

NEW YORK

“Rear Window Treatment”

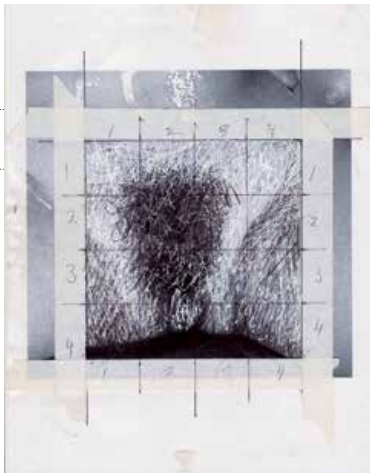
Louis B. James // December 11, 2014–January 18, 2015

LIKE MISS HEARING AID, who was observed carving large Brancusi-like sculptures on a pedestal on the front steps of her apartment building in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1954 film *Rear Window*, the artists in “Rear Window Treatment” are both marks for and perpetrators of voyeuristic leanings. The works often make no distinction between provocateur and snoop.

Oblique in approach and style, Brad Phillips’s four watercolors from his 2014 “Your Miroslav Tichy” series—titled after the early 20th-century photographer who used provisional cameras constructed of cardboard tubes and empty tin cans to take snapshots of young women wandering around his native Kyjov, Czechoslovakia—have a more wholesome appeal than their namesake’s work, simply capturing fragments of attractive people who cross his camera’s lens. Several other artists insert confessional slivers into the crevices of abstractions—Barb Choit takes photographs of her unsuspecting neighbors through their windows in her “Crystal Head” series, and William E. Jones’s 2006 film *Mansfield 1962* is cut

from grainy surveillance tape of “sex deviants” used in training by the Mansfield, Ohio, police department. Though all the participants are complicit in Deric Carner’s installation *Tip If You Love Me*, 2014, a black tree with working touchscreens at the ends of its branches, viewing the piece is jarring. It is evident that we are intruding: The interactive screens are connected to users of chaturbate.com, where participants garner five-cent tips by taking directions from paying users.

The oldest featured artist, Betty Tompkins, depicts the most graphic subject matter. Although her “Fuck Paintings” denied her entry into France in 1973, her six framed “Photo Drawings,” 2012–14, appear tame and intimate today, pinpointing exactly how desensitized the audience has become only two generations later. In



the series, closely cropped scenes of intercourse are sketched in ink over digital photographs. There is no romance here—the drawings’ matter-of-fact presentation serves to remove any sense of mystery in terms of what

we are watching, the scene digressing into abstraction rather than objectification, even if we do not see the subjects’ faces or any other identifying marks.

Prying is not necessarily erotic or pornographic, but the act hinges on spooled tension—betraying one’s presence has the capacity to unravel the whole operation. As the distinction between voyeur and witness is often drawn by whether one has transgressed moral boundaries, “Rear Window Treatment” attests that this line can be crossed out, redrawn, and traced several times over. —Jennifer Piejko