

SEPTEMBER 13 TO NOVEMBER 9, 2014

KELLY LYCAN: UNDERGLOW

Underglow is a response to Presentation House Gallery's architecture and history. Vancouver artist Kelly Lycan has transformed the gallery spaces to bring the past into dialogue with the present. The exhibition—composed entirely in shades of black and white—subverts our expectations about photography's physical shape and form while engaging the medium as a copy, representation and index. By this, *Underglow* asks provocative questions about the growing impact of digital imagery on the display and reproduction of photography today.

In the entry and bookstore area Lycan has intervened through slight alterations to the architecture. Based on research in Presentation House Gallery's photo-documentation archive of exhibition installations, *Approximations* retools past techniques of exhibition display including black baseboards and light fixtures, mirrored surfaces, and chair configurations. These subtle gestures emphasize that gallery architecture, together with modes of exhibition and presentation, impose conditions for viewing art that are far from neutral.

In the West Gallery Lycan has created a full-scale replica of 291 Gallery. This now iconic New York photography gallery was initially conceived to promote the medium and as home to the Photo-Secessionists, and became renowned as the first exhibition

space to showcase photography as art.

Between 1905 and 1917, 291 produced over eighty exhibitions, introducing many European modernist artists to America including Matisse, Rodin and Duchamp, and generating critical discussions that grew from a focus on expressive pictorialism to embrace all forms of art.

Lycan's simulation mimics a black and white installation photograph taken by Alfred Stieglitz of a 1906 exhibition of Pictorialist photography at 291. Visitors are invited to explore this 'reproduction' of a reproduction; to walk into the picture and viscerally experience this intimate space complete with decorative details and a foliage bouquet—everything except pictures on the walls. Lycan's mediation extends from the 291 space, which was itself built in imitation of Victorian décor and Arts and Crafts design. Painted entirely in tones of grey, the artist has meticulously reproduced the warm textured surfaces and glowing light of the soft-focus photogravure originally printed in a 1906 issue of *Camera Work*, a quarterly magazine published by Steiglitz. As implied by the title, *291 From the Faraway Nearby*, the illusionistic set appears to be frozen in an ambiguous sense of time. The first room leads into a second, which dissolves into an empty white space, drawing out the impact of architectural design and display methods on our reception of art.

In the East Gallery Lycan explores the impact of institutions in the production of cultural histories. Here she reconfigures the room with the addition of a wall that cuts through and interrupts our views of architecture as a container. A disorienting arrangement of grainy black and white photographs amplify the gallery's spatial dynamics and mottled grey carpet. *I Walked into a Moment* features an interplay of images of convex and concave spaces of ambiguous scale. Photographed in modernist New York museums, the close ups of corners, shadows and wall surfaces hover between the blank and the detail, at once documentary representations and abstract fields of grey. Applied directly to the grey walls, the vinyl prints are at times barely discernable, merging into the Gallery's architecture and melding its spaces into a unified installation that troubles the very nature of photographic imagery.

This exhibition extends Lycan's ongoing investigations of the ways that décor and the armatures of display determine the meaning of objects. With its walls within walls and frames within frames, *Underglow* references the conditions of its own production, and draws attention to the interplay between systems of representation and perceptual experience.

Helga Pakasaar
Curator

UNDERGLOW, 2014

WEST GALLERY

291, From the Faraway Nearby
wood, burlap, cloth, lights, vases, leaves, grey paint

MIDDLE GALLERY

Approximations, PHG 1985-2005
lights, chairs, mirrors, black paint

EAST GALLERY

I Walked Into a Moment
6 inkjet prints, grey paint

One of the large rooms is kept in dull olive tones, the burlap wall-covering being a warm olive gray; the woodwork and moldings similar in general color, but considerably darker. The hangings are of an olive-sepia sateen, and the ceiling and canopy are of a deep creamy gray. The small room is designed especially to show prints on very light mounts or in white frames. The walls of this room are covered with a bleached natural burlap; the woodwork and moldings are pure white; the hangings a dull ecru. The third room is decorated in gray-blue, dull salmon and olive-gray. In all the rooms the lampshades match the wall coverings.

A white screen, suspended from the ceiling converted the harsh illumination from the skylight into a quiet light full of a soothing, mystic feeling. In the center of the room was a square platform, also covered with burlap, and on top of it stood a large brass bowl filled with autumn foliage, which became a trademark for 291.

DESCRIPTIONS OF 291 FROM THE PERIOD



Alfred Stieglitz, installation view of the Gertrude Käsebier and Clarence H. White exhibition at Gallery 291, New York City, 1906. Reproduction of the photogravure originally published in *Camera Work*, No. 14, 1906.

Kelly Lycan lives and works in Vancouver. Initially studying photography at Ryerson in Toronto, she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1992, and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles in 1998. Her work has been exhibited in exhibitions across Canada, the US and Europe, including solo presentations at SFU Gallery, Burnaby, 2014; Or Gallery, Vancouver, 2011 and Gallery TPW, Toronto, 2009. She is a member of Instant Coffee, a service-oriented artist collective and currently has a two-person exhibition at Gallery 295 in Vancouver.

PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY

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HOURS: WEDNESDAY TO SUNDAY 12PM TO 5PM

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