

SARS, Skincare, Real Estate, Rhythm: Lee Kit's Politics of Space

Now a decade old, Lee Kit's career comes with an origin story. During the 2003 SARS outbreak in his native Hong Kong, when much of the city was under quarantine, Lee Kit and several friends ventured out into the city for a picnic. Then a student, he brought four of his hand-painted cloths to use as picnic blankets. This act, in the Lee Kit narrative, marks the artist's first use of his acrylic on fabric paintings as everyday objects. This was soon followed by his use of a cloth painting as a banner, during Hong Kong's annual July 1 protest march in 2004.¹ When Lee Kit began exhibiting widely in 2007, he was already presenting his work as having emerged from that originary act of the picnic, albeit indirectly so at first. The press release for his first solo exhibition, *3/4 suggestions for a better living* at Para/Site Art Space, Hong Kong, in 2007, announced that it was not only an exhibition of Lee Kit's works, but also offered "a communal area: a full bar/cafe for his friends and visitors to enjoy." He therefore introduced himself as a gallery-ready artist clothed in the legacy of participatory anti-art: "The picnic in the grass, the meal with friends, or a common bar: the communicative part of the works is as important as the actual object itself."²

Lee Kit's origin story, however, reveals more than just another attempt to bridge the gap between art and life. It also indicates a political awakening that continues to sustain his work. Most overtly, the second use of Lee Kit's cloth painting as a political banner recalls the deployment of Marcel Duchamp's principle of the reciprocal readymade as a political act in postwar French art. Curator Martin Germann, in his catalogue essay on Lee Kit, casually notes the artist's debt to Daniel Buren, whose *Sandwich Men* of April and May of 1968 featured two men walking around Paris donning Buren's signature stripes on placards.³ The political banner's larger



Lee Kit, picnic in 2003, acrylic on fabric. Courtesy of the artist.



Lee Kit, July 1st demonstration with friends, acrylic on fabric, 2004. Photo: Jaspar Lau Kin Wah. Courtesy of the artist.

Left and right: Lee Kit, *3/4 suggestions for a better living*, 2007, installation views, Para/ Site, Hong Kong.



Daniel Buren, *Sandwich Men*, 1968, performance, Paris.



significance to Lee Kit's origin story, however, is the historical context of SARS to an activist history of Hong Kong:

... the unparalleled shutdown of the city and the atomization of society in quarantined segments led to an unexpected shift in the political awareness of the Hong Kong citizenry. Just after the end of the epidemic, record numbers of people turned out to protest against a new internal security law imposed by Beijing, causing its shelving and, more importantly, the emergence of an active political community.⁴

In the wake of the 2014 Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong, we might see symmetry between the political context of SARS as a symbolic wellspring for Lee Kit's work and the function of May '68 to the Buren mythology.

At the age of four, my mother said she was going to buy a doll for me. I told her I didn't want a doll, I wanted Nivea hand cream. I can't exactly explain why.

—Lee Kit, 2012⁵

Of the two enduring visual faces of the SARS epidemic, namely face masks and ubiquitous hand-sanitizer dispensers, the latter figures prominently in Lee Kit's work, though again indirectly. Aside from the aforementioned cloth paintings, Lee Kit is best known for his inkjet ink-on-cardboard transfers, which often feature skincare product logos sourced from the Internet. Most prominent among these are those of hand-care products, the paintings often accompanied by containers of the lotions themselves,



as in the 2010 exhibition *Someone singing and calling your name*, which features the product logos in paintings on the wall, video loops depicting containers of the products on a four-monitor installation, and three ready-mades on the floor—a tube of Vaseline, a paper take-out coffee cup, a tin of Nivea cream—each encased within a Plexiglas vitrine.⁶ In a recent talk at the Walker Art Center, Lee Kit mentioned that he always travels with an array of hand lotions in his suitcase.⁷ His fascination with lotions, therefore, can be seen in the

Lee Kit, *Nivea (Cream)*, 2010, acrylic, enamel paint, and tape on cardboard, 50 x 77 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

context of one habit that resulted from the SARS outbreak: the compulsion to apply self-evaporating hand sanitizer, especially when re-entering from public to private space, and, especially, to be well stocked with antiseptics when traveling internationally. Lee Kit's lotions, however, displace the post-SARS obsession with hygiene, especially as it is conflated with the threat of the public sphere, with comfort. Using hand lotions also often accompanies the use of hand sanitizers: to salve one's hands after excessive cleaning. Indirectly, as is often the case with Lee Kit's work, the figure of skincare actually speaks to larger sociopolitical stakes.

