



Jesse McLean, *Remote*, 2011. HD Video, color, Dolby 5.1 surround sound, 11 minutes.

Jesse McLean: REMOTE

February 23 - March 18, 2012

Chicago-based artist Jesse McLean's witty yet empathetic videos and installations examine the manipulative power of mass media while acknowledging her own complicit role as an impressionable viewer and consumer. She draws inspiration from an eclectic cross-section of contemporary visual culture, including reality television, religious revival sessions, Photoshop, the viral Internet videos known as "memes," fandom, and artist Andy Warhol's book of aphorisms, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975). Through McLean's selective, deliberate editing, her works isolate uncanny moments or phenomena – like YouTube videos of people singing Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On" (the theme song from the 1997 film *Titanic*) – to uncover deeper insights into human behavior.

For her Front Room exhibition, McLean heightens the horror film genre's classic trope of suspense. Her video *Remote* (2011) presents a compendium of appropriated and original imagery – a security camera, a TV monitor displaying only static, the exterior of a house at night, the surface of a lake, library book stacks, a silhouetted figure in a window – along with equally banal sounds – an owl hooting, crickets chirping, a ringing telephone, and approaching footsteps. Taken together, they suggest how seemingly innocuous matter can become sinister and foreboding when framed within a horror film context.

McLean throws the video's atmospheric qualities into relief in her Front Room installation. The presence of black-painted picture frames recalls commonly found arrangements of family photographs in living rooms and stairwells. The black door installed in the gallery appears similarly trivial; however, both picture frames and doors play a significant role in the *Remote* video. More broadly, these objects very often serve as mute witnesses to violence in horror films; the hero or

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heroine invariably races up the stairs or down into the basement, confronting the very danger he or she seeks to flee.

Throughout the video, McLean explores the different meanings of the word “remote” — be it a marginal location or one’s own absence from a particular scenario — to imply a potentially menacing presence. Disembodied voiceovers tell us, “You can’t see it, you can’t feel it, you can’t taste it, but it’s here, right now, all around us. It’s going through you like an X-ray!” At several other moments on the soundtrack, people ask, “What’s happening?” But perhaps the most telling expression is the male voice that insists, “It was a dream, it had to be. How can you tell what’s a dream and what’s real when you can’t even tell when you’re awake and when you’re asleep?” In fact, this dream-like tone underscores the entirety of *Remote*, blurring the line between perceived threat and actual one. The black objects in the installation fade into the background of the darkened gallery, where they, too, hover in a strange liminal state, both here and not here at the same time. By suspending the viewer in a moment of anticipation that never quite finds resolution, McLean suggests that not knowing can be more perilous than we might imagine.

Jesse McLean: REMOTE is the artist’s first solo museum exhibition and is curated by Kelly Shindler, Assistant Curator, and organized by the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

Jesse McLean (b. 1975, Philadelphia, PA) lives and works in Chicago, where she is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. McLean has presented her work at museums, galleries, and film festivals worldwide, including at the 25 FPS Festival, Zagreb, Croatia; European Media Arts Festival, Osnabrück, Germany; Interstate Projects and PPOW Gallery, both in New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit; and Gallery 400, Chicago (all 2011); Venice Film Festival, Italy; Impakt, Utrecht, The Netherlands; CPH:DOX, Copenhagen; Kassel Documentary Film and Video Festival, Kassel, Germany; and the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago (all 2010); and New Insight at NEXT Art Chicago and Three Walls, Chicago (both 2009). In 2012, she will have presented her work at Transmediale, Berlin; International Film Festival Rotterdam, The Netherlands; and the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH, among others, and in March 2012, she will be an artist-in-residence at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH. McLean was the recipient of the Overkill Award at the 2011 Images Festival and the Barbara Aronofsky Latham Award for Emerging Experimental Video Artist at the 2010 Ann Arbor Film Festival.

The Front Room is generously supported by Mary Ann and Andy Srenco and Étant donnés, the French-American Fund for Contemporary Art.

Major exhibition support is provided by Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield; William E. Weiss Foundation; and Nancy Reynolds and Dwyer Brown. General operating support is provided by Whitaker Foundation; Missouri Arts Council, a state agency; Missouri Cultural Trust; Regional Arts Commission; Bank of America Charitable Foundation; The Trio Foundation of St. Louis; Wells Fargo Advisors; Arts and Education Council; and members of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

