

ARTFORUM

Koki Tanaka

YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

701 Mission Street

September 25–November 28

Both physical comedy and the parti-colored stock of ninety-nine-cent stores can be found nearly anywhere in the world, and both, in a sense, transcend language barriers, wordlessly communicating their appeal. By combining the two elements, Japanese artist Koki Tanaka manages to allude to art history and the physical and emotional architecture of households. “Nothing related, but something could be associated,” his first US solo exhibition of witty, offhand sculpture, video, and drawing, finds him making varied use of cheap plastic commodities and putting them through paces, creating temporary frameworks from the throwaway. Tanaka makes messy marks with such actions as haphazardly piling up chairs to create a makeshift ladder from yard to roof (in the video *Approach to an Old House*, 2008), or painting a circle on the ground with soda that gushes from a bottle (*Simple Gesture and Temporary Sculpture*, 2008). All the works are displayed in a mazelike plywood structure that doubles back on itself, thwarting white-cube cleanliness and providing nooks that contain crumpled plastic cups.

There is nomadic appeal here as well—Tanaka created most of this show in San Francisco, scouring thrift stores, Home Depots, and gallery storage closets for parts. He coerced local stylists into participating in the video *a haircut by 9 hairdressers at once (second attempt)*, 2010, a chatty United Nations–like affair reveling in negotiated disarray. His practice is seriocomic and semiathletic, in the manner of Jacques Tati, Erwin Wurm, and Kate Gilmore. In a series of drawings, however, Tanaka also interrogates Japanese art history with his own bemused detachment. In depicting works by antecedents such as Yoko Ono and Hiroshi Sugimoto, Tanaka manages to look at a whole other layer of cultural export that may require more detailed translation.

— Glen Helfand



View of “Nothing related, but something could be associated,” 2010.