

Godfre Leung, 'Reviews: Lee Kit at the Walker Art Center'
Art in America, New York, 24 October 2016

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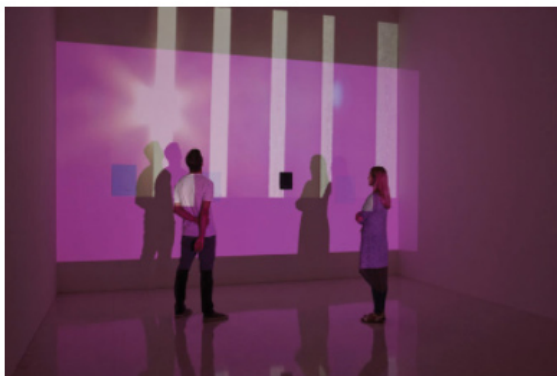
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REVIEWS Oct 24, 2016

Lee Kit

MINNEAPOLIS
at Walker Art Center

by Godfre Leung



“Who sees me naked, and who spends time alone with me in the bathroom? Johnson & Johnson. Nivea.” This is how Lee Kit, Hong Kong’s representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale, discusses the personal hygiene product logos in the paintings that unassumingly populated his Walker exhibition, “Hold your breath, dance slowly”: as bespeaking a level of comfort and intimacy, while also hinting at the ways in which commercial interests infiltrate our living spaces. These paintings—faint inkjet transfers on paper and cardboard, made in Lee’s trademark washed-out pastel palette—were accompanied by slow-moving videos that provided most of the show’s lighting, and household furniture and storage containers purchased from a local Home Depot and IKEA. In effect one large installation, “Hold your breath” subdivided the gallery devoted to it into a number of spaces, which were generally too large for the little details of domestic life displayed in them.

The centerpiece was I can’t help falling in love (2012), a thirteen-channel video installation that features eleven short looped videos depicting household objects—and one outdoor electrical box, viewed through a window—shot with handheld devices from oblique perspectives. The two remaining channels play the floating DVD logo. Serving as a soundtrack for these videos is a looped instrumental karaoke version of the Elvis Presley song after which the installation is named. The song could be faintly heard throughout the otherwise silent exhibition.

Lee’s treatment of space in the show was best exemplified by an out-of-place rectangular sliver of pale beige light on the upper right corner of a nearly empty gallery wall. The source of that light was a video projection in the exhibition’s front-most space depicting a beige wall. The projection had been intentionally misaligned with the architecture, its bottom left corner interrupted by a doorway; the beam of light continued through the top of that doorway, traveling across the exhibition’s central open thoroughfare and through another doorway to appear—like a totally banal miracle—at the other end of the show, as the

decontextualized sliver. This traveling of light through various openings in the gallery recalled Vermeer's treatment of everyday interiors. Also conjuring Vermeer, a dangling sheet of translucent polyethylene (the type of material used to create barriers during home renovations) was fastened with blue masking tape to the show's final doorway, evoking the curtain framing the studio scene shown in the Dutch master's *The Art of Painting*.

Elsewhere, video projections aimed at Lee's paintings both lit and colored them, while also augmenting them by coloring the exhibition spaces in his palette. Meanwhile, Lee's placement of the projectors at awkwardly low heights, on his Home Depot and IKEA readymades, implicated the viewers in the installation, casting their silhouettes on the gallery walls and floor. In several cases, when viewers attempted to look at the paintings up close, their shadows blocked the video projections, throwing the paintings into darkness. "Hold your breath," in fact, seemed meant to be experienced not by close, attentive viewing but ambiently, in the manner that we experience the rhythms of the everyday.

Lee, if we take him at his word, is not a political artist. Instead, his work deals with the private and the domestic. But in twenty-first-century Hong Kong, the domestic is political. "Hold your breath" appeared to echo the concerns of the 2014 Umbrella Revolution, an activist eruption in Lee's hometown that was fueled, in part, by frustration among young citizens over high housing prices, which prevent many of them from moving out of their parents' apartments. In the face of the speculative housing market that has brought Hong Kong to the point of crisis, Lee's work emphasizes the human side of residential real estate, as spaces in which to live.