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A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM: AT TEAM GALLERY, MAX HOOPER SCHNEIDER LETS ELECTRIC EELS CONTROL THE LIGHTING

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Installation view of "Dolores" at Team Gallery.
COURTESY TEAM GALLERY

The first thing you notice when you walk into Team Gallery's show "Dolores," on view in New York through Sunday, is how dark it is. Only occasionally will the lights briefly flick on. The person who's flipping the switch isn't actually person—it's a fish.

For a work called *Dielectrix I: Division Electrophorus* (2016), Max Hooper Schneider has installed two *Electrophorus electricus* fish that can turn the lights on and off. Better known as knifefish, or more incorrectly as electric eels, the fish emit a slight charge that, when it hits metal connected to the gallery's central system, can flicker the lights. Inside the dark gallery, the fish's effect is odd yet alluring.

"These eels are so charismatic, and I'm obsessed with them," Schneider told me by phone from Los Angeles, where he is based. "They're so adorable. When you see them, they're like curious pups."

Schneider's work tends toward dramatic, oddball situations such as this one. Often, he will introduce foreign natural elements into white-cube gallery settings. A past work, staged at Kayne Griffin Corcoran in Los Angeles, involved placing a school of fish inside a Jacuzzi filled with black water.

"I'm interested in this kind of aesthetics of succession, or this ecology of neglect," Schneider, who studied landscape architecture, and who has worked as a project coordinator for Pierre Huyghe, said. "And I'm not necessarily prescribing a world precept, like it's good or bad. I actually think it's kind of beautiful, maybe not dystopian, but it's about possibilities for environments that could occur."



Max Hooper Schneider, *Dielectric I: Division Electrophorus*, 2016, live freshwater ecosystem, glass aquarium, steel base, sand, filter pump, aluminum panels and quarterage, electrodes, custom lighting interface, *Electrophorus electricus* species.

COURTESY TEAM GALLERY

For Todd von Ammon, the curator of "Dolores" and the gallery's director, the show conjures a post-apocalyptic suburbia. Pointing to a Catherine Czudej sculpture adorned with motion-sensing lights and Viet Cong booby traps, von Ammon said, "[The show is] kind of like a scabrous prepper's basement in suburbia or something. Everything was going to have some sort of faint utility beyond an art object." And who is Dolores? "That's just the name of the lady's house that owns all this stuff. That's it."

The works on view are familiar objects from American households that appear ever so slightly off. A Jessi Reaves sculpture includes a chair draped in a pink fabric, while an Anicka Yi sculpture features a taxidermy mountain lion slickened with silicone, which, according to von Ammon, makes it look as though it is covered in amniotic fluid.

The knifefish looked rather difficult to care for, but Schneider said it is not hard to keep them. “I kept one in junior high,” Schneider said. “Honestly, from the aquarist’s perspective, it’s novice-level... You could feed it a hardboiled egg, [or] a mouse or a fish—anything that can fit in its fucking mouth, basically.”

Before the opening, the gallery was already eying collectors who could buy the work, but in case no one took the bait, von Ammon told me that he and Schneider would split the fish. “There’s very little market for them, as you can imagine,” von Ammon said.

As for Schneider, he plans to continue making works on his “Dielectrix” series. “I’m going to tell three different stories with three freshwater electric fish. This is the first,” he said. “There’s the black-knife ghost fish, which will be used for number two, and then there’s the electric catfish, which will be used for number three. I’ll keep it a cliffhanger for what systems they’re going to operate.”