

# TITLE MAGAZINE

## A Side Window: Eve Sussman | Simon Lee

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Installation view at Locks Gallery

LOCKSGALLERY



In his poetic essay “A Small History of Photography,” Walter Benjamin describes the early process of mechanically fixing an image to a surface. The exposure time of the first photographic plates could be so extended, he writes, that the sitter for an outdoor portrait might strain to remain still, causing “the subject to focus his life in the moment rather than hurrying on past it.”[1] A visitor to Locks Gallery’s current exhibition *A Side Window*, featuring videos and photographs by Eve Sussman and Simon Lee, experiences such an impulse to “focus life in the moment,” to examine the implications of prolonged looking in works that explore the very nature of filmic and photographic process. Complexities of the still and moving image, viewer access and privilege, and the physical structures and rituals organizing daily life all coalesce in Sussman and Lee’s pieces, which require a sustained level of attention from the viewer and prove well worth the effort.

Many of the works included in *A Side Window* were created while Sussman and the collaborative group *Rufus Corporation* produced the film *whiteonwhite:algorithmicnoir* (2011) in locations

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throughout Central Asia. Playing on thematic cues from Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear Window*, Sussman and Lee's video pieces explore the very act of viewing, framing the visitor's (at times voyeuristic) gaze in works that evoke the simultaneously banal and enigmatic qualities of everyday experience. In the three-channel video installation *Wintergarden*, images of three Soviet-era apartment balconies in Bichkek, Kyrgyzstan slowly transform into one another, in a meditation on the simultaneously universal and idiosyncratic nature of architectural vocabulary and inhabited space. Sounds of falling rain and the gentle waving of tree branches are among the few signs revealing the work as video rather than photograph, continually recording slight changes in the cityscape over time.

This aesthetic is echoed in *Seitenflügel*, a cropped shot of one side of an apartment complex, in which 24 windows act as a series of views onto the activities of its inhabitants. Muted lighting fills some windows, while in others residents chat, cook, or pass from room to room; the video almost assumes the feel of an anthropologic study, in which its subjects remain fully unaware of the camera's and viewer's gaze trained upon them. One of these characters reemerges in *Waiting for an Icon*, an intriguing work that distinguishes and enlarges the scene from one of *Seitenflügel's* windows. Visible through a perfectly rounded portal in a frosted pane of glass, a woman goes about mundane activity in the kitchen, wrapped in a robe and towel. Over a period of several minutes I found myself relaxing into a position of undetected anonymity before her, until she cautiously peers out through the window, exhibiting the distinct feeling of being watched; in an electrifying moment, she looks directly out to meet my eyes, before averting her gaze and continuing to search for an unknown spectator.



In addition to meditations on the camera's function as voyeuristic viewing or recording device, concerns of time, narrative, and process also loom large in Sussman and Lee's works. The video *How to Tell the Future from the Past v.2*, a collaboration between Sussman and Angela Christlieb shot during a three-day train ride through Central Asia, depicts six different views from six windows of a moving train. Each view reflects movement at a different speed past village landscapes, occasionally permeated by shadows of people walking by the camera or snatches of conversation. Framed to appear as a sequence of windows in a single train car, one expects a coherent narrative to emerge from the views of houses, fields, and human activity outside, and is left instead with an enigmatic representation of time and space, splintered and continually unfolding across the video screens. Simon Lee's *Where the Future Throws a Shadow Over the Land*, a series of photographs taken during the same train ride, conversely arrests our impressions of this landscape. In slightly blurred images, each half-covered in a distinct white sheen, his ethereal photographs appear partially exposed, evoking the material process of photography itself and the transition from duration to stasis in the visual field.

Sussman's work with *Rufus Corporation* is known for its experimental inquiries into the potential of film and video; *whiteonwhite:algorithmicnoir*, for example, is made up of more than 3,000 clips pieced together in unique sequences by an algorithmic formula, forming a work that is never played the same way twice. In *A Side Window*, Sussman and Lee's videos and photographs reflect a similar spirit, offering the viewer an engaging meditation upon the material qualities of filmic and photographic mediums. In works that are both intimate and distanced, Sussman and Lee effectively capture both the universal and personal in how we occupy our architectural spaces and our sprawling landscapes.

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