

JASON MATTHEW LEE

Bruteforcephreak

Opening: July 23rd, 5-8 pm

Exhibition period ends: August, 22nd

Gallery opening hours:

Wednesday - Friday 12-5.30 pm, Saturday 12-4 pm

For most of the history of the payphone, when a coin was inserted into the phone, a tone was emitted at a specific frequency and for a specific duration that indicated which coin had been inserted.

Red Boxing was a very simple way of tricking the phone company into thinking that you had inserted the right coins for a long distance call. A "Red Box" played the appropriate tones into the phone, the system verified the tones, and voila, the call was free. A few very intrepid phone phreakers with perfect or near perfect pitch could just whistle the tones into the phone. Most payphones are now digital, so none of this will work.

In 1997, the National Institute of Standards and Technology held a contest among the world's best cryptographers to develop a cipher that was by everyone's estimation unbreakable without trying every single possible key.

In contrast to the playback of a simple tone into a handset as a gateway to vast amounts of information, cracking the industry standard of 128-bit encryption, now widely used as a result of NSIT's contest, by systematically entering every possible solution, would take the average modern computer over a quintillion years. It would cost many billions of times the GDP of the entire planet in power costs. In order to break 256-bit encryption, regularly used to protect the most valuable information, the energy released by a supernova would not provide enough power for the job to run to completion.

For his exhibition bruteforcephreak, Jason Matthew Lee has gathered together a series of payphone sculptures and new paintings. The payphones are presented in various stages of disassembly and disrepair, vandalized with odd totems left in remainder—some have had their guts completely excavated, perhaps replaced by a skull or a prosthetic leg, others have been hacked at with an angle grinder or airbrushed, a charred cell phone casually affixed to the exterior.

In conjunction, a new group of paintings is on display. Extremely dense layers of text cascade into broad abstract strokes, masking over embedded images and obscuring their foregrounds. Black ink runs over the edges of the canvases, spilling over masses of indistinct information.

Alexander Shulan, NYC 2015