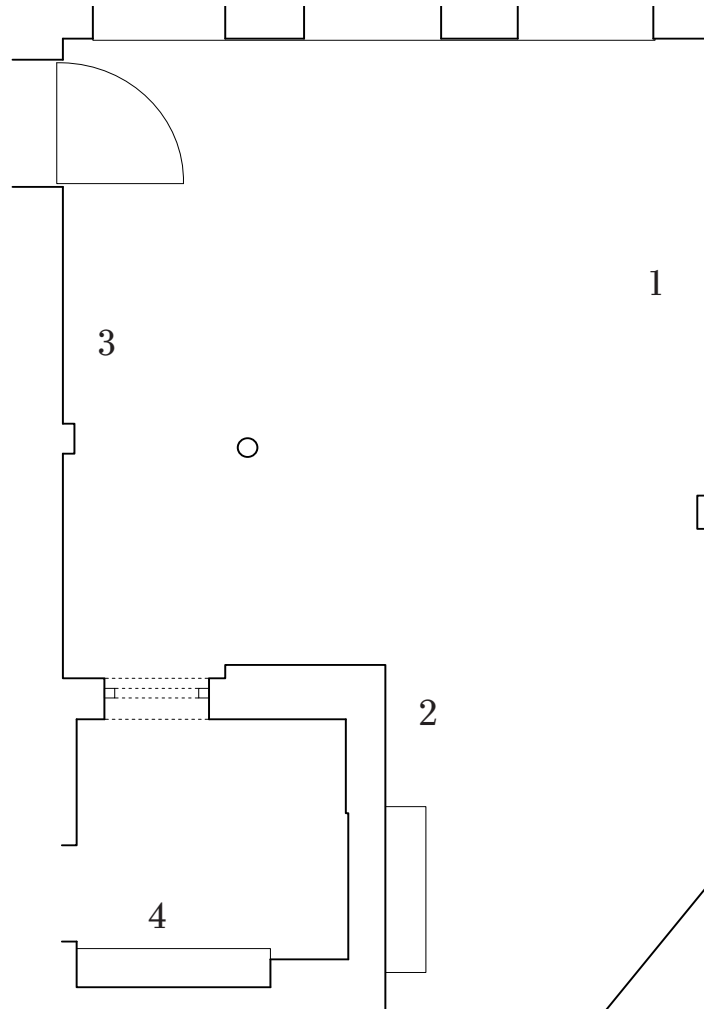
JUDITH KAKON (*1988) lives and works in Basel. Her work includes sculpture, installation, image-making, and text. By means of subtly altered reproductions, contextual and spatial shifts, Kakon presents us with the familiar once again, but now outside of day-to-day life.

Recent shows include Villa Wenkenhof, Riehen (2025), Frac Champagne-Ardenne, Reims (2024), Gauli Zitter, Brussels (2024) La Criée, centre d'art contemporain, Rennes (2023), Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen (2021), Kunsthalle Basel (2020), COALMINE, Winterthur (2020), SALTS, Birsfelden (2019), Anorak at the project space of Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart (2018), Riverside Space, Worblaufen (2018) Paul Ege Kunstpreis, Freiburg (2017), Kunsthaus Langenthal (2017), Studioli, Rome (2016), Taylor Macklin, Zurich (2015), Kunsthaus Glarus (2015).

Judith Kakon is currently faculty member at the Bard MFA program in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, as well as an advisory board member of the exhibition space For, in Basel. She was one of the recipients of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant for 2025.

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1. *Grisaille (Sky gray, 9-parts)*
2025
Modified, lacquered aluminum
ramps

2. *Grisaille (Pebble gray, 2-parts)*
2025
Modified, lacquered aluminum
ramps

3. *Grisaille (Silk gray, 2-parts)*
2025
Modified, lacquered aluminum
ramps

4. *Undertones (Cathédrale de
Reims; Construction site, Basel;
Tour d'Eiffel, Paris; Musée
Marmottan, Paris), 2025*
four-parts, Ed.1/4
Xerox print on neon paper,
cardboard, glass