

BROOKLYN

Carl Lee

Undercurrent Gallery

“Myoptic,” a sculptural video installation by Carl Lee, contemplated the intricate twining of spectatorship, memory, and technology. The title, a play on the word “myopic,” strongly underscores this notion: “myopic” means nearsighted, not being able to see the wider view without some sort of corrective lens; “myoptic” seems to indicate a more personal spectatorship, the nostalgic lens through which we each, individually, experience the past. Throughout “Myoptic,” Lee playfully foregrounded the devices that we use to view personal media. In *Vision Test*, for example, a large structure resembling a novelty souvenir photo viewer of the kind one might purchase at a tourist site contains a looping video of a man opening the front door to a small one-story house, surveying the garden, and watering plants. Much like the photos in a souvenir viewer, this simple video sequence induces a nagging sense of déjà vu, of having somehow seen this site before. To produce this effect, Lee located a home in suburban Buffalo, New York, that faithfully replicated the image of the house found within an autorefractor, a machine used during eye examinations to measure how light changes as it enters a person’s eye. *Vision Test* slyly uses visual sleight of hand to question how memories of images and memories of experiences can become conflated

within our media-saturated environment.

Home Movies evokes yet another nostalgic optical device—the tower viewfinder found at roadside scenic lookouts. Here, a pair of binoculars pointed across the gallery at a wooden structure on which a small video was projected. Gazing through the binoculars, the viewer saw snippets of home movies from Lee’s personal archive—his father singing karaoke at a family gathering, his young daughter talking with his wife, a boat ride down a canal. While the act of peeping into Lee’s intimate memories can feel a bit voyeuristic, *Home Movies* also works to remind us that we live in an era when we increasingly experience all manner of life events at a distance, through the lens of a viewfinder.

Telescope House 2, the most conceptually and technically complex work in the show, takes the form of Buffalo’s iconic telescope houses. Built in the 19th century as workers’ cottages, telescope houses sport a series of successive linear additions, each one smaller in height than the previous, which gives the appearance of a collapsible spyglass or handheld telescope. Much like a house owner layering additions on one after the other, Lee layers the video imagery projected within the structure through the use of Pepper’s ghost, an optical illusion technique popularized by John Henry Pepper in the mid-1800s. Unlike Pepper, however, Lee exposes his visual trickery, removing the roof and walls of the last extension to reveal the angled glass that creates

his superimpositions: a sequence from Eadweard Muybridge’s *Horse in Motion* (widely considered to be the first moving image), footage of his daughter playing outdoors, and a letter board on which Lee attempts to spell out personal memories of his daughter. With *Telescope House 2*, Lee contemplates the constructedness of the moving image, reaching back to the earliest movie to make his point and, in the process, revealing the faultiness of video as an objective source of recall. In an era when smartphones and tablets have become our optical devices du jour, but the veracity of the image itself has come under fire, Lee reminds us to be diligent spectators of our own past.

—LAURA MCGOUGH

OPPOSITE:
ECHIKO OHIRA
Installation view of
“Finding the Center,”
2019–20.

THIS PAGE:
CARL LEE
Telescope House 2,
2019.
3-screen video
installation and
wood construction,
installation view.

