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Art Gallery Shows to See in February

By Holland Cotter, Blake Gopnik, Jillian Steinhauer, Travis Diehl and Max Lakin

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TRIBECA

‘Engineering for the Human Spirit: From Gentle Wind Project to I Ching Systems, 1983-2022’

Through Feb. 11. Theta. 184 Franklin Street, Manhattan; 917-262-0037, theta.nyc.



Installation view of “Engineering for the Human Spirit: From Gentle Wind Project to I Ching Systems, 1983-2022.” via I Ching Systems and Artworks and Theta, New York

The enigmatic acrylic rods, pucks and cards on view here are not art, strictly speaking. Promoted as “healing instruments” by the Gentle Wind Project, which espouses a vague New Age spirituality and is maybe a cult, these spooky gizmos lift liberally from Chinese medicine and chromotherapy. Ecstatically vibrant with a mesmeric graphic style, they take color theory to its implausible extreme, like a Josef Albers exercise on psilocybin.

Their promises, prescribed in their names — “Trauma Card 2 + Combat Fatigue Ver 17.0” (2006); “Soft Sleep Ver 8.2” (2008) — join them to the raft of homeopathic cures aimed at psychic ailments. These are outré versions — better judgment suggests that communing with a laminated Day-Glo Fibonacci spiral will not realign your body’s electromagnetic field — but not so different from the stuff marketed under the \$450 billion “wellness” industry. The organization’s current incarnation, after a fraud investigation, as I Ching Systems and Artworks, invites contemplation as an aesthetic practice, even as its intent is less art world aspiration than eliding F.D.A. scrutiny.

We’re awash in bad actors, opportunists who would exploit our suffering for profit. A grifter blows into town and another buys the film rights. But the exhibition, organized by Nick Irvin, resists indulging in sordidness or levying a value judgment, a pose that can feel admirably openhearted or frustratingly oblique. It becomes its own study in obsession (books by Gentle Wind true believers I are available to reference, complete with Irvin’s extensive marginalia), an attempt to make sense of faith, which of course can’t be explained, or perhaps restore it. *MAX LAKIN*