

## CLIFTON BENEVENTO

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# ARTFORUM

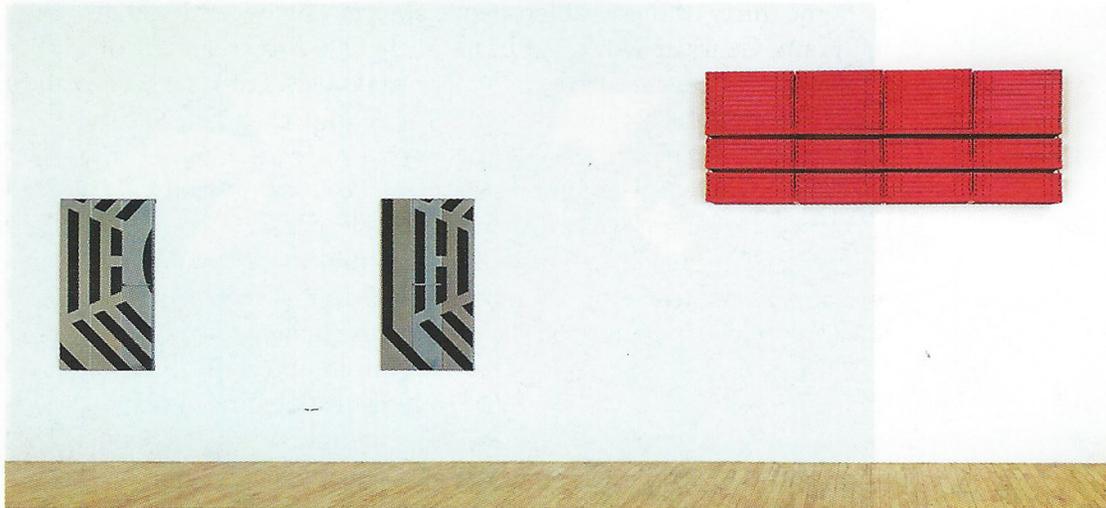
## Zak Kitnick

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Those for whom the term *feng shui* connotes a Chinese technique seized upon by Western interior designers in the 1990s and quickly bastardized and rebranded under the New Age aegis may have suffered some alarm at the prospect of Zak Kitnick's second solo exhibition at this gallery, laid out as it was according to the principles of something called a "bagua grid." Outwardly a taciturn display of abstract sculpture, the Brooklyn-based artist's arrangement of quasi-industrial objects had apparently been designed with different ends in mind than the "merely" aesthetic. Kitnick ends a sheet of notes that was available at the front desk with this injunction: "Optimize life. Activate space. Maximize power." While not necessarily divergent from the ambitions of most artists, the aims here were expressed in the rather different context offered by a gallery.

As delineated in a helpful diagram that constituted the show's press release, the bagua grid divides a given space into nine segments, each of which is assigned a specific set of colors and significances. Adapting the matrix to the irregular space of the gallery, Kitnick sited his works in alignment with it, titling each according, in part, to the supposed resonances of its relative position. Thus, the first work in the main gallery was *(Water) Career, Kan (Water) Black (Water) Career* (all works 2013); the second *Self, Career, Work, Change, Job, Switch Career Fields, Meet New Work Goals, Water, Blue, Black*; and so on. Seen in conjunction with the objects' mass-produced, workaday styling, this system seemed to establish a dialogue between symbol and function more tightly codified than we have come to expect from art: not merely suggestive or referential but prescriptive, instructional.

But how to read those instructions? The works here took three basic forms, all studiously unexpressive. First, most numerous and striking, were the shelves—businesslike units in powder-coated steel mounted on the walls and stacked with further unassembled examples of same. Each is supposedly "available" in thirty-two possible size-and-color combinations, the specific permutation permitted in a given space determined by that all-important grid. Second were the panels—in fact, also shelving units, but displayed flat against the wall to make dull silver surfaces marked with patterns of black bars derived from some other part of the baguan system. Their vibe, like the shelves', was one of



factory-made serial Minimalism, but they might equally have been ripped from the interior walls of some slightly retro movie-spacecraft.

The show's only other component was *Well-Being, Balance, Achieve Balance, Recover from Illness, Increase Athletic Abilities, Earth, Yellow, Brown*, an octagonal plywood bench that encircled one of the gallery's columns, providing a resting place for the weary—or newly empowered—viewer. Clifton Benevento is a quasi-domestic space replete with architectural details—there's also a freestanding vintage radiator and a wall-filling bookshelf that surrounds three windows—but many artists still choose to pretend they aren't there. Not so Kitnick; just as his project's meaning is driven in part by an extant system, so its placement is assigned, in part, by an extant set of design decisions.

Though the look of Kitnick's show may have been (in spite of its multiple colorways) austere, its allusion, however disengaged, to a technique for the achievement of well-being kept it messily human. And while it would have been easy for the artist to attack feng shui and its latter-day, commercialized manifestations as bankrupt or exhausted, his aim here was more properly investigative. By folding one code into another, he asked that we consider the function of codes in general, and of art in particular.

—Michael Wilson

View of "Zak Kitnick," 2013. From left: *Wealth and Prosperity, Xun (Wind), Purple, Prosperity*, 2013; *(Fire) and Reputation, Li (Fire), Red (Fire), Fame/Reputation*, 2013; *Fame, Future, Reputation, Increase Recognition, Establish Reputation, Become Well Known, Fire, Red, Orange*, 2013.