

ARTFORUM

Jason Loeb

ESSEX STREET
114 Eldridge St
May 4–June 29

As New York lurches out of a punishing winter into a temperamental if not completely aborted spring, Jason Loeb focuses his second solo exhibition at this gallery on the evanescent properties and manifestations of heat. In a briskly poetic essay on the topic—distributed at the gallery—Loeb meditates on the symbolic harmonies between thermal energy and Bataille's notions of Marxian surplus value, networked economies, and hot microprocessors mining exotic cryptocurrencies, thermographic imagery, and recycling programs for “waste” heat.

In the back room, Loeb turns mats of carbon-heating film—electricity-powered sheets of plastic installed on spa floors and under domestic floor tiles—into freestanding, cylindrical sculptures.

With a light touch, he transforms technology that lends perambulatory comfort to something that demands to be walked around rather than over, at once charting new motions for both visitors and the air, which invisibly rises as it is heated. In the main gallery, a new suite of abstractions substitute black thermal paste for oil paint—a material used to conduct heat out of engaged CPUs into copper heat sinks. Rather than cooling busy circuitry, these works absorb ambient thermal energy and transfer them to inert, indifferent white canvas supports—a pessimistic model, perhaps, for today's accelerating, socially driven, and exchange-oriented culture of art collecting.

In this theater of thermodynamic motions, it's easy to find oneself strangely stilled in front of the show's most powerful work. Near the gallery entrance, a museological arrangement of various precious and semiprecious ores used to manufacture computer equipment suggest astral origins but belie a patrimony of online overseas merchants. The artist's only modification of these rocks is a light application of security ink, something used by nation states (and counterfeiters) to authenticate or “sign” monetary notes and legal documents. While historically an artist's signature asserts authenticity and indelible origin, Loeb's signatory gesture rather implies one state in a chain of material trafficking.



Jason Loeb, *Untitled* (detail of gold ore, breccia, Gilpin County, Colorado), 2014, minerals, optical variable security ink, dimensions variable.

— Boško Blagojević