

Lee Kit and the Fleetingness of Feelings

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Installation view of *Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly*. All photos: Gene Pittman, Walker Art Center

“Hold your breath, dance slowly,” invites artist Lee Kit. As you walk into the dimly lit galleries, wandering from space to space, or nook to nook, you find yourself doing just that: holding your breath in quiet anticipation of what is to come. And perhaps if the gallery assistants were not standing guard you would dance, or at the very least catch yourself swaying as you move to the melody of Elvis Presley’s *Can’t Help Falling in Love* (1961), a karaoke instrumental version of which permeates the exhibition space.

Curated by Misa Jeffereis, the Walker exhibition marks Lee’s first US solo show and is presented as part of a two-part exhibition. (*A small sound in your head*, curated by Martin Germann at SMAK, Ghent, will open on May 28.) With gentle care and great sensitivity, Lee offers us an interior space, a domestic space, and perhaps what is usually coded as a female space. Forgoing the open-plan galleries many contemporary artists and artworks seem to favor these days, the architecture of the show evokes an interior with many walls, doorways, hallways, and closet-like niches that are populated with wardrobes, tables, and other household furnishings.



Installation view of *Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly*

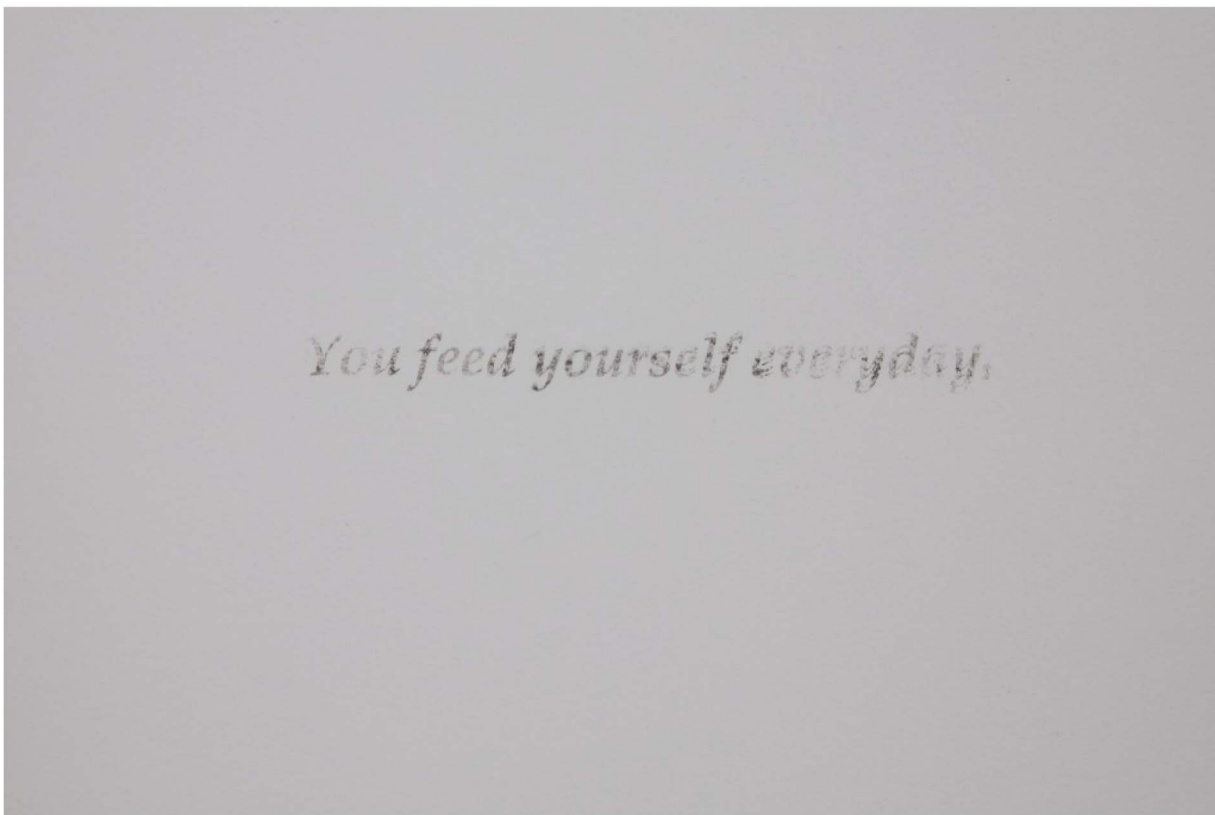
Using floor lamps and the soft light that spills over from the many projections that punctuate the gallery, Lee casts a warm glow on the unremarkable actions we tend to perform behind closed doors: The works in the show incorporate objects of an intimate nature, ranging from bathroom products (Nivea cream, Smith's lip balm, Johnson's baby oil, etc.) to a shower stall situated in a corner of the exhibition. Beyond these direct references to commonplace consumer products, his works more broadly evoke the daily regimen of personal hygiene and care that we conduct in private. We are shown fragments of hands and soles of feet, body parts that heighten our sensations of touch and which we can imagine caressing with the various creams and lotions alluded to throughout the exhibition.

