



JASON MATTHEW LEE

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BY ALEXANDER SHULAN

Over the course of the past year, artist Jason Matthew Lee has been collecting discarded payphones from around New York and using them as parts of his installations. Sometimes he shows only the shells, the phones torn out, and other times the telephone handset hangs off the hook, its guts spilling out of the end of the mouthpiece.

Lee's work gravitates towards near-obsolete technologies such as the payphone: machines charged with the mystique of the early Internet. Images of phone phreakers, lines of malicious computer code traded on floppy disks or over dial-in bulletin boards and the graphic layout of the Hacker quarterly 2600 all come to mind when you look at his paintings and installations. For his most recent exhibition "Entropy" (2014), at Eli Ping Frances Perkins, Lee showed a series of canvas paintings, most of which were made with a handheld inkjet printer that can print on any surface. Some of the canvases are so densely saturated with text that they appear as pure abstractions, concentric circles of black ink at the very edges of which the line of a character is barely visible. In others, you can see what looks like lines of computer code, but the text's appearance is still more akin to a line or brushstroke. In places, the ink bleeds as if a digital filter has been applied to it, as acetone has been poured onto the canvas.

Throughout the entire gallery, printed text spills off the canvases onto the walls. Clippings from the website Erowid.org, an online library which contains thousands of logs of users' experiences with different psychedelic substances, eke out from behind the paintings and cover the space from floor to ceiling. A battered

Jason Matthew Lee (American, b. 1989) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. His most recent solo exhibition was at Eli Ping Frances Perkins.

Lee is now preparing for two solo presentations in 2015, at Galerie Croisecour in Paris and Johan Bergeren in Malmö, Sweden.

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Image courtesy of the artist and Eli Ping Frances Perkins, New York

payphone is mounted on one wall, its receiver dangling down, as if it was the analog conduit for the data that supersaturates the space.

Lee was professionally trained as a photographer, and many of his paintings are created by repeatedly printing on top of the same canvas. He uses scans from comics, pages of art books, or just jpegs found through Google. His exhibition "Zero / Lenna" (2014) at Geneva's Marbriers 4 featured a series of canvas works many of which contained reproductions of the standard test image colloquially known as Lenna, a photograph of a *Playboy* Playmate that has been used to illustrate image processing since the early days of computing. Buried deep within many of Lee's paintings, she is an avatar without content, created merely to be transmitted. Each successive layer of his paintings further obscures their components, and the final product appears both like a painting and as the execution of some arcane program.

Sometimes, Lee pushes this method to its extreme; for his exhibition "Too Many Memories" (2014) at artist Jared Maderer's Brooklyn apartment gallery Bed-Stuy Love Affair, he literally wrapped the entire space in translucent plastic printed with text. On one wall, Lee showed a group of payphones, sharp lines carved into their frames with an angle grinder. The payphones appeared both like ready-mades, perhaps rescued from some junk pile, and like deeply worked sculptures. The plastic wrap, which extended to cover even the lights in the ceiling, cloaked a series of new paintings. In the dizzying atmosphere of the opening, it was unclear where the edges of the canvases were, or if they had any at all. ☉

"LAYERED PAINTINGS CHARGED WITH THE MYSTIQUE OF THE EARLY INTERNET"

HIGHLIGHTS