Lee Kit has left two other breadcrumbs for us to follow as we decode the fascination with brand-name lotions that recurs in his work. The hand-painted fabrics for which he is still best known were also repeatedly hand-washed to achieve their faded hues. The washing, Lee Kit notes, is meant to make the cloth "look like it has been used for years."⁸ The life rhythms of using, washing, drying, folding, and storing, all of which have been invoked at one time or another in Lee Kit's installation practices, also constitute his artistic process—he mentions that he spends far more time washing his cloth paintings than he does painting them.⁹ Here, again, we have compulsive washing, though with a different relationship to the private-public dyad. The life rhythms intimated by his cloth paintings' distressed colours, now also the trademark palette of his cardboard paintings and his video projections, point to hand-care as both a necessary byproduct of his artistic practice and a balm for its aesthetics of domestic everyday life. Lee Kit's other nod to these products, via the synecdoche of their logos, also speaks to the interiority of the domestic:

Who sees me naked, and who spends time alone with me in the bathroom? Johnson & Johnson. Nivea. Many people talk to themselves, or are deep in thought in the shower. These are very intimate moments, and these inner conversations are not often shared with other people. . . . No one is around but all these bottles—that seem to be looking at us.¹⁰



Lee Kit, installation view, *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?*, 2011, installation view, Art Basel, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Gallery, Hong Kong.

Lee Kit, installation view, *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?*, 2011, installation view, Art Basel, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Gallery, Hong Kong.



Lee Kit, *Henry (have you ever been this low?)*, 2011, installation view, Western Front. Photo: Kevin Schmidt. Courtesy of the artist and Western Front, Vancouver.



Against C. Y. Leung’s Hong Kong—or perhaps better said, Li Ka-shing’s Hong Kong—Lee Kit’s work imagines a utopian public sphere that is an extension of the domestic habits that we normally relegate to the private sphere. Two 2011 exhibitions articulate the other side of the private sphere at stake here: namely, the financial transaction of private spaces as real estate. At Art Basel 42, under the auspices of his former gallery Osage Art Foundation, Lee Kit exhibited *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?*, an installation that turned the art fair booth space into a demonstration flat, the type of off-site prototype apartment space often housed in malls or convention centres. Later that year, at the Western Front in Vancouver, British Columbia, he transformed the artist-run centre’s gallery space into a sparsely furnished living space belonging to a fictional character named Henry, who was inspired by Henry Tang, then embroiled in an adultery scandal and on the cusp of announcing his candidacy for Hong Kong’s Chief Executive position. The exhibition, entitled *Henry (have you ever been this low?)*, imagines a disgraced Henry Tang “moving to Vancouver when he gets old, living in a big house but full of guilt and regrets.”¹¹

In keeping with Lee Kit’s practice of extending his artworks to everyday uses, the simulated living spaces in both exhibitions—the former being in fact a simulation of a simulation—served social purposes, as Lee Kit, the respective galleries’ staff, and their friends and associates ate communal meals in both installations. The exhibitions’ conceits, however, reveal a deep concern with

real estate that suggests a second duality in his aesthetics: on top of the public–private dyad, private space is conceived in Lee Kit’s work since 2011 as itself bifurcated. In this pair of 2011 exhibitions, the financial transaction of space as real estate is conceived as a parallel reality to the concerns with the life rhythms of the domestic by which his oeuvre is best known. Just as I have argued that skin care is a metonym for the politics of space for which SARS has provided a historical touch point, the domestic as it has and continues to play out in his work must be understood as the lived counterpart to the other function of private space: namely, its own financialization.



