

ERRATIC ROOM
LYLA RYE





ERRATIC ROOM LYLA RYE

Essay by Shani K Parsons

A dark doorway looms; fitful light from beyond the threshold beckons. Upon entering, you may chance upon discordant collisions between sound and image, or perhaps instead a dark and quiet moment's repose, allowing pupils to widen and attention to focus on the absence of sensory stimulation. Images continue to appear and fade — at times swiftly, other times slowly; a door slams, light sprawls across a living room floor. Other images evoke decidedly non-domestic spaces — walls from a virtual world collapse; a crack crawls across a foreign roadway. From your cloistered vantage point within the darkened room, enveloping projections assume the form and function of apparitional windows on an unsettled world.



One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark.

Annie Dillard¹

Throughout human history, dark rooms have occupied a spectral presence in our imagination and memory, and even in today's brilliantly illuminated world we continue to spend a significant portion of our lives within them. From the theatre to the bedroom, we enter or invest these anomalous spaces with feelings of anticipation, trepidation, fantasy or fear. Curtains closed, we await the return of light to our eyes, whether through the spectacle of performance or through sleep – itself a kind of personal performance in the theatre of dreams. During those first moments when darkness begins to settle upon us, our senses become finely attuned to the subtleties of atmosphere and existence, focusing inward upon the flow of our thoughts even while searching outward for any clue of what remains to be seen. In the absence of light, our minds take flight, seeking exits and entries through any aperture that can be discerned within the shadows. In the dark, where space becomes boundless and untenable, our most imaginative selves take centre stage, enacting our innermost desires and deepest dread.

Lyla Rye's *Erratic Room* is one such anomalous space, finely tuned to interrogate and conflate dualities of light/dark, inside/outside, past/future, and reality/fantasy in ways that destabilize our assumptions as to what constitutes a "safe place" (e.g., home or sanctuary) in the world today. However, unlike the archetypal house or stage, *Erratic Room* is devoid of physical features, becoming a pure distillation of the anticipatory, fantastical spaces of the darkened theatre and the bedroom before sleep, as well as an echo of the once-magical creative spaces inhabited by digital photography's forebears, the camera obscura and darkroom. Going back even further: our distant ancestors brought to life the very earliest of humanity's pictorial images within the deepest of caves. In all of these hidden, hallucinatory places, representations of the real are carefully wrought within beams of light emerging from the end of a torch, out an aperture, through a lens. In the developing image before us, we make a mirror of reality, in which we desire to see ourselves.

ERRATIC ROOM

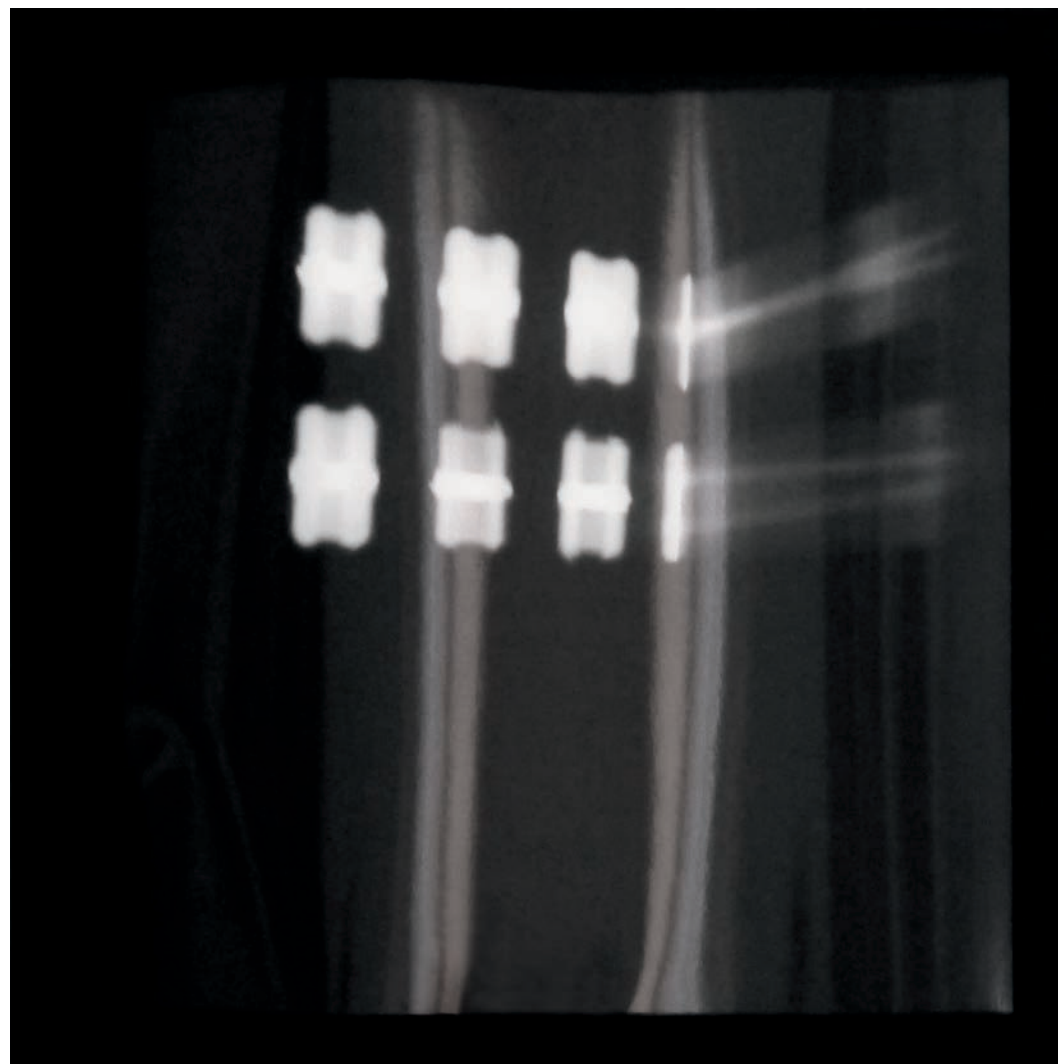
Print Series

The *Erratic Room* Print Series is produced by Lyla Rye in conjunction with the exhibition of the *Erratic Room* installation at TYPOLOGY. For over the past ten years, photography has been an integral part of Rye's artistic practice, and the *Erratic Room* Print Series is the physical extension and embodiment of the ideas she explores in the ephemeral installation.

Conceived as a sculptural photo edition, the print series features four light-filled moments from the *Erratic Room* video projection sequence, each of which has been carefully selected, printed, and mounted between curved supports within a custom wood box frame. Like the installation, the edition hovers between two and three dimensions, playing with the viewer's spatial perception in its warping of both image and support. The resulting artworks appear to flex and breathe within their containments, shifting in perspective and depth as the viewer changes position.

Digitally printed on glossy fine art paper, the prints are highly reflective and responsive to ambient light and the surrounding environment in a way that makes them truly site-specific: the constantly changing reflections and shadows playing across the photographic surfaces are considered by the artist to be integral to the images. Often ghostlike in form, they function as a visual index to the specific spatial and temporal conditions in which they are being seen.

The Erratic Room Print Series is shown framed with reflections on the next four pages. To see the unframed edition without reflections, see the Exhibition Checklist, p. 25.



ARTIST Q+A

What is your background and how does it shape your interest in visual art? How did you come to be an artist?

I began my post secondary education studying architecture. I actually dropped out of art after grade nine. In high school I was very good at math and had strong three-dimensional perception so architecture seemed like the right direction. In the end it was not a good fit, at least not then and there, but that two years of study influenced me greatly. Once I made the transition to studying visual arts, it actually took me a few years to find a way to use my interest in architecture in my work.

Where does an artwork begin for you? How do you develop ideas and imagery? What materials and processes do you employ? How do you experiment or play?

Starting with a found element is my favourite way to work. Most often I have a material, site, or source footage that I reflect upon and respond to and the piece develops from there without much sense of what the final result will be. On a video project, I usually have to find, create, and alter almost twice as much footage as I ultimately end up using. The pieces grow and grow and grow and then there is a crisis point when I'm lost and confused. I often seem to have to discover the logic by trying as many possibilities as I can imagine. Then I start putting limits on the project and refine the logic more consciously than I did in the early development phase.

Erratic Room began with the Buster Keaton footage and the realization that the architecture was active enough that I could zoom in and isolate it. In his work the sets are almost cast members — they are so inventive, interactive, and mobile. *Erratic Room* then expanded to include a wide range of footage where I could find that mobility in architectural space, like web animations and product demos. It was also informed by news reports of people being pushed off subway platforms, trucks careening into houses and toxins leaking into basements. I felt a new sense of societal anxiety about the safety and security of built space.

I also have vivid architectural dreams where there are no other people but the spaces change or grow as I move through them. When I remember these dreams I can usually find a starting experience or the memory of a room that was the origin, and then I can consider how my subconscious altered it.

How has your practice changed over time? Has your work evolved in a particular way? Have there been experiences in life or work that changed your approach?

In undergrad, I began studying painting but then made architectural models to paint from. Then the paintings came off the wall and I shifted to sculpture. I always wanted to occupy a lot of space and give the viewer a spatial experience. At first I did this by creating many small objects but by grad school I had developed the strategy of using very ephemeral materials to occupy a large amount of space. This has the advantage of saving money and storage space and allowed me to show site specific works particular to each gallery or exhibition space. I've worked in many unconventional places including warehouse basements, an elevator, a women's prison and a decrepit bathroom of an old rooming house. Each of these spaces was the impetus for a unique piece that was aligned with an investigation into a material and its potential — structural, formal, optical, and referential. The disadvantage of working this way was that if I didn't have any exhibitions scheduled I didn't know what to do with myself and after each show I was left with only images and fragments.

After becoming a mother I taught myself video editing with the help of some very generous artist friends including the late Kartz Ucci, and Michael Balser, and filmmaker Ross Turnbull. Each of them taught me something about what it meant to work in a time-based medium. But I was also heavily inspired by watching my daughter. I think I carried that responsiveness from the site works to the video pieces. This allowed me to investigate my reactions to unplanned footage of my daughter and me. Video also seemed like a way to impact a large volume of space without much material. I really relate to much of my practice as being experiential. The fact that the work is both ephemeral and temporal locates the viewer within the present moment with respect to the work. Their memory of the experience is as much a part of the piece as anything tangible, kind of like a book: is it an object, a narrative, or your experience of the narrative?

I then developed strategies to have the video imagery impact the perceptual experience of the physical space in which it was situated. I think of this as a contrast to the alternate reality, or window experience, that conventional film presents. In parallel with the video installations, a series of sculptural interventions began to emerge, and then alongside many of the video installations I developed a series of digital photos. The *Erratic Room* photo series came after the video installation but has similar intentions.