

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in February

John Knight

Through March 2. Greene Naftali, 508 West 26th Street, Ground Floor, Manhattan



At Greene Naftali, the artist John Knight had the track lighting in one room moved from the ceiling to the floor.

John Knight, via Greene Naftali, New York; Photo by Zeshan Ahmed

The conceptual artist John Knight delights in a revelatory style of institutional critique. His pointed interventions in exhibition spaces aim to undermine the mystery of neutral art-viewing conditions or bring buried histories to the surface. Past work includes asking a gallery to remove its doors and painting a project space like the original parking garage it was built to be.

At Greene Naftali, he has had the track lighting in one room moved from the ceiling to the floor. You're asked to ponder a piece of the gallery experience that you're typically meant to ignore.

Knight's work echoes that of Michael Asher, a conceptual artist famous for running daylong critiques with students at California Institute of the Arts and for elegant analytical moves, like having the Whitney Museum of American Art stay open for 72 hours straight. Where Asher was brainy and playful, Knight is puckish and punk.

In the Greene Naftali show, the spotlights shine in your face; the rails block your path. The lamps have been brought down to earth for your consideration, but your eyes find the ceiling, up the single stout cable connecting the lights to their power supply, to the tufts of exposed wiring marking the track's old path. Maybe, too, you'll be primed to notice how, in the front room, the track remains in place, weaving under the air ducts and pushing through a wall. A gesture like Knight's is easier said than done, and you wonder how many electricians and art handlers it took to unscrew and re-screw all those lightbulbs.