How to set up an apartment for Johnny? in fact bears little visual resemblance to a demonstration flat, though it is described as one in the Osage Art Foundation’s press release for the exhibition.¹² The space feels lived in, not pristine. Lee Kit’s cloth paintings, installed variously as table cloths, curtains, a makeshift barrier to enclose the bathroom area, and bedding and cushion covers, are not pressed, as they would be if the installation really was a demonstration flat, and they in fact hang even more loosely than they usually do in his exhibitions. Elsewhere, the cloth paintings are at least sometimes neatly folded or installed hanging on form-fitting wooden supports; here they hang haphazardly on a wire drying rack. The installation does, however, act like a demonstration flat. Though containing many saleable works

Lee Kit, installation view, *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?*, 2011, installation view, Art Basel, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Gallery, Hong Kong.



Lee Kit, installation view, *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?*, 2011, installation view, Art Basel, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Osage Gallery, Hong Kong.

of art—cloth paintings, cardboard paintings, and ready-mades—Lee Kit declared the installation, which was later re-exhibited at Osage Kwun Tong in Kowloon, indivisible and set the price for the entire “unit” according to its square footage, the rate determined by the typical price of space in a Hong Kong high-rise. By itself, this conceit falls within the tradition of institutional critique projects that draw out the implications of art within the real estate industry; a partial list includes works from the 1970s and 80s by Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler, Louise Lawler, and PAD/D, and, more recently, by Glenn Ligon and Renzo Martens, and the brilliant *RMB City: Investors’ World Premiere* at the 2007 Art Basel Miami Beach by Cao Fei. However, it seems prudent to view *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?* and the subsequent *Henry (have you ever been this low?)* as a pair.¹³ Retroactively, the *Henry* exhibition colours the earlier exhibition’s clear concern with Hong Kong real estate also as an explicitly global concern. In the context of its European art fair audience, to shop for a Hong

Kong apartment would either be to secure a convenience apartment for international business travel or purely for speculation.¹⁴ The latter especially suggests the gulf between those who live in these spaces and those who buy, sell, and hold them. The demonstration flat, as an off-site prototype, hypostatizes this alternate reality of real estate to actual living, while its place at Art Basel also knowingly points to the common role of art and real estate as places for the investor class to safely park money.¹⁵

Johnny's sequel, *Henry (have you ever been this low?)*, is an exhibition whose scope is explicitly trans-Pacific. Its outward stakes are in Hong Kong, where the namesake of its protagonist, Henry Tang, was an extremely politicized and polarizing figure. While Tang's adultery scandal was in the news during the exhibition's run—Tang first publicly addressed the scandal the month before the exhibition opened—and his campaign for the office of Chief Executive, which ultimately came up short against C. Y. Leung, launched only a week and a half after the exhibition's opening, Lee Kit's invocation of Henry Tang, in keeping with his earlier invocation of Hong Kong's July 1 march, is rooted in its relationship to activist protest and, especially, in a generational shift marked by political awakening. Early in 2011, public statements by Tang taken to be admonishing the younger, post-1980s generation were met with organized public demonstrations. A consortium of eight activist groups released a joint statement that read:

The whole of Hong Kong is at the mercy of real estate developers. . . . The government has not only slowed down the construction of public housing, but also turned a blind eye to the speculative behaviour of real estate developers.¹⁶

While the scandals, including another one surfacing in February 2012 pointing out that Henry Tang had built a basement addition to his house without a government permit, as well as the election bid, threatened to render the Western Front exhibition generic, an unacknowledged specificity underlies the exhibition and its two sites. Lee Kit himself has often insisted on the generic nature of his exhibition's "Henry" figure as standing for any high-ranking politician, plutocrat, or even celebrity in a state of public disgrace. "I turned this Henry into a common individual," the artist states, "like a lot of bourgeois Hong Kong immigrants in Vancouver."¹⁷ The specificity, which distinguishes Lee Kit's Henry from a Silvio Berlusconi or an Anthony Weiner, is therefore the specific relationship between Hong Kong and Vancouver.

