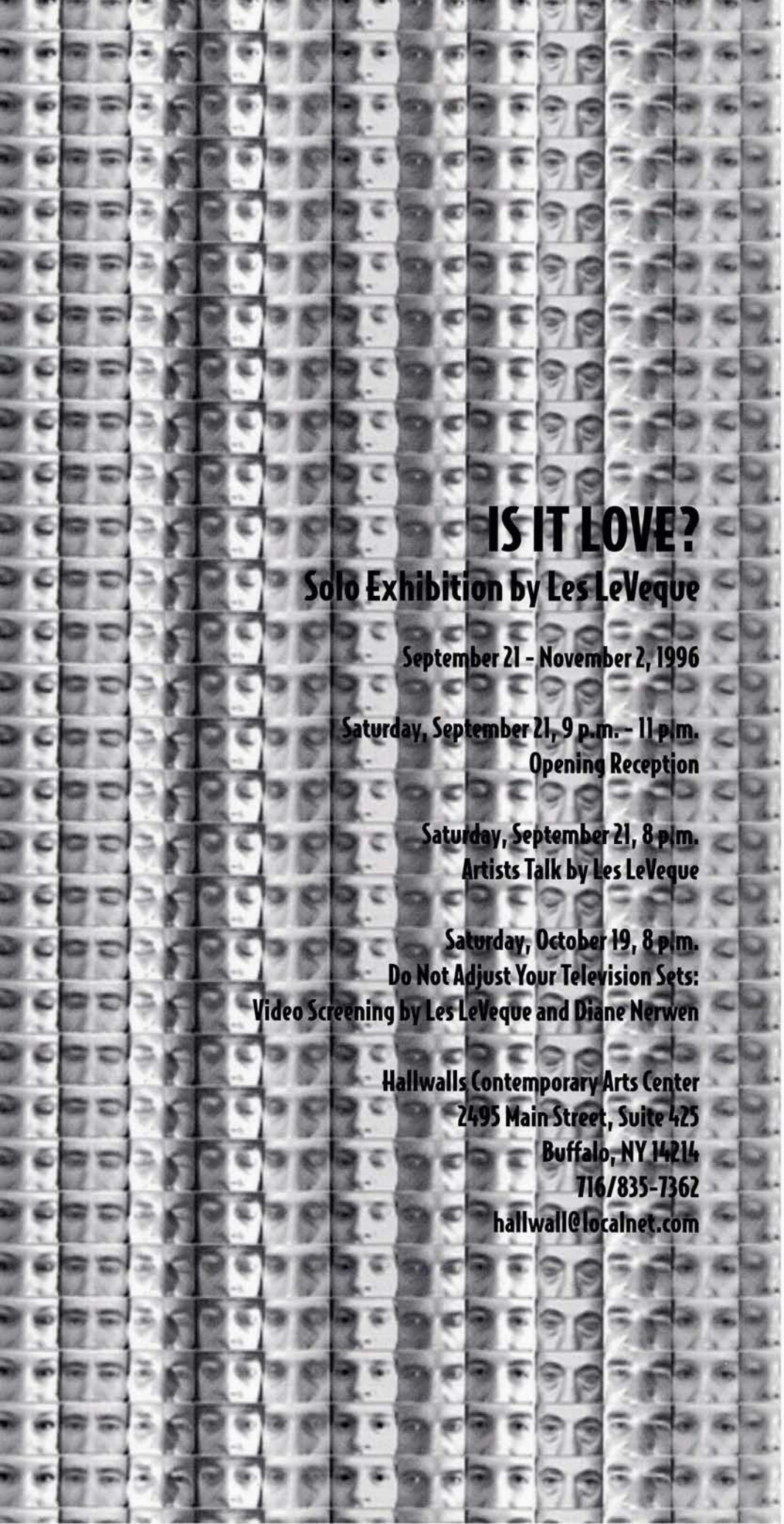




IS IT LOVE?

Solo Exhibition by Les LeVeque

September 21 - November 2, 1996

Saturday, September 21, 9 p.m. - 11 p.m.

Opening Reception

Saturday, September 21, 8 p.m.

Artists Talk by Les LeVeque

Saturday, October 19, 8 p.m.

Do Not Adjust Your Television Sets:

Video Screening by Les LeVeque and Diane Nerwen

Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center

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IS IT LOVE?

An Installation by Les LeVeque

On loan from The Museum of Possible Futures.

Excerpted text courtesy MPF Archives, from original notes by Graham Leggat, Assistant Curator, Objects of Negligible Worth.

1.

...[This installation period of the corporate docu- nity, this was a sphere. Citi- days to under- Now, a decade or so later, they watched with a mixture of excitement and disbelief as the sociopolitical body disintegrated still further — into data.



tion is] representative of works from the middle Consumers League of America. Referred to in ments as the period of the 2nd Fiduciary Commu- time of considerable dissociation in the public zens had struggled during the League's early stand fully their roles as "complete consumers."

"Is it Love?" captures the promise and unease of this era. But to understand these ideas and this installation fully, it is better to know more about the League...

2.

...The Consumers League of America had been founded in the late 1990s in North Carolina's Raleigh-Durham axis by a group of university students who had adopted wholesale the teachings of political dissident Noam Chomsky. Following Chomsky, the organization cleaved to a simple, brilliant truth: the mass media does not exist to provide information to audiences; its primary function is to provide audiences to advertisers.

Suing successfully under the freewheeling fiscal laws of the early 21st century, the CLA established itself as the first Independent Consuming Bloc. As such, once it had attracted sufficient numbers, the League sold itself directly to ad- vertisers as an integrated demo [demographic group] whose loyalty and enthusiasm, being contractual, com- pletely tran- scended the vagaries of the marketplace.



The results were revolutionary. Imagine a whole graphic area encompassing several nations, for directly to ad- city — or geo- that was the ul- timate reach of the League— using exclusively a specific set of products and you have timate reach of the League— using exclusively a specific set of products and you have some sense of the League's power. Imagine also a complete inversion of the laws of consumption as they had existed since the Industrial Revolution. The CLA didn't pay for a thing — not one Nike tracksuit, not one Ding-Dong, not one Honda Accord. Instead, every man, woman, and child of the bloc was *paid* to consume, and the products were supplied for free.

In its early days, then, the League functioned as a service-industry corporation that provided reliable, professional consumers. The genius of it was that the CLA did not merely *represent* the American public and its consuming desires — they *actually were* the American public and its consuming desires. (Later, of course, the authenticity of contractual desire would be contested in the landmark *Jordan v. The World*.) The citizen and the consumer became indistinguishable, and corporate reality had only to unhinge its jaw to gulp down whole the idea of the social...

3.

...The initial services of- forward outgrowths of cer- But they were, to be sure, For with the emergence of



ferred by the League were fairly straight- tain maxims of endorsement theory. in a constant state of development. "complete consumption," the individual was irrevocably subsumed within the demo, and all details of daily life — properly surveilled, or surveyed, and recorded — were transformed into marketing data.

The League's first crowning achievement was its ability to sidestep entirely the archaic Marxian anxiety about the means of production and instead to seize direct control of the means of consumption. Its second great controlling idea was the profound understand- ing that capital and its products do not stand apart from humanity, but that capital and humanity are one...

4.

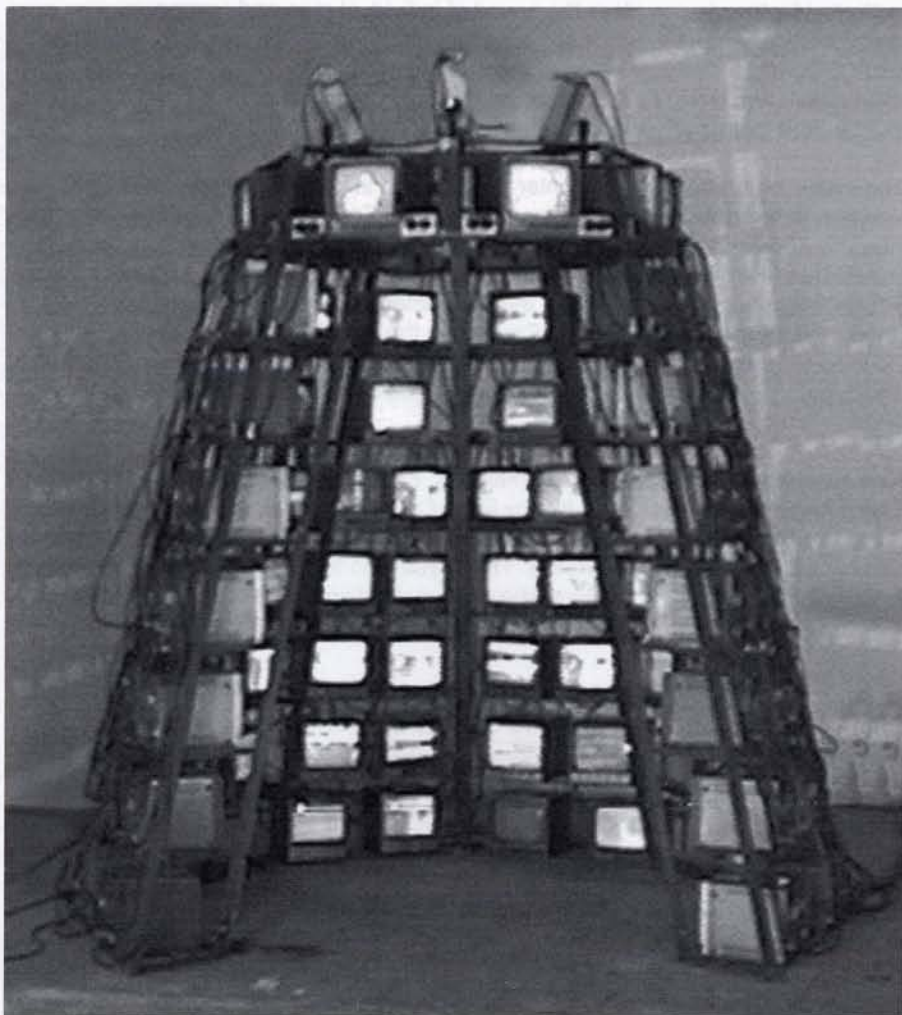
...LeVeque's installation is a good example of how oppositional artists in the League's middle period struggled to articulate in symbolic terms the powerful socio-corporate processes that captains of high finance — and indeed, ordinary Americans — had already begun to ac-



In the first part of the installation, "We Miss You," the individual is welcomed into the community by a series of hands and enters an electronic hive. There, beneath loving and distant gazes, he or she is introduced to the surveilled image and to the irresistible knowledge of digital life. Light floods the brain and the evanescent individual disappears from the screen, immolated in consumption's optimistic flame. Gone, gone...only to be reborn again! ...for in the second part "You Made Our Rendezvous," the consumed individual returns, repackaged and reconstituted as a single voice in a glorious chorus, yearning to be one with all.

There is an implicit journey here, a cunning arc that sees the hive or tower's nostalgia replaced by the utter contemporaneity of the erotic boxes. A wistfulness for the analog past haunts the tower's outdated surveillance equipment. The televisions hiss and sputter, tendering ghostly palimpsestic images of their previous employ in addition to their sublime apotheoses. The wee boxes, by contrast, offer only the seduction of the digital future.

Originally part of a group exhibition, "Greetings from the DataStream," this installation poignantly reminds us of the heady moment when America first surrendered fully to a digital datasphere in the service of corporate reality. The eyes in the octagonal tower blink out in Morse code — an antique language long since forgotten — the slogans of telecom corporations of the time: AT&T, GE, CNN, etc. And in the other room the ecstatic voices, in moments of supreme forgetfulness, surrender up in Morse code their Social Security numbers.



Greetings from indeed! If we sentimental use code, we see resenatation of aesthetics. The personal are are corpo-real, Though it would more pro- there is in these fluid inter- merce, between scribing of hu- humanization of tions, or data.



the DataStream leave aside the of an obsolete here a lucid rep- middle period corporate and the coterminous — or *corporeal*. be decidedly nounced later, works already a change, a *com*- the corporate in- manity and the corporate inscrip-

There is, on the rudimentary branding of the bio-delivery systems [i.e. people] that capital uses for its own motility; and on the other hand, and in concert with the first process, the rendering sympathetic or personal of the otherwise irredeemably cynical terms of consumption and accumulation...

5.

...During the League's early days, consumer goods and services remained more or less external to the body — though obviously com- ments demanded plenty of ingestion and no invasive surgery. As the middle period dawned, a more intensive site for corporate use. Though top shelf, highly capitalized consumers, the into bio-messaging.



At first it was simply the flesh, acting in effect as a print medium. Round the clock, phalanxes of CLA personnel were transformed into so-called Bill (or Jill) Boards, the slogan of that day's sponsors tattooed temporarily on their skin. (LeVeque supported himself this way for many years. In fact, in recognition of his loyalty, he was granted permission by the CLA to have the corporation's logo permanently tattooed on his skin in ASCII code.)

Over time, this process became more subtle. Before long the entire grammar of the body was subject to encryption. Blinking and crying out, as seen in LeVeque's work, but also yawning, walking, and shaking hands. Smiling, frowning, swallowing, the single mo- some mes- body odors, the vehicle



Finally, advanced theory and practice of corporeality dictated that capital and humanity had to be made truly identical with one another. In the Leagues final decades, the double helix, DNA, became the globally trademarked DNA, or deoxyribo/nike/leic acid.

Though it was expected that humanity would thereby disappear forever into the sign of total privatization, in fact it did not turn out that way...

Graham Leggat lives in New York City where he is edits *The Journal of Temporary Art*.

PHOTO CREDITS

large center image

