

## REVIEW: Instant Coffee Takes the Easy Way at MKG127

by Ulysses Castellanos 25/05/13 1:55 AM EDT

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(Installation image of Instant Coffee at MKG127.)

**Instant Coffee** has been stirring things up for over a decade. With an aesthetic that combines slick fabrication with impoverished materials, and an elaborate conceptual framework with a slacker attitude, the collective (composed of artists **Jinhan Ko**, **Kelly Lycan**, **Khan Lee**, **Jenifer Pappararo**, **Kate Monro**, and **Cecilia Berkovic**) has become a well-known emblem of hybridity.

Past projects have typically merged architecture, design, and the trappings of contemporary consumer culture with a playful teenybopper sleepover aesthetic (whose

dominant hue, natch, is electric pink). Their current show at **MKG127**, entitled "Take The Easy Way," proves the rule.

For their current forage, the collective has undertaken the task of morphing the gallery space into a condominium sales showroom. Branding dominates the space, namely through the preponderance of a graphic geometric pattern made up of vinyl lettering in the shape of the collective's logo, which covers large wall areas much like the photo-op friendly, logo-laden backgrounds at red carpet events. The floor of the space is covered in black risers, each resembling the monolith from Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey" – if someone had knocked it over. The risers are stacked on top of one another to create different levels of elevation, so that when viewers enter the installation they have to stand higher or lower than everybody else, depending on where they are situated.

This slick environment houses a number of individual objects that are stand-alone works and function as rubrics to penetrate the overall conceptual framework. "Neon Violator," for instance, is taken from the "violators" (jagged shapes that proclaim slogans like "For a limited time only!" or "New and Improved" etc.) that disrupt the design of product-packaging and print ads. The violator, in this case, bears no message, but leans casually and enigmatically on one of the risers like a disconnected speech balloon without any text. Also on the risers, at the highest point of the floor elevation, are two pink logs entitled "West Coast Stools." They are beautifully varnished and glimmer in their pink sheen, alive and dead at the same time. Adjacent to these, and meteoric in appearance, is a black mass entitled "After Taking the Easy Way." The piece was constructed from the wall logo's detritus, with so much leftover vinyl.

And so, the installation's slickness is only deceitfully so. The materials involved in the construction are base materials like plywood, vinyl strips, black rental risers, a framed Burberry plastic shopping bag, etc. The ensemble is tied together by one of the few unpainted objects in the exhibition, a large wooden board leaning against the wall, bearing the text "Thinking of You" in a flowing schmaltzy script that was lifted directly from a Hallmark card, encapsulating the sentiment of the show, as well as that of advertisers and hucksters around the world, from self-help gurus to investment bankers. Like the title of the show proclaims, the artists have truly taken "the easy way," in a sort of artistic hedonism that mimics the draconian work ethic of the Protestant West while not

participating in it. As artist Jinhan Ko explains, in an interview with **ARTINFO Canada**, “It’s ironic, because [as an artist] you have to maintain a full life, which means that you *do* drink a lot, you go to parties, but you still want to be productive. You have to maintain a semblance of outsidership somehow, but ultimately, though we pretend otherwise, there’s always a sense of commerciality that’s attached to making art.”

Of the two, Instant Coffee seems to focus on the more populist approach, inciting the viewer/participant to “Get Social or Get Lost,” as their motto emphatically proclaims. No Instant Coffee exhibition is complete without a number of social events that occur within their installations. Their “Makeout Party” (2005), for example, in which a large blanket fortress (designed by architect **Emily Hogg**), woven with elaborate tunnel systems and multiple chambers, transported the viewer back to seventh grade and provided a backdrop for hours of making-out with friends or even perfect strangers.

Yet the aforementioned slogan (“Get Social or Get Lost”) is also a red herring; it suggests both invitation and exclusivity, feeding on our anxieties and feelings of inadequacy and using them to incite compliance. By mimicking the strategies of advertising and design, Instant Coffee ironically exposes the banality and meaninglessness of it all, taking the piss out of the Corbusian idea that architecture and design can affect a positive change in society by conditioning human behavior.

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