

# ARTFORUM

## CRITICS' PICKS

### NEW YORK

#### Zoe Leonard

MURRAY GUY

453 West 17th Street

September 15–October 27



Zoe Leonard, *453 West 17th Street*, 2012,  
lens and darkened room, dimensions variable.

The checklist for Zoe Leonard's current solo exhibition lists the materials composing her twenty-three-by-twenty-nine-foot camera obscura, *453 West 17th Street*, 2012, as "lens and darkened room." As with the installation's previous iterations in Cologne, London, and Venice, the inventory could very well extend to include sunlight, subjective time, bodies, optics, perception, and the outside world, offering its view. Here, just east of Tenth Avenue, Manhattan is the source of sight and sound. Footsteps on the floor above, honking cars, voices drifting from the High Line and street below—Leonard has framed an environment so immersive as to deem integral all its many parts, incidental or intended. The city plays itself.

Being inside the darkened room is akin to walking under the lamp of a massive enlarger. The lens Leonard has fitted to the south-facing wall functions as aperture, manipulated by the position of the sun and cloud occurrence. Not unlike an upturned view from a sidewalk in Midtown, the patches of sky spilled onto the gallery floor are largely subsumed by the rectangular juts and jags of high buildings, resulting in a fractured and painterly grid. One's eyes adjust to register a confluence of details gliding across the polygonal picture plane. Swaths of data develop in high contrast while adjacent sharp lines of the inverted city slacken into blurs. Upside-down pedestrians, cyclists, and yellow cabs traverse the length of an exposed beam. The exhibition continues in the bright-white center room of the gallery, where five gelatin silver prints from a series of sun portraits are hung (all works 2011–12). Shot directly into the sun's surface, each high-grain image reports a pale orb just off center, giving nice slant-rhyme to the hole in the wall next door.

At once real and representation, Leonard's camera obscura is a heterotopic site of emergence and disappearance wherein experiential time is made strange. Even a brief dart into the room activates a readerly attention; as one enters the pitch-dark space the mind must calculate to navigate physical borders and decipher visual signs. If given duration, that immediate focus or acclimation might open onto a more metaphysical mode of contemplative longing. Eros—a very sensual charge—underlies the atmosphere of flux. There is a desire to know how it works and an urge to name what one sees as to narrate sense from the disorientation. It's an Empire State of mind.

— Corrine Fitzpatrick