In the Hong Kong imagination, Vancouver is much like Lee Kit describes above. Especially after 1997, and through the first decade and a half of "One Country, Two Systems," Vancouver was not generally considered by Hong Kong's international business class a city in which to live. It remained, however, a city in which to own. This trope of exile in the Canadian outpost allows for the character Jack in the 1999 Hong Kong action film *Gen X Cops*, played by actor and pop star Nicholas Tse, who as a juvenile delinquent had to be sent away to Toronto. There, art follows life, as Nicholas Tse himself spent several years in Vancouver in the early 1990s before being expelled from boarding school and returning to Hong Kong.¹⁸ The real estate

transactions that began as a hedge against the uncertainty of impending Chinese rule in the early 1990s leading up to the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 became, at least rhetorically, a way to park money offshore—and perhaps also to provide an out-of-the-way place to send one’s “problem” teenagers. Within this narrative, the solitude of Lee Kit’s Henry, in his big, under-furnished house, is accompanied by the ignominy of being a Hong Kong plutocrat forced to drop out of “society” and reduced to actually living in his Shaughnessy mansion.¹⁹

The exhibition’s material site, Vancouver, adds a dimension that parallels the concerns voiced by the students who protested against Henry Tang back in Hong Kong. With Vancouver also undergoing a housing crisis, the local reception of an exhibition about a disgraced Hong Kong plutocrat occupying a Shaughnessy mansion would be quite different in Vancouver than in Hong Kong. The politics of space within this Canadian city have long been racialized, reaching its first heyday in the late 1980s, when Hong Kong real estate developer Li Ka-shing’s company Concord Pacific purchased 166 acres of underdeveloped waterfront property from the province of British Columbia following the city’s 1986 Expo world’s fair.²⁰ Those racial-spatial tensions have become almost a cliché of Vancouver art, as evidenced by works such as Jeff Wall’s 1982 photograph *Mimic*, and, more directly, Ken Lum’s *Nancy Nishi, Joe Ping Chau, Real Estate* of 1990. I am writing this in the immediate wake of the British Columbia provincial government’s 15% tax on non-domestic real estate transactions, introduced in July 2016 and aimed to curb what is now the third wave of Asia-Pacific investment in Vancouver real estate.

As argued by Katharyne Mitchell, the actual migration from Hong Kong, and later Taiwan and mainland China, which was very real, is not at issue; it is “the perception of this speculative activity by long-term residents [of Vancouver]” that has shaped both the public discourse around Vancouver real estate and, now, thirty years of planning debates and policy.²¹ Coming immediately on the heels of Vancouver’s second world event, the 2010 Winter Olympics, it could not be lost on the exhibition’s Vancouver audience that the Olympic gambit resulted in a \$320 million CAD shortfall as of 2012, to be absorbed by the province’s taxpayers. This deficit, caused by the delinquent Millennium Development Corporation, was expected to be recouped through condo sales of the Olympic village apartments that Millennium was tasked with building.²² In the context of this public discussion in Vancouver about empty Olympic condos, as well as empty Shaughnessy mansions, *Henry (have you ever been this low?)* draws out the parallel realities of dwelling and real estate by perversely humanizing Henry Tang. Lee Kit writes:

Henry, in Hong Kong, is widely criticized. People don’t see him as human, but as a public figure, a signifier. So I want to create a space which rather than victimizing him, makes him human—a sad and lonely human.²³

In the process, Lee Kit's exhibition also turns 1% global real estate into a place where viewers imagine someone actually living; the gulf between media-circulated public persona and living, breathing, and feeling human beings is analogous to that between abstract, speculative real estate, and dwelling.

"The rhythm of the exhibition is mellow, brainwashing."

—Lee Kit, 2016²⁴

Lee Kit, *Henry (have you ever been this low?)*, 2011, installation view, Western Front. Photo: Kevin Schmidt. Courtesy of the artist and Western Front, Vancouver.



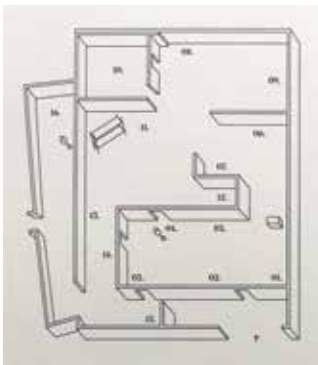
In both *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?* and *Henry (have you ever been this low?)*, cloth paintings play a privileged role in domesticating the spaces. Above and beyond the little verisimilar details of everyday life—such as a cup sitting precariously on the corner of a side table in *Johnny* and a half-thumbed self-help book on a dining table in

Henry—used, hanging fabrics bring together this pair of exhibitions' shared concern with the rhythms of the domestic. *Johnny* is the more cloth-heavy exhibition, the exhibition almost wholly outfitted with the artist's hand-painted fabrics. Most striking are the three fabrics hanging on a wire drying rack, with a fourth one bearing the Pet Shop Boys's lyric "from revolution to revelation" folded and sitting on the rack's lower shelf. As previously stated, this arrangement draws out the habitual rhythms of domestic life in the spaces referred to by the demonstration flat: the daily manual tasks of washing, drying, and folding, accompanied by stray lyrics caught in one's head or hummed or sung to oneself in the routine of chores.²⁵ In keeping with the sparseness of the titular character's isolated living conditions—"permanently temporary," as one reviewer put it—*Henry* features only two fabrics.²⁶ Significantly, one is a small striped rag lying to dry on a radiator that Lee Kit had used to clean the furniture before the exhibition opened. Here again, the manual nature of the fabric's use, along with its cycle of cleaning and drying, metonymically stands for "emotions that are subtle and often indescribable."²⁷

Lee Kit, *Henry (have you ever been this low?)*, 2011, installation view, Western Front. Photo: Kevin Schmidt. Courtesy of the artist and Western Front, Vancouver.



Lee Kit's concern with these manual uses of fabrics, which also hint at their tactile surfaces, emerged alongside an enormous amount of artistic attention to textile production, and especially to the porosity between textiles and the canvas-supported picture planes of paintings—and, accordingly, a porosity between the senses of touch and vision. In the work of contemporary painters such as Sarah Crowner, Michelle Grabner, and Molly Zuckerman-Hartung, and in the renewed interest in earlier figures such as Anni Albers, Faith Ringgold, Franz Erhard Walther, and Rosemarie Trockel, all of this somewhat clumsily fitting under the critical umbrella of the “haptic,” we encounter a treatment of cloth's real or imagined tactility that makes an analogy between material texture and the manual nature of craft-based practices.²⁸ While one would be hard-pressed to describe Lee Kit's painting and washing of his fabrics as craft in the sense that one would speak of Sarah Crowner's sewing together of canvas and fabric, similar themes of domesticity and, furthermore, intimacy seem at play in both.



Since 2011, Lee Kit's work has become less explicitly about the politics of real estate. It also has shifted in orientation from cloth paintings to video projections, though then and now his installations still usually include his inkjet ink on cardboard transfers and store-sourced ready-mades, and sometimes also his karaoke-style video monitor installations.

Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly, 2016, installation map, Walker Art Center.
Illustration: Gabriela Baka.
Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

A recent exhibition, *Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly* (2016), at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, displayed the grounding of these new projection-oriented installations to be rooted in the same themes of domesticity as the earlier interiors. For the exhibition, the artist took the large open space allotted to him—a literal and proverbial “white cube,” he notes—and subdivided it into a series of interior-like spaces, including two almost completely closed “rooms.”²⁹ On many of the walls hung his cardboard paintings, and the exhibition's central thoroughfare hosted his 13-channel video installation *I can't help falling in love* (2012). The exhibition, however, was less notable for what it included than for what it did not; specifically, many of the large walls were mostly bare, and others felt far too big for the small fragments of domestic life housed in or on them. More than anything, the exhibition felt like a small Hong Kong apartment stretched far beyond its reasonable size, perhaps pointing to that real estate market's hyperinflation.

Due to the largeness of the exhibition space, especially the gallery height of its walls, and the sparseness of the exhibition—one colleague joked, “Did they finish installing?”—the exhibition, whose only lighting was provided by projections, monitors, one floor lamp, one outdoor LED light, and the natural light that made its way into the exhibition space from the Walker Art Center's large west-facing windows, seemed more concerned with the passage of projected light through space than it was with any of the images being projected. Accompanying the crisscrossing and bleeding of light in

Lee Kit's trademark washed-out palette, the faint soundtrack to *I Can't Help Falling in Love*, an instrumental karaoke version of the Elvis Presley song of that name, could be heard throughout the gallery space. The result was an ambient exhibition aimed at the "background" of the senses, to borrow Brian Eno's description of ambient music as "ignorable as it is interesting."³⁰ Lee Kit's use in his video projections of soft dissolve effects as a montage technique also served to draw out and soften the transition from one video to the next—and, often accordingly, from one colour to the next. Another kind of inflation, perhaps.

Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly, 2016, installation view, Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly, 2016, installation view, Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



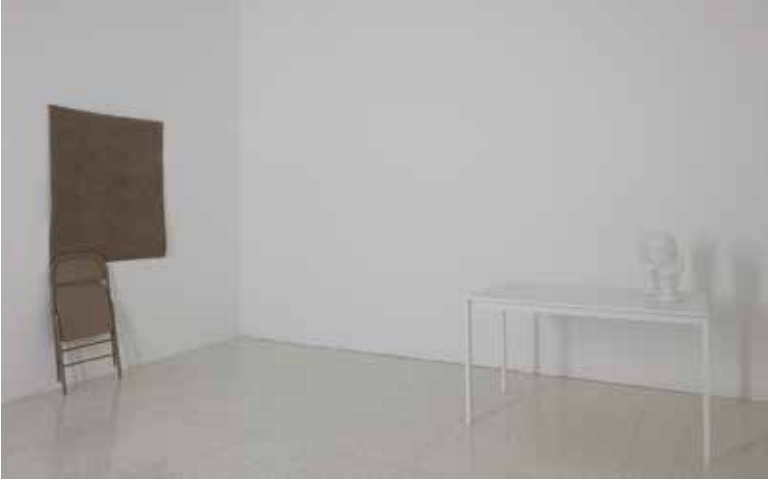
Lee Kit frequently cites seventeenth-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, another painter of the domestic concerned with the passage of light through interior spaces, as his favourite artist. In the gallery space's exit doorway, which leads to one last installation by Lee Kit in one of the Walker's interstitial, between-gallery spaces, he pays tribute to the Dutch master, leaving a sheet of translucent polyethylene from the installation process dangling over half of the doorway, the sheet made to gently

and hypnotically blow back and forth by the museum's HVAC system. Beyond referring to the curtains that often frame Vermeer's picture planes and the recurrence of tapestries in their backgrounds, Lee Kit also invokes the history of artists triangulating the planar surfaces of easel paintings, textiles, and architectural walls.³¹ Here the crossover between Blinky Palermo's own cloth paintings and his wall paintings in the late 1960s and Anni Albers's discussion of "clothing" the architectural wall in her 1965 essay "Designing as Visual Organization" become important reference points, even if Lee Kit was not necessarily making direct reference to them.³² In that prehistory of the contemporary "haptic" textile painting, colour and texture were collapsed into one design element that ambiently affected the viewer's perception. Lee Kit seems to acknowledge at least the later variants of this trend in his blown-up video projections, which reveal warp and weft-like projector grid lines that are most noticeable when he projects onto the surfaces of his paintings, coming very close to updating the terms of Laura U. Marks's discussion of the haptic in pixelated 1990s video art for the digital age.³³

Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly's masterstroke was a video projection in the exhibition's front-most gallery that could be considered an interior. Accompanying a floor lamp, several small paintings on the wall, and pair of teal candle holders on the floor, the projected image features a short, slowed-down video loop depicting a kitschy easel painting of a vase of flowers on a beige wall, to the right of and slightly below a wall-mounted lamp. This projection is fitted inexactly to one of the makeshift walls that



Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly, 2016, installation view, Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly, 2016, installation view, Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

divided the gallery space, whose doorway intrudes into the bottom left corner of the projection. The projected video continues, blown up due to the extra distance, as a decontextualized, abstract beige rectangle across a pair of perpendicular walls, both facing spaces darkened to accommodate video work and that enclose the exhibition's farthest interior. Through an entryway into that far interior, the entryway perpendicular to the wall of the original projection, a small off-white rectangular sliver of projected light sneaks through. That farthest interior is also the brightest space in the exhibition, illuminated by an LED light meant for outdoor use. In the corner of that interior sit two white busts on the far corner of a white IKEA table, set against the backdrop of intersecting white gallery walls. Juxtaposed against that white-on-white is the final destination of the projection as a wholly decontextualized rectangular sliver, landing well higher than the normal viewer's sightline. Originally depicting a beige wall, the sliver is "inflated" to off-white on its gallery-white wall support and made yet less luminous by the interference of the brightness of the LED light in that tight, mostly-enclosed space. The sliver is oddly off-putting, and at the same time banal, but, following Lee Kit's Vermeer fandom, also kind of miraculous.

The traveling of that projection through small doorways, and also through the exhibition's main thoroughfare, is subtle. One does not so much follow the traveling of that light as notice its destination in the far interior and trace its route back to the originating projector. This detective work done, the viewer notes the fading that takes place as the projection travels beyond the white wall in the front interior, where its depicted wall is beige, to the identically white wall in the rear space, where it is now off-white. This, along with the exhibition's faint but insistently repetitive soundtrack, and its cycles of projected light shifting from baby blue to pale grey to soft pink, each video loop unsynchronized with the others, suggests an experience of

Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly, 2016, installation view, Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly, 2016, installation view, Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



life rhythms previously intimated in the artist's work by the obsessive washing of the cloth paintings and the concern with skincare in the cardboard paintings. This, it seems, is Lee Kit's art of the Umbrella Revolution era: indirect, as his work is wont to be, more subtle than the "apartment" exhibitions of 2011, but

also more poetically concerned with the habitual rhythms of domestic life, here still conceived as the lived alternate reality to the abstraction of global real estate speculation. It is perhaps ironic that during the occupation of Hong Kong's Central district in 2014, Lee Kit had already moved to Taipei, at least partially due to the high cost of living in Hong Kong. Or maybe it is not ironic at all. In the artist's own words: "Taipei is like a cocoon from which I can see Hong Kong more clearly. So I can see what I should contribute as a citizen and as an artist."³⁴

Notes

1. These two events appear in tandem in numerous interviews and articles, including Pauline J. Yao, "Lee Kit: A Slice of Life," *Leap: The International Art Magazine of Contemporary China* 15 (June 2012), 127; John Jervis, "In Pursuit of Lee Kit," *Art Asia Pacific* 82 (March/April 2013), 105–06; Martin Germann, "A small sound in his head," *Lee Kit: Never* (Ghent: Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, 2016), 17; and Doryun Chong, "Lee Kit: Scenes of Everyday Life," *Parkett* 98 (2016), 116 n. 2. Unlike the authors listed above, Christina Li has recently taken these events as integrally a pair of explicitly political moves—"an act of defiance," she writes—aimed at Hong Kong's politics of space, rather than as tokens of the participatory ethos of Lee's work for which the protest is one of several conceivable applications of the matrix established by the picnic. Li, "Claiming Space: Occupation and Withdrawal in the Work of Lee Kit," also in *Parkett* 98, 122–25.
2. Press release, *Lee Kit: 3/4 suggestions for a better living*, Para/Site Art Space, Hong Kong, May 4–June 10, 2007, np.
3. Germann, "A small sound in his head," 17. Buren reprised this gesture in a more unequivocally activist form in 1975's *Seven Ballets in Manhattan*, which featured five participants carrying his stripes as "picket signs" in four lower Manhattan locations, as well as Times Square. On the reciprocal readymade as activist gesture in postwar French art, most forcefully argued in relation to Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wall of Oil Drums—Iron Curtain*, rue Visconti, Paris (1961–62), see Tom McDonough, *"The Beautiful Language of My Century" Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), especially pages 87–97. Another reference to postwar French art, here by curator Jesse McKee in reference to the use of Lee Kit's paintings as everyday objects: "Like Niki de Saint Phalle, is this auto-destructive painting?," in Jesse McKee, untitled exhibition brochure essay for *Lee Kit: Henry (have you ever been this low?)* (Vancouver: Western Front, 2011), n pag.

4. Exhibition brochure, *A Journal of the Plague Year: Fear, Ghosts, Rebels, Bars, Leslie and the Hong Kong Story* (Hong Kong: Para/Site Art Space, 2013), n pag. Lee Kit participated in this group exhibition, which commemorated SARS's role in catalyzing an artistic and activist civil society on its ten year anniversary.
5. Lee Kit, "Guest Entry #04: Lee Kit," A Story/A Week by Heman Chong, weblog (June 25, 2012), published by *A Prior Magazine*, aprior.schoolofarts.be/blog-entry/guest_entry_04lee_kit/.
6. *Lee Kit: Someone singing and calling your name*, Osage Soho, Hong Kong, November 27, 2009–January 10, 2010.
7. Lee Kit, opening day artist's talk for *Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA, May 12, 2016.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Quoted in Olga Viso and Misa Jeffereis, "Lee Kit: The Good Traveler," in *Lee Kit: Never*, 28.
11. Quoted in Xue Tan, "From Skin Care Products to a Handmade Ball, Lee Kit Seeks Inexplicable Emotions in the Everyday," *Blouin Artinfo Hong Kong*, June 1, 2012, hk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/806792/from-skin-care-products-to-a-handmade-ball-lee-kit-seeks-inexplicable-emotions-in-the-everyday/.
12. "Lee Kit creates a typical Hong Kong demonstration flat with a living room, a toilet, a bedroom, and a small kitchen," press release dated May 11, 2011, *Lee Kit: How to set up an apartment for Johnny?*, Osage Art Gallery, n pag.
13. This seems to have been intended by Lee Kit himself. Though it clearly depicted a "large house," as he described it, and not an apartment, *Henry (have you ever been this low?)* was described in the first sentence of its exhibition brochure as "the second exhibition in Lee Kit's apartments series" (McKee). As far as I know, this series was never heard from again; presumably the first "apartments" exhibition was *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?*
14. On the audience and its role in the work, Lee Kit states: "a show-flat without visitors means nothing. . . . It's like a temporary reality show." Lee Kit, "Something Happened," *Hong Kong Gallery Guide 20* (June 2011), 53.
15. Jonathan Burgos and Netty Ismail, "New York Apartments, Art Top Gold as Stores of Wealth, Says Fink," *Bloomberg*, April 21, 2015, bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-21/new-york-apartments-art-top-gold-as-stores-of-wealth-says-fink/.
16. Quoted in Elaine Yau, "Young Activists Hit Back at Henry Tang Jibe," *South China Morning Post* (January 31, 2011), 1.
17. Quoted in Tan.
18. On this trope, see the discussion of what the author calls a post-1997 Canada-to-Hong Kong "repatriation narrative" in Lisa Funnell, *Warrior Women: Gender, Race, and the Transnational Chinese Action Star* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 129–61.
19. Shaughnessy is a residential neighbourhood in Vancouver that boasts the city's highest average house price. Due to its historical role as home to the city's wealthy (Caucasian) elite, it became a heated battleground during the first moment of Hong Kong investment and immigration in the late 1980s and 90s, resulting in the loaded and racialized term "Monster House" becoming key term in planning and zoning debates. See John Punter, *The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design* (University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 133–42.
20. Lance Berelowitz, *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 107–111.
21. Katharyne Mitchell, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 68–86.
22. Jules Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism and the Olympic Games* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 71–72.
23. Quoted in Chantal Wong, "Interview with Lee Kit," *Diaaologue* (November 2011), aaa.org.hk/Diaaologue/Details/1096/.
24. Lee Kit, "500 Words," *Artforum* (August 8, 2016), artforum.com/words/id=62687/.
25. Song lyrics often appear in Lee Kit's work. Elsewhere in *How to set up an apartment for Johnny?*, we encounter a New Order lyric on a cushion cover.
26. Mandy Ginson, "Lee Kit: Henry (have you ever been so low?)," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 11, no. 2 (March/April 2012), 102.
27. Exhibition brochure, *Lee Kit: Hold your breath, dance slowly* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2016), n pag.
28. For several examples of recent scholarship on the haptic, see Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); T'ai Smith, *Bauhaus Weaving Theory: From Feminine Craft to Mode of Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); and "Touch," the opening section of essays in the anthology *The Textile Reader*, ed. Jessica Hemmings (London: Berg, 2012).
29. Lee Kit, "500 Words."
30. Brian Eno, "Ambient Music," *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 97.
31. The classic text on Vermeer's flattening of picture plane, tapestry, and architecture is the chapter "The Dutch Art of Mapping," in Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 119–68.
32. Anni Albers, "Designing as Visual Organization," *Selected Writings on Design*, ed. Brenda Danilowitz (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 60–63.
33. See Marks, *Touch*, 1–20.
34. Lee Kit, "500 Words."