

Lior Modan – *The One-Two-Three Stones*

Make Room is pleased to present The 'One-Two-Three Stones', a solo exhibition by Lior Modan, in which selected works from “The Visual Cortex of the Cat” are shown as a single body of work for the first time.

In 1891, the Catalan scientist Santiago Ramón y Cajal hypothesized a concept that seemed an oxymoron: neurons could touch without physically touching. Cajal's own research focused on the brain, in particular those cells involved in the development of the cerebral cortex, the source of consciousness, the senses, and memory. The epicenter of touch, therefore, was regulated without the physical contact of its cells. Cajal's first experiments were done on the cortexes of cats, their cells extracted and placed on microscopic slides for analysis. Cajal— who began his career as an artist before his foray into science— compiled hundreds of freehand drawings of proposed connections between these cells. The signals between neurons became lines, their arcs evoking the branches and roots of trees.

Lior Modan's series, “The Visual Cortex of the Cat,” is, as the title suggests, deeply inspired by both the scientific and artistic legacy of Cajal. In particular, Modan's series is interested in the fundamentals of the cerebral cortex, and its ability to contain the distilled elements of human consciousness, particularly memory. Modan's pieces eerily evoke the specters of sense and memory, becoming, in effect, artistic embodiments of Cajal's cells that “touch without touching.”

The pieces in the exhibition are engulfed in a layer of hand-dyed fine silk velvet. An emotionally charged material, velvet's deep sensuousness is innately connected to nostalgia, its touch so specific it cannot be forgotten. Underneath the velvet, the forms of household objects— a fishbowl, clothespins, a radiator— push through the top layer, as much a product of their physical components as they are the ambient environment of light and shadow that play off of them. The velvet, compressed over the objects and often embossed, immortalizes a specific visual moment on its face. Modan's artworks invite the viewer to dive into the double sensuality of his reliefs, activating both sight and touch in their evocative chiaroscuro surfaces.

Modan's objects possess an almost eerie specificity, but also an ambiguity. In both *Steam* and *Night Fight*, domestic spaces are disrupted by curious, even ominous objects, shadows, and patterns. In *Fish Tank*, the eponymous glass holds the ghosts of keys, two familiar images spliced together in an uncanny scene. The pieces in “Visual Cortex of the Cat” consistently conjure this feeling of a layered memory. This is perhaps most apparent in the largest of the series, *2:35 am*, where the face of a clock holds within it a cryptic interior, framed by hands made of driftwood harvested from a beach in Latvia. Each of the smaller works in the series is wrapped in a cast rubber belt frame. The belts act as a container for the energy of these objects, demarcating a space within which their magnetism is held. They also prescribe a corporeal physicality, suggesting an anthropomorphic quality to the composition of figures under velvet.