Though deeply personal, the show suggests an intimacy not limited to the artist himself. You can feel traces of the body, an unspecified, non-gendered body, that had inhabited the space before: Folding chairs are arranged throughout, variously opened or left leaning against walls, while rugs are displayed both rolled and unfurled so you can imagine yourself taking up where the previous tenant had left off, tidying and rearranging objects as you might at home.



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This sense of familiarity resonates throughout the exhibition: When presented with the phrases “Fuck you” and “You feed yourself everyday” (transferred via inkjet onto a piece of cardboard or, in the case of the latter, at eye level directly onto the wall), you can easily imagine moments, the most private of moments, when you might look up into the bathroom mirror after washing your face and, assessing your reflection, offer up words of uncharitable condemnation or, if in a more generous spirit, of self-encouragement.



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“When we talk about places, we seldom consider our emotions,” Lee says. “People don’t often talk about emotions, particularly in art. They talk about concepts and ideas, but emotions are also very important. I’m not talking about expression. I’m referring to feelings that are subtle and often indescribable.”¹ Lee’s installations, or what he calls “situations,” can be described as meditations on feelings that are subtle and indescribable. Like emotions, the exhibition possesses a dematerialized presence that feels at once ethereal and embodied, imagined and very real. The works that inhabit the spaces are themselves fragile and ephemeral (digitally projected images permeate the installation; lightweight, translucent plastic bins are stacked up and scattered throughout the space; and paintings on cardboard and paper are casually tacked onto the wall). The modes of presentation also suggest a transience or impermanence (projected images fade into one another; passersby cast shadows onto the projection surfaces, the shadows ostensibly becoming a part of the experience of the artwork that is impossible to hold onto). There is no beginning, middle, or end, no narrative structure to grasp; instead, you get the sense that you have experienced an all-consuming sensation that, albeit pleasurable in the moment, begins to slip away the moment you walk back into the daylight.

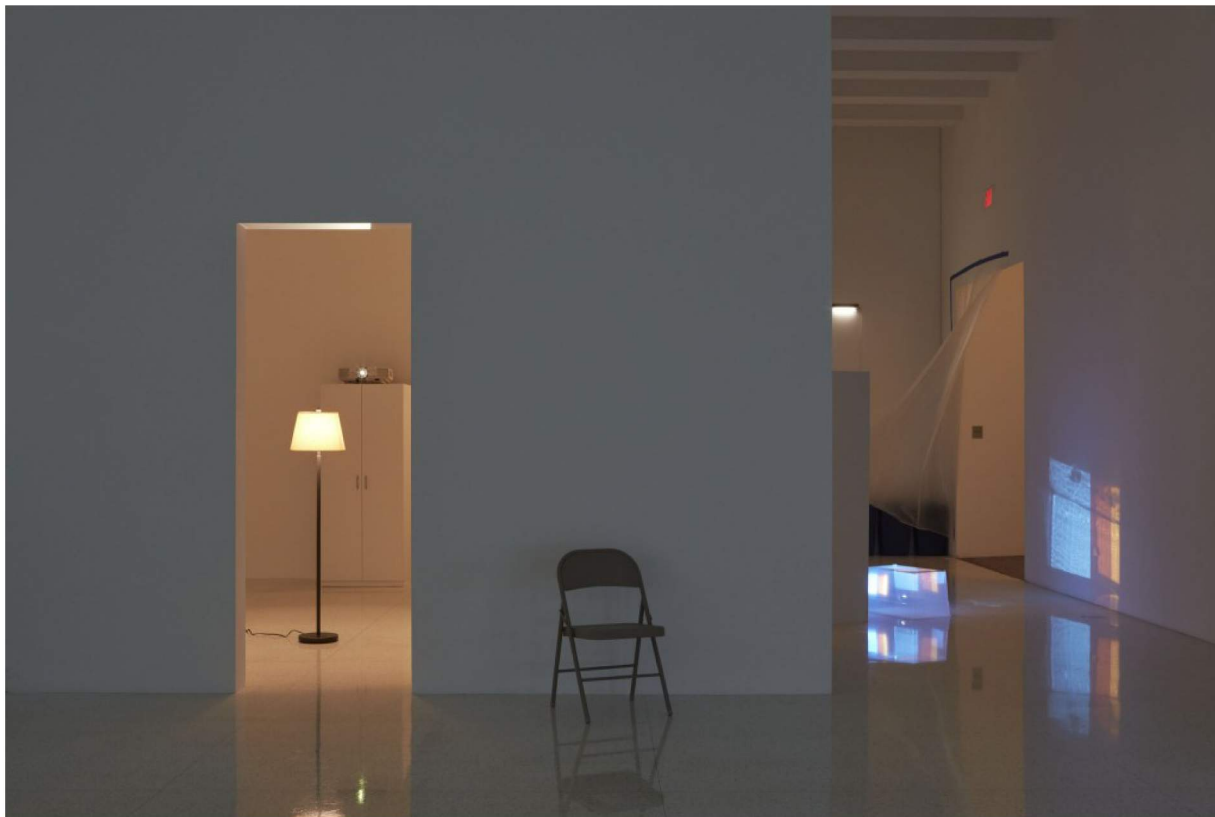


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But perhaps the act of forgetting is precisely the point. Upon entering the exhibition, the space stirs up a feeling—a tender, loving, comforting feeling—guided by Lee’s sensitivity to the poetics and aesthetics of touch. We indulge in this feeling as we wander in and out of the various recesses of the physical architecture, an analogue to our subconscious mind, but it eventually recedes from our memory once we exit the gallery. In other words, Lee prompts us to actualize through movement the fleeting nature of our feelings, and in turn the

impossibility of rendering them permanent or concrete. “I focus on a moment that attracts my attention and then I extend it,” Lee says. “When I stretch it, I begin to see it more clearly. Then I pull in other things from the moment and extend it again, until I cannot extend it any further.”² Despite the artist’s attempts, and by extension our own, to stretch a moment, to prolong a memory by visiting and revisiting it over and over again, the original feeling inevitably fades. And so the exhibition, despite being sweet and romantic, is also tinged with sadness. Because for every good feeling or memory had, there is always the possibility of subsequent longing. Dance ever so slowly, Lee seems to suggest, for this feeling, too, will soon evaporate.

Lee Kit: *Hold your breath, dance slowly* is on view at the Walker from May 12 to October 9, 2016.



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Footnotes

¹ Lee Kit in conversation with Misa Jeffereis and Olga Viso; “Lee Kit: The Good Traveler” in *Lee Kit: Never* (London: Koenig Books, 2016), 25.

² Lee Kit in conversation with Misa Jeffereis and Olga Viso; “Lee Kit: The Good Traveler” in *Lee Kit: Never* (London: Koenig Books, 2016), 25.