

# ***AUTUMN EXHIBITIONS***

**OCTOBER 19 TO  
DECEMBER 4 2021**



Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre is a non-profit organization facilitating the presentation, interpretation, and production of contemporary visual, time-based and interdisciplinary arts. Modern Fuel aims to meet the professional development needs of emerging and mid-career local, national and international artists, from diverse cultural communities, through exhibition, discussion, and mentorship opportunities. Modern Fuel supports innovation and experimentation and is committed to the education of interested publics and the diversification of its audiences. As an advocate for contemporary art, as well as for artists' rights, we pay professional fees to artists in accordance with the CARFAC fee schedule.

Modern Fuel is situated on the unceded ancestral territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg peoples. We acknowledge the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg peoples as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land. We also recognize the Métis peoples and other nations from across Turtle Island who have called Katarokwi / Kingston home for generations upon generations. We are grateful to be able to live, learn and make art on this land and be in such close proximity to the waters of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. To acknowledge this traditional territory and waterways is to recognize this city and country's longer history pre-dating confederation and the work that must still be done in decolonizing our spaces and relations. We at Modern Fuel strive towards respectful relationships with all of our communities in hopes of walking a good path together.

We at Modern Fuel want to state unequivocally that Black lives matter, Indigenous lives matter, and that the lives of People of Colour matter. Modern Fuel strives to ensure that members and visitors feel safe and welcome in our space and at our events. We do not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or violence including but not limited to ableism; ageism; homophobia and transphobia; misogyny; racism and white supremacy. It is also important to us that Modern Fuel not only continues to present works and programs that support Black and Indigenous artists, members and visitors, but invests in the work of becoming an inclusive, anti-racist organization. We feel it is only then that Modern Fuel can advocate for artists and foster community with care and respect.



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Gallery Hours  
Tuesday-Saturday  
12-5PM

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In the Main Gallery

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***THERE ARE  
MINIMUMS  
TO OPERATE  
PROPERLY***

**Christopher Lacroix**



## Exhibition Description

*There are minimums to operate properly* brings together sculpture, photography and augmented technical drawings that present a strategy for non-hierarchical ways of being. The central work (above), *There is a minimum to operate properly* (2019) is an elaborate structure inspired by gym equipment and fetish furniture. The structure is operated by two occupants who control a series of mirrors and bodily restraints through cranks and pulleys that require constant physical exertion. The operation of the structure reveals the occupants' buttocks to each other and themselves, creating a reciprocal dynamic of power and vulnerability. On the walls of the gallery is the title work *There are minimums to operate properly* (2019) which serves as an instructional image for the structure's use. Also included in the exhibition is a suite of 22 engineering prints. The suite, titled *Technically, ...* (2021), presents schematics for the construction of the structure, but have had the dimensions and all contextual information removed. In removing this critical information, the drawings are rendered useless as they become art objects. This gesture brings into question art's commonly assumed ability—given its innate ambiguity—to affect concrete change, thereby emphasizing the absurdity of the works in the exhibition.

# About Christopher Lacroix

Christopher Lacroix is a white settler of French, Irish, and Scottish ancestry. His practice utilizes familiar materials and objects in conceptually and formally absurd ways, generating queer perspectives that are often a blend of humour, refusal, and aspirations for alternative relations and futures. He holds a BFA in Photography from X University and an MFA in Visual Arts from the University of British Columbia. In 2018, Lacroix received the Phil Lind Emerging Artist Prize and has since shown at The Polygon Gallery (Vancouver), Gallery TPW (Toronto), and the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Arts (Kelowna). He lives and works in Vancouver which is located on the unceded territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓xw̓ú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwəta? (Tsleil-Waututh) nations.

## There is a minimum to operate properly; Love and Holeness // Michelle Weinstein

*Shared courtesy of the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art.*

***An essay response to Christopher Lacroix's *There is a minimum to operate properly****

Why are some holes in the body coveted, and some considered shameful? Gazing into another's eyes is a romantic act of love, while gazing into a butthole, another's or one's own, is an awkward proposition. It is safe to assume that the initial reactions to Christopher Lacroix's artwork, *There is a minimum to operate properly* will range from disgust, titillation, curiosity, desire and a variety of other states, perturbed and pleasing. This project requires multiple lenses in order to consider its subtle production of meanings, beyond initial visceral responses.

A full engagement with the artwork requires two subjects to voluntarily remove the clothing from the lower half of their bodies, cover their genitals and strap into an uncomfortable contraption. The two art-participants then use mirrors to reflect the butthole of their partner-in- art back to each other; a view that is impossible without the aid of both the artist's machine, and a partner. It takes

strength and concentration to function the machine properly, as well as a leap into ultimate vulnerability with a partner, who has equally chosen this extremity of revelation. An examination of Lacroix's work in relation to theories of the abject, to philosophies of love, and to the psychology of subject formation, reveal that his intimacy apparatus, this buttohole viewing machine, transforms a source of revulsion into tender beauty. It creates a chance at psychic completion through our orifice of waste.

In order to appreciate the transformative properties of Lacroix's artistic apparatus, it is helpful to examine customary reactions to excrement and its exit point. These reactions can sensibly be categorized as abject. The dictionary has two definitions of the This synonymy is a clue to the foundational (basic) aspect of the abject, including excrement and the buttohole. They are incontrovertible aspects of our being that disclose our source and relation to the material world. The anus is the



hole of excretion, the earthly hole. It links the human body to soil (an unwelcome reminder that our sustenance flourishes in faeces). Excess earthly matter passes through us, that which is not incorporated into our being. If the eyes are the windows to the soul, the anus is the aperture that completes our terrestrial coil. It is the hole which expels the material that was momentarily part of the self, and is returned to the world outside the self.

According to Julia Kristeva, there is a complex subjectivity at play in our experience of the abject. In her work *Powers of Horror; An Essay on Abjection*, she cites physical reactions to abject experiences; revulsion, gagging and retching — reactions of

the skin, of the digestive. These are instinctive responses when confronted with evidence of death and decay. Kristeva deems that this physical feedback implies an intricate weaving of self and other, a dissolution of the subject with the object. What is revealed in this merging is meaninglessness. The flimsy state of “self” is exposed when confronted with its biological link to death. Simultaneously, an abject experience creates a situation where the self is remarkably present, in its extreme physical reactions.<sup>4</sup>

The entanglement between self and other is a descriptor of a different phenomenon, that of love. Plato’s theory of love describes three types, but it is eros or romantic love that is of interest in this case. The account of eros is a claim to beauty; the lover is so moved by the beauty of the beloved, they are transformed. A union takes place that creates completeness; through the beauty of the love-state elicited by the beloved, an understanding of the world of ideas is effectuated. Love is a risk, a sacrifice of the subjective self to ideals which can only be understood through the loving awareness of another.<sup>5</sup>

*In Praise of Love* a book in the form of Q&A between Nicolas Truong and philosopher Alain Badiou, interrogates the interplay of self and other altered through the force of love. There is a reinforcement of the self through the intensity of loving another, a highly charged condition where selfhood is acutely felt through an awareness of the beloved. Simultaneously the world is restructured, viewed through a double consciousness of self-and-other united in love. Similar to an experience of the abject, there is a superimposition: an extremity of awareness of self and other (lover and lover) concurrent with the meshing of two into one. Badiou also speaks of the need for commitment, a conscious act through language and action to reconfirm the inexplicable shift into love. He claims that the pursuit of “no-risk” love as advertised through dating sites, equates to no-love-at-all. It is only through risk, through chance, that the surrender of the self necessary for the love experience is possible. In Badiou’s view, it is love that overcomes the inherent awkwardness of the aftermath of sexual consummation. Love is won “point-by-point” in every decision to disregard selfishness and subsume the will for the sake of the beloved, in honour of that initial event.<sup>6</sup>



The conditions of love thus defined lead us directly back to Lacroix's machine. The use of the machine requires a commitment to exposure, a mutual choice of entry that reinforces the subject (the self-consciousness that comes with exposure) and dissolves it through intention; through the common goal of reflection back to the other. It is not the physical beauty of the buttohole that reiterates love in this composed situation, rather it is the almost unthinkable beautiful act of intimacy and risk, the discarding of clothing and every safe social convention, which choreographs a love-state. Risk, the choice to enter into awkwardness, and the willingness to trust infuses **meaning** into the situation, shifting it away from the realm of pointless abjection. The contraption unites the two participants in their focus and effectively blurs subjectivity to the point where it is only the other who can reveal the hidden-self back to the self. Through the creation of meaning and the deliberate choice of discarding one's own subjectivity, placing it into the care of another, Christopher Lacroix transforms our humble waste hole into a fount of love.

There is an additional consideration in the understanding of Lacroix's treatment of subjectivity: that of Jacques Lacan's "mirror phase." Lacan describes the transition when, as a toddler, a mirror reflection is recognized as the "self". This reflection of completeness consolidates the toddling subject into an "I." The mirror image of wholeness conflicts with inner experience, which is a conglomeration of sensory input, a blurring of interior and exterior. According to Lacan, visual apprehension of the individual as a discrete whole, an object in a world of objects, creates a sense of profound absence and a recognition that interior needs can only be met by an exterior world. It is this recognition that produces desire. In Lacan's theory, all desire is born from an acknowledgement of incompleteness, from the disconnected subject longing to recapture unity with the exterior. It is a yearning to seal the interior lacuna, which was created from the friction between a sensory being and its image. Desire is the source of all action in the world, sprouting from the initial shock into subjecthood, the solidification of a "self".<sup>7</sup>

*There is a minimum to operate properly* replays this subject-formation, complicates it, and allows the possibility of psychic closure. It is a conjoined "another" who reflects back a partial

image of the body, a hole, where once a whole image caused rupture and created an unbridgeable separation between the self and other. The double-subject, linked by their exertion within the art-machine, relive the initial shock of the image that is not equated with their sense of “I,” yet is undeniably themselves.

Participation with this artwork carries the potential of a therapeutic conclusion. Engaging with another in equalizing vulnerability, the participants assist each other by recreating the initial scene of subject-formation. Instead of an illusion of wholeness, the hole where the material of the self becomes other, the invisible-self, is reflected. The artwork reconnects with subjectivity’s nascence, and thereby sutures the rift brought about by a “too- complete” image of being. An entry into the machine is a pact. It creates a performative transmutation; the ridiculous turns into a compassionate revelation, redeems shame through vulnerable efforts. This redemption of the abject is the beautiful ideal that can be gained through a perilous encounter with another in Lacroix’s machine, embodying both platonic eros and Badiou’s definition of love. *There is a minimum to operate properly* is presented at the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art in latent form. Only by entering and operating the machine can two linked participants actualize its meaning.

<sup>1</sup> [www.lexico.com/en/definition/abject](http://www.lexico.com/en/definition/abject)

<sup>2</sup> [www.etymonline.com/abject](http://www.etymonline.com/abject)

<sup>3</sup> [www.thesaurus.com/abject](http://www.thesaurus.com/abject)

<sup>4</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*. Translated by Leon S Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1982

<sup>5</sup> Reeve, C. D. C., “Plato on Friendship and Eros”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <[https:// plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/plato-friendship/](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/plato-friendship/)>.

<sup>6</sup> Badiou, Alain and Nicolas Truong. *In Praise of Love*. Translated by Peter Bush, The New Press, 2012

<sup>7</sup> Johnston, Adrian, “Jacques Lacan”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <[https:// plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/ entries/lacan/](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/)>.

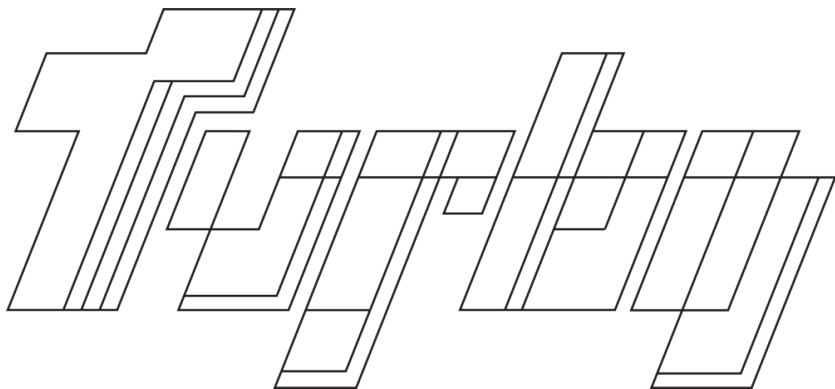
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*Born in Toronto, raised in Connecticut, Michelle Weinstein earned her Bachelor of Fine Art at Maine College of Art, and Yale University.*

*She began exhibiting her work upon graduation and has been shown nationally and internationally. Weinstein's first solo exhibit, Orogenesis, was in Los Angeles, in 2007, and her 2010 solo exhibit at SmackMellon in Brooklyn, NY, was warmly reviewed by Modern Painters magazine.*

*Weinstein held her first solo exhibit in Canada, Mars Pamphleteer, at the Gam Gallery in 2014. She was awarded a Social Science and Humanities Research Award by the Canadian government in 2014, after relocating from Los Angeles, CA to Vancouver, B.C. in order to earn her MFA (2015) from the University of British Columbia. She has been on the board of directors of Or Gallery, acting as President in 2018.*

*Weinstein is currently working on a series of one-night art events that occur at the Ladner Clocktower and its surrounding sunken garden, on the UBC campus. These projects have taken the form of a long-term residency, and aim to alter the experience of temporality. Michelle Weinstein lives and works in Vancouver.*

# In the State of Flux Gallery



**Alvin Luong**



*Turbo*, Image Still, Alvin Luong

## Exhibition Description

*Turbo* is a video project about life after The Great Recession of 2007/08.

On a stormy night in 2007, a teenage boy named Brett 'Turbo' Matthews lost control of his sports car and drove off the side of a cliff. Turbo descended through the air and crashed into a building housing financial instruments. He was killed upon impact and his body was unidentifiable amongst the burning car wreckage.

That same night, financial markets began to crash, becoming what we now know as The Great Recession. The reconstruction and resurrection of global financial institutions by state governments during The Great Recession would have the unintended consequence of also reconstructing and resurrecting Turbo. Although spared from death, Turbo was now cursed to live with the behavioral impulses of a sports car. During day time, Turbo lives in frustration because he can only communicate through car sounds that he makes with his mouth. At night time, Turbo enters into hallucinations where he is free to drive, however these hallucinations always end with a car accident.



*Turbo*, Image Stills, Alvin Luong

# About Alvin Luong

Alvin Luong (梁超洪) creates artworks based on stories of human migration, land, and dialogues from the diasporic working class communities that he lives and works with. These stories are combined with magic realism, humour, and biography to produce artworks that reflect upon issues of historical development, political economy, and social reproduction; and how these issues intimately affect the lives of people.

In 2017, Luong was awarded the OCADU Off-Screen Award for best new media installation at the Images Festival (Toronto). In 2018, Luong was Artist-In-Residence at IOAM (Beijing) and lectured at the Institute for Provocation (Beijing). In 2019, the artist exhibited at Boers-Li Gallery (Beijing), was invited to pursue research at HB Station Contemporary Art Research Center (Guangzhou), and screened and lectured at Gudskul (Jakarta). In 2020, the artist screened at China Millennium Monument Art Museum (Beijing), produced a video program with Guangdong Times Art Museum (Guangzhou), and was commissioned by The Bentway and the City of Toronto. In 2021, the artist exhibited at The New Gallery (Calgary), published a co-written book with The New Gallery Press (Calgary), screened at The Polygon Gallery (Vancouver), and was Artist-In-Residence at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto).

## Alvin Luong's Turbo: A Meditation on Class and Consumerism // Sanchari Sur

Alvin Luong's short film, Turbo (run time: 19 minutes, 39 seconds), is inchoate capitalist desire wearing a human face. The human face is that of the fictional Brett Matthews, a 14 year old boy, who crashes his luxury sports car while on a joy ride one night, and transforms into Turbo. With the crash, he triggers off The Great Economic Recession of 2007/2008, while simultaneously becoming the wrecked car. In the aftermath, he is fated to communicate via car sounds, reliving his crash in an unending cycle, almost like the artist's loss of agency as a working-class person in the larger context of the capitalist state.

The film begins inside a dark room, the street lights casting a shadow

on white walls through the blinds; the blinds mimic prison bars. The shot of the room pans to the right accompanied by the sounds of a revving engine in the background. Within seconds, white bokeh move over the shadow of the blinds, foreshadowing Brett's death; his crash playing on a loop that Brett as Turbo will be imprisoned inside, just like the bokeh inside the blinds. As the revving speeds up, so does the appearance of the white lights, like passing street lamps, placing the viewer in the position of Brett/Turbo inside the car.

The bokeh increases in width and range, a ghostly haunting that shows up throughout the film. The revving too indicates an increase in speed while the camera pans further into the house, the Toronto home of Luong's parents. Luong wants the viewer to interrogate their class positionality while simultaneously engaging with working-class aesthetics. The room we see in the darkened house is a working-class household with the art on the walls and everyday utensils inside glass cupboards. The camera pans a full circle before coming to rest at the window, looking outside at other similar households, before fading into black. The title, Turbo, written in a retro 80's font, comes into view, introducing us to Turbo's world through Luong's lens.

Luong's film and its protagonist are inspired by the 1980's American animated series Turbo Teen universe. In this universe, the main character (also named Brett Matthews) crashes his car on a stormy night into a secret government laboratory. Brett and his car become fused together, giving Brett the ability to alternate between human and car form at will. Luong's Brett however does not have the same agency. Here too, Brett crashes his luxury sports car but into a building housing financial instruments. When he wakes up as Turbo, his limited agency lies in reliving his car crash and communicating through car noises, rendering him unintelligible.

Brett's complete fusion with his car symbolizes the extreme result of a complete unity with a commodity (here, the race car). Luong's absurdist take on Brett's fate indicates the merging of the subject (Brett) with an object (car). This fusion is the extreme end-goal of capitalism and the consumerist state, where unbridled aspiration can lead to actual market crashes like The Great Recession. Luong's warning however pertains only to the nouveau rich Brett, whose culpability in the economic crash (symbolized by the car crash) is punished through a loss of language. Luong, as a working-class artist



who lived through The 2007/2008 Great Recession—along with his parents—takes back his own agency by taking away Brett’s agency. In Luong’s magic realist narrative, Brett becomes subaltern.

Luong goes beyond just portraying a rich teenager losing his voice. Like his piece, *The Young Comrade*, made around the same time as *Turbo*, Luong plays the titular character of Brett. This is where Luong experiments with meta-narrative. Instead of imagining a Brett Matthews, he finds a Brett Matthews on Facebook, downloads his photo, and manipulates the photo to create a mask. He then wears the mask and plays the character in *Turbo*. In doing so, Luong comments on the interchangeability of identity within the commodified capitalist culture, and the easy consumerism aspect of social media. As an artist, Luong literally shops for a face on the internet which he puts on and uses to create a narrative. In Luong’s words, “it was a mechanical way to bridge fiction and real life.” This act of casually shopping for a “Brett Matthews” highlights the callous easiness of consumerist culture.

Luong uses magic realism to showcase consumerist culture and the extent to which it pervades and affects class structures in North America. Following his former magic realist piece, *Bidding War* (with collaborator Ivana Dizdar), and inspired heavily by “the many hours-long art by Matthew Barney’s *The Creymaster Cycle* videos,” Luong uses magic realism as an absurdist tool to explore life after The Great Recession. Magic realism is Luong’s way of adapting Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas of class and taste. The sociologist Bourdieu states that “the legitimate taste of the society is the taste of the ruling class.” The idea of good taste is dependent on class positions, and has nothing to do with “taste” itself. Taste is then a class dependent aesthetic experience. Luong explores the merging of this idea of “class taste” with that of the economic crash. *Turbo*’s class position as Brett becomes irrelevant in this context, as *Turbo*’s feeling of being trapped as a car-sound-emitting ghost mirrors the trapped feeling of the working-class position of the artist. While *Turbo*’s narrative becomes an aesthetic experience for our consumption, the artist’s class position never changes. And this dissonance between taking away Brett’s agency through an aesthetic move and Luong’s actual reality as a working-class artist can only be explored through the absurdity of magic realism. As consumers, it would be impossible for us to access this dissonance in any other way.

Luong's use of music too reflects this absurdity. In the film, the music that plays in the background is in the words of the artist "very pop-y, very EDM-y," almost auto-tuned electronic. Some of this music was made by Luong himself, while some of it was appropriated. His music emulates the Top 40 hits he was listening to in 2018; "an extreme Top 40 aesthetic." Inspired by a lot of Personal Computer music that "tried to push the limits of data-pop music in a grotesque way... that was very earnest but also very bombastic," Luong felt this kind of music embodied Bourdieu in the way it was condensed. Like the character of Turbo, the music aspires to become an aesthetic experience it may never evolve into.

While Luong does not personally connect with his character, Brett, in any way, he relates to some qualities of Brett, specifically the societal and cultural linkages between masculinity and the desire to own a sports/muscle car. Muscle cars are not owned by the cultural bourgeoisie, but are a deliberate ostentatious display of wealth. Brett and the artist occupy opposite ends of the class spectrum. At the same time, they are connected via age. While Brett meets his end at 14 through an actual car crash, Luong was 14 when the Economic Crash of 2007/2008 occurred. In a way, Brett embodies all that was responsible for the actual economic crash that Luong lived through with his parents.

The film, both set in his parents' home as well as dedicated to them, carries the underpinnings of Luong's experience of the economic crash; an experience he had no control over. As a teenager, he both lived through his parents not having regular work days (they would work three days, and sometimes, even have a whole week off) due to the factories being shut down, while attending a school with upwardly mobile middle-class kids. His classmates seemed to be unaware of the crash, going about their days as if nothing had changed, while Luong went through the experience of watching his parents deal with financial precarity and food insecurity. The absurdist sense of dissonance between his outside and domestic worlds as a teenager forms the basis for the absurdist dissonance that Luong explores through magic realist modes. It is this realization that outside economic forces can have an effect on his lived experience that Luong highlights through Turbo's trapped existence after death.

A fundamental part of Turbo is car worship. Apart from the Turbo Teen universe and personal working-class experience and reflection of surviving The Great Recession, Luong also uses the subculture of young boys/men making car sounds with their mouths, not unlike beat boxing. This subculture of human car sounds, where the individual makes sounds with their mouths and records themselves on their webcam or phone cameras, points to an aspirational desire to own cars; a commodity beyond their reach. Certain cars, like the sports car depicted in Turbo, is a sign of wealth that the uber rich can afford regardless of the car being a money-sink. The boys/men in this subculture are often in bedrooms that mirror Luong's own bedroom in Turbo, filmed through low-res, foggy cameras, pointing to their possible (working) class positions. In their performances, these male individuals imagine ownership of these vehicles they fantasize about, but also reassert their masculinity through that fantasy. They seem to hold their desire for this particular kind of private property in the highest reverence, where they perform the sports car to become it. Like Turbo, they fuse into the sports car, and give in to their consumerist desire through fantasy. However, unlike Turbo, their performance has agency where the playing out of this fantasy has an element of joy even in a (working) class reality.

Luong's Turbo opens on the 19th Oct 2021 in the State of Flux Gallery at Modern Fuel in Kingston, Ontario. The film will play inside a darkened room, with viewers passing through curtains with printed images of the car wreckage in Luong's Turbo. The entire room is painted black, with no incoming light, to mirror the movie-theater-going experience. Luong's aim is to immerse the viewer into the almost 20 minute film, so the viewer can simultaneously become Turbo as well as view Turbo from a third-person perspective. Just like the dark room the film begins and ends with, so too shall the viewer begin and end their viewing in a dark room.

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