

REFLECTING ON

WHITE

A REVIEW OF
KELLY LYCAN'S INSTALLATION
'AUTOBIOGRAPHY FOR NO ONE'

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Walking into the space from within Simon Fraser University's 'quadrant', you first encounter Kelly Lycan's *Lazy Whites*—sheets of transparent film with applied white paint that hang from the ceiling. You are then confronted with more assemblages that bring Lycan's studio practice to the fore. Installed are collections of selected objects that transform and re-picture the neutral platform of the gallery.

The purposefully re-purposed materials range from milk-glass vases, linen, plastic containers, light reflective foam core and carpet. The majority of the objects presented are white - some are off white or very light beige. Walking through the space, your gaze shifts and the objects re-image themselves again and again. This re-imaging and re-picturing comes about through the viewer's subjective experience of the space and their relationship to the neutralized objects. This is enhanced by the flickering variations of white, mediations on forms and their implied meanings. The viewer is brought into a cyclical process of their own while visually ingesting the objects that Lycan has composed. It becomes apparent that Lycan's installation uses the gallery as a place of practice: a studio within a studio. The installation reflects studio production in a stylized manner; it is embedded

in the languages of value systems, modes of looking, and the transformative qualities of photography.

A loaded material and color, the use of white as a neutralizer in Lycan's installation calls forth the historical connotations of art practices and spaces. In light of its loaded historical symbology, the use of white can be read in a multitude of ways (similar to the variations of white used in Lycan's installation). It can be seen as totally neutral or totally pre-disposed.

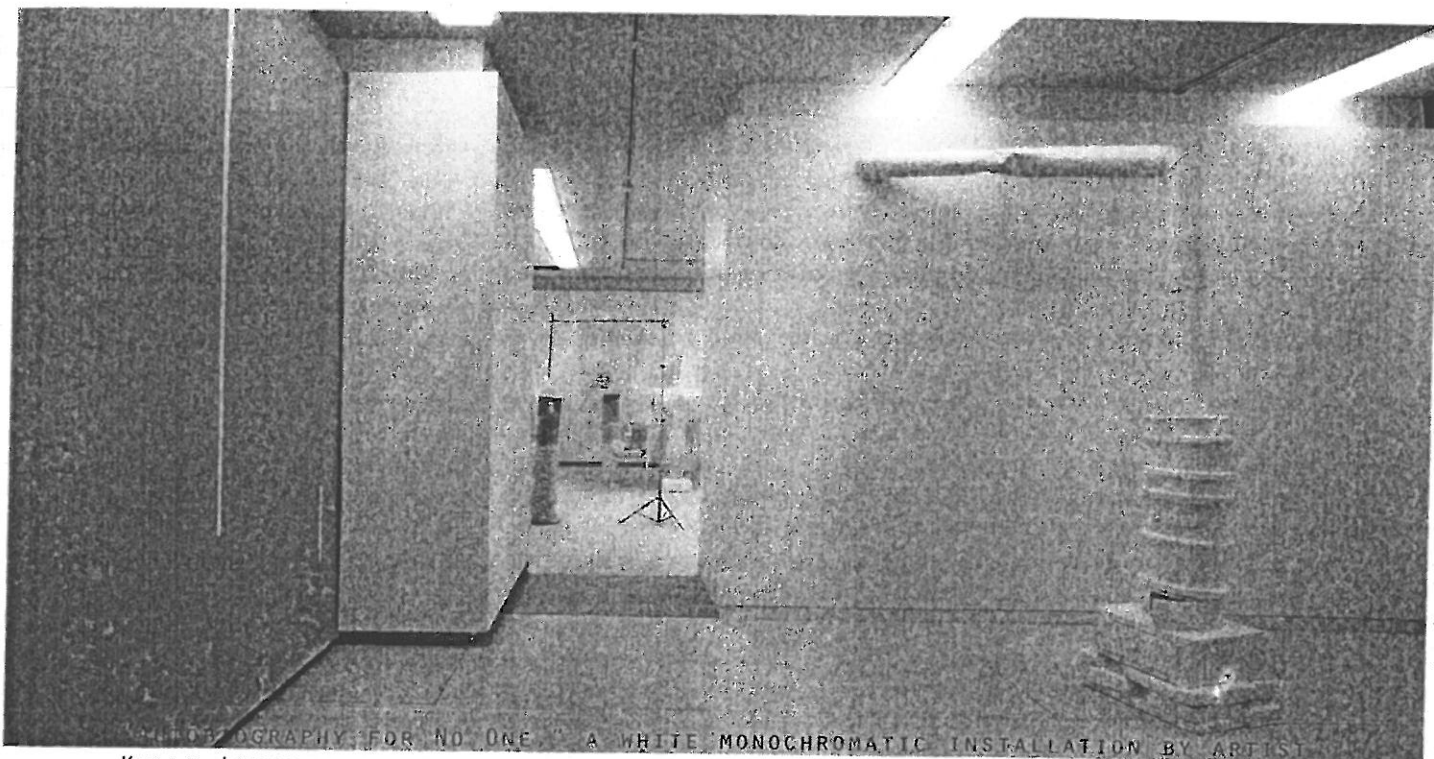
Thinking about Bryan O'Doherty's conceptualization of the gallery space as a non-neutral container, as an aesthetic object loaded with historical constructs, we can see Lycan's attempt to intervene with these conceptions. Simon Sheikh writes in the article "Positively White Cube Revisited" for *e-flux* that "the modern gallery employs the formula of the white cube for an architectonics of transcendence in which the specificities of time and place are replaced by the eternal." In "Autobiography for No One," Lycan reflects and re-stages this aforementioned white cube, infusing a cyclical and ever-evolving studio practice.

Additionally, the use of monochrome calls upon these systems as well. Similar to the use of white, the use of this monochrome can be

seen as a 'zero degree' platform for representation. According to Ian Wallace in his essay *Photography + The Monochrome*, "the monochrome has functioned as the essence, the ground, the fundament of painting, as the ideal tabula rasa of an infinite possibility of signifying marks, refusal, closure" (65). We can think of the monochrome in relation to white, and this relation is transparent in Lycan's installation. The work then allows itself to be used for reflection, similar to a mirror, signifying itself.

White (as a material + way of thinking) has frequently been used in Lycan's work. She has spoken about it as a tool to 'de-sentimentalize' objects, reverting them to a status of ubiquity. By 'de-sentimentalizing' the objects, they transform into alternate value systems within the gallery space. Some become neutral still lives, some become objects that provoke the viewer to consider how they see, and some form formal compositions stemming from unclear beginnings.

White makes the objects neutral and invisible, awaiting subjective projections. White also substitutes itself for a beginning—it is the starting place for many art practices, the first layer on a painting. Interestingly, the title of the show - "Autobiography for No One"



PHOTOGRAPHY: FOR NO ONE A WHITE MONOCHROMATIC INSTALLATION BY ARTIST KELLY LYCAN, IS CURRENTLY INSTALLED AT THE SFU GALLERY IN BURNABY, B.C. CURATED BY MELANIE O'BRIAN, THE SHOW RUNS FROM MAY 10TH UNTIL AUGUST 1ST.

— alludes to an end, an actualized finiteness through its inherent narrative nature, white acts as the silencer, creating an open platform to impose possible narratives.

In one area, she has installed a piece titled *White White +*, in which a double sided mirror often found in photographic studios reflects the installed environment. In Greek mythology, the mirror (as a symbol) alludes to the physical and mental interpretations of objects and space. This dualism transcends the artist-viewer-space relationship that Lycan seems to emphasize within her installation.

On the other side of the room, *Too Much Light Resting on Too Little Light* rests against a wall. The sculpture is made of two materials: foam core (which is resting against the wall) that bounces light, and a grey neutral density film that rests overtop of the foam core. These objects appear to be in waiting, ready to be re-valued. Lycan continually reminds us to reconsider applications of viewing systems.

One of the most compelling aspects of the exhibition is the creation of a totalized experience. In one area of the gallery, three tables are displayed with various objects on them (*Ruminations 1, 2, 3*). Some have more, some have less. These are tables that she has

modified and re-introduced into the gallery from her studio space. This gesture totalizes the experience of the installation through the thoroughness of Lycan's interception of the objects.

Finally, instead of opting to use the wooden floor of the gallery, Lycan has installed unfinished drywall as the floor (a very light grey color), aside from one area where she has installed a rectangular piece of beige carpet. The carpet could be a tool to shift the textures from one area of the gallery to another and seems to allow for another transformation of viewing the displayed objects and interpretation of the space. Using the drywall to complete the 'white cube', Kelly Lycan also points to both historical and alternative modes of gallery décor and presentation. In these ways, Lycan has taken steps to influence every material present in the exhibition space.

On both a local and global scale, this type of spatial practice is becoming increasingly relevant as we try to place ourselves in the world. With a ceaseless amount of objects and accumulations, the formal qualities of objects in relationship to their sentimental values continue to fascinate us. Within the realm of Vancouver's contemporary art scene, Kelly Lycan's probing of various modes of looking

and value systems is very relevant with respect to our photo-conceptualist history and incredible landscape.

'Autobiography for No One' neutralizes a symbolic and phenomenological playing field between object and viewer. Phenomenologically speaking, the show stimulates a particular effect for the subjective viewer—the multitude of experiences of the installation vary as much as the shades of white. The shades of white each have the possibility to suggest different 'lenses' of meaning. Through the multiplicity of pieces and their inherent formalism, the show adopts the form of a symbol.

The installation is curatorial in nature—it carries the viewer into a visually subjective experience. At the preliminary level, the selections by Lycan allow the viewer to begin to assemble their own accumulations. Cloudlike, the variations of white call the viewer to contemplate form and presence. The work is cloudlike both in colour and in form; as the accumulations come together they create larger gestures. Much like a rhizome, the objects act as fragments which create a whole, reflecting the process by which they form relationships outside of the gallery, within time and space.

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PHOTO: Blaine Campbell