

# FrameWork 1/16

## Karina Irvine on Kelly Lycan

To glow, or cast a glow, is associated with a humble feeling of elation in addition to a low light. An under glow could refer to its direction, whether below eye level or beneath a surface where a soft humming light is only revealed through gaps or thinning parts of material. When considering the reproduction of images, an under glow might be the bulb from an enlarger emanating behind a negative, a photocopier's sweeping light, or the computer screen. In Kelly Lycan's exhibition *Little Glow* at Susan Hobbs Gallery, the relationship between light and object is brought into enigmatic focus, where chromatic shifts and blurred and grainy images tarry with questions of mediation and value.

The site of Alfred Stieglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession later known as 291 became the subject for Lycan's exhibition *Underglow* (2014) at Presentation House Gallery in Vancouver. Recreating the iconic gallery using photographs taken by Stieglitz, the relationship and distinction between the original and representation was explored. In *Little Glow*, Lycan hones in on aspects of the space in images collected from books, screen captures and photographs of photographs. Through these, an historical layer is revealed that is translated into a sequence of fixations, obscuring textures, shapes and colours; piecing together the smaller details from a place that no longer exists.



The Victorian aesthetic of 291 presents a curious opposition of design and purpose. The walls were covered in burlap, curtains draped over the wainscoting and vases on ledges placed throughout. The focus of 291 was on showcasing photography as art in addition to introducing European avant-garde artists in America. Here, rather than focusing on the artwork once displayed, it is the Victorian decor in the space itself and smaller decorative elements that become the subject.

*Nearby Nearby* (2015) depicts the chromatic transformations of a photocopied image aligned in a gridded format and loosely tacked to the wall. With the burlap that covered the walls at 291 as the starting point, it is reproduced in sequences of five, one hundred and ten times. The effect is atmospheric, becoming distanced from its reference

## FrameWork 1/16

as it tends towards abstraction in the shifts between purples, pinks and blues. The blurred lights and darks that play against the length of the wall and into the corner recall Stieglitz's series of cloud photographs (*Equivalents*, 1925-34), heightened further by the movement of the paper as it flutters with the onset of heating or from the breeze caused by a passerby.

The original installation photographs of the space—cropped, enlarged, reproduced—lose definition and discolour, becoming more indiscernible from its origins. In this sense the place depicted becomes situated elsewhere. It is a place whose particular elements become the central focus and in many ways impregnated with a sense of unreality. Once seen again within the gallery setting, these elements, distorted through their consistent reproduction, filter through various mediations, becoming even more distorted. The gallery becomes another screen, or page, framing and imprinting details from another place. Considering this, *Nearby Nearby* is in actuality quite far away. This place becomes contingent on the archive, which gains an irreplaceable significance in its current condition: existing simultaneously in and out of the past and in and out of the present.



Another detail from 291 is the curtain wainscoting, reproduced on canvas and positioned to line the upper portion of the wall in the stairwell, *A Dull Ecrú* (2015). Its quality and proportion is skewed, though it still maintains the dullness in colour that its original did. A curtain alludes to a function: of covering something that is intended to be opened. As a decorative element, used widely in the Victorian era, its function is primarily aesthetic and in 291's case it conveniently acts as a space for storage. As a reproduction it is removed from its function, simulating the presence of the curtain through blurred pixels. The tension between light and obscurity that the curtain evokes seems appropriate to the gallery space as a site that largely exhibited photography. Photographs themselves are only revealed through a combination of light and dark. Different lights cast different shadows and every image is formed by this duality. In this case the glowing light, dimmed and dulled through a pixelated picture quality emphasizes the veiling role of the curtain.

The upper floor of Susan Hobbs Gallery stages a rendition of 291 that is both precarious and vague. Pasted to cover the entirety of the walls are pieces of blank newsprint paper. The newsprint extends over a foam-core shelf, holding it up with a tension that is tenuous, propped up further with flimsy cardboard tubes and another strip of foam-core. The newsprint itself enacts its own impermanence through its discolouration and the frail quality of its material. Reproduced images of vases taken from 291, laminated in a pearlescent gold, have a ghostly look of criminality with their blown-up and blown-out aesthetic. At times hardly discernible, blurred and grainy, their

## FrameWork 1/16

presence is as if a reminder of a place, or event, whose happenings remain a faint recollection that is dependant on its multiple representations.

If we think of the past as resounding echoes, losing audibility with each articulation, or a light that dims and subsequently obscures a clear image or memory, glow can suggest the dim traces of prior valuations. *Little Glow* brings into distorted focus the role of the archive and history in the forms of memory, recollections. In these representations of an actual place, distortions multiply reproductions...