

Lyla Rye Illusion's Obstacles

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Cambridge Art Galleries
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Queen's Square Gallery
1 North Square, Cambridge
519.621.0460

Lyla Rye

Illusion's Obstacles

Written by Marcie Bronson

Lyla Rye is a Toronto-based artist who uses video and installation to explore how we experience space and time. The works in this exhibition focus on illusions of space that can be created in the digital world, and in each, Rye employs different forms of representation to reveal when those illusions break down. Through these works, Rye subtly addresses how media and technology influence the perception of images.

In her immersive video installation, *A Meditation*, Rye draws attention to the disconnection between our reverence for the natural world and the negative impacts of our actions upon it. The three-channel video is comprised of hundreds of found nature videos, arranged according to isometric projection to suggest the walls of an architectural space, such as a series of cubicles. Sourced from online meditation aids, the imagery is hyper-saturated and idealized, much like the majestic landscapes often found on computer screensavers and wall calendars in otherwise sterile office environments.

As the composite scene slowly scrolls from right to left across the accordion-fold screen, these pristine, idyllic views of nature are gradually replaced by

cell phone footage of litter and pollution in everyday environments. As the imagery changes, the accompanying audio shifts from soothing instrumental and natural sounds to discordant tones. The carefully ordered composition deteriorates to a haphazard arrangement as it trails off the left side of the screen. After a black expanse, the video loops, restoring illusions of nature that are often sought as a reprieve from the stresses of life and work.

The digital prints titled *Deviations* are made from collages based on Rye's working drawings for the architectural design of *A Meditation*. The collaged elements—including maps, accounting ledgers, and paint colour swatches—represent familiar systems of order that are used to understand and manage our experience of the world. Here, one system of order interrupts another, sometimes suggesting another kind of imagined space.

Flatland presents a series of short, simple animations that similarly create and disrupt illusions of three-dimensional space. In each video, brightly-coloured geometric shapes seem to move or morph across the screen alongside manipulated cell phone videos. When the two intersect in improbable and often humorous ways, the fiction of the illusions is revealed.

The embroideries titled *Slow Pixels* are also based on modified cell phone images, some of which are recognizable from the animations in *Flatland*. In this work, Rye exponentially slows the image capture through a deliberate, meditative task: each pixel-like stitch takes longer than the click of a digital camera. Installed in groups of three in a zig-zag formation that echoes the form of *A Meditation*, the back of each embroidery is visible—another abstraction of the image that also reveals the labour of its making.

Through these works, Rye presents embodied experiences that explore the disembodied experience of contemporary screen culture. In contrast to the rapid pace of image creation and consumption in the digital world, Rye encourages slow viewing and close observation, and by extension, renewed attention to the physical world around us.

A Meditation features audio by Debashis Sinha.

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