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ART IN REVIEW

Zoe Leonard

Murray Guy
453 West 17th Street, Chelsea
Through Oct. 27



The idea that photographs no longer take up much physical space seems to have inspired a wave of installations, among them the simple but enticing walk-in camera obscura in Zoe Leonard's current show.

Ms. Leonard's version of this ancient technology minimal and straightforward. As light passes through a small window into a darkened gallery, the streetscape outside is projected onto the walls and ceiling. The images are inverted, so that taxis appear to cross overhead and the tops of the high-rises across West 17th Street point toward the floor.

Ms. Leonard is certainly not the first contemporary artist to employ the camera obscura — see, for instance, photographs by Abelardo Morell — but she emphasizes the technology and the space instead of the final product. Floor cushions encourage you to stay and meditate on the camera obscura's strange reversals, watching the projection fade or intensify as the light changes. You may also contemplate real estate, as views of recent construction encroach on the gallery's older building; the work's title, "453 West 17th Street," encourages such thoughts.

Ms. Leonard also offers up a sort of ghost twin to the camera obscura: a brightly lighted, blindingly white room of prints made by aiming the camera at the sun. The extreme contrast between the two rooms forces your pupils to adjust as you walk from one into the other, giving you an interval to think about what's actually going on in your eye. (The retina, as it happens, has much in common with the camera obscura; it receives a reversed image and depends on the brain to flip it.)

The suggestion is that images may now live in the cloud, but cameras will always live within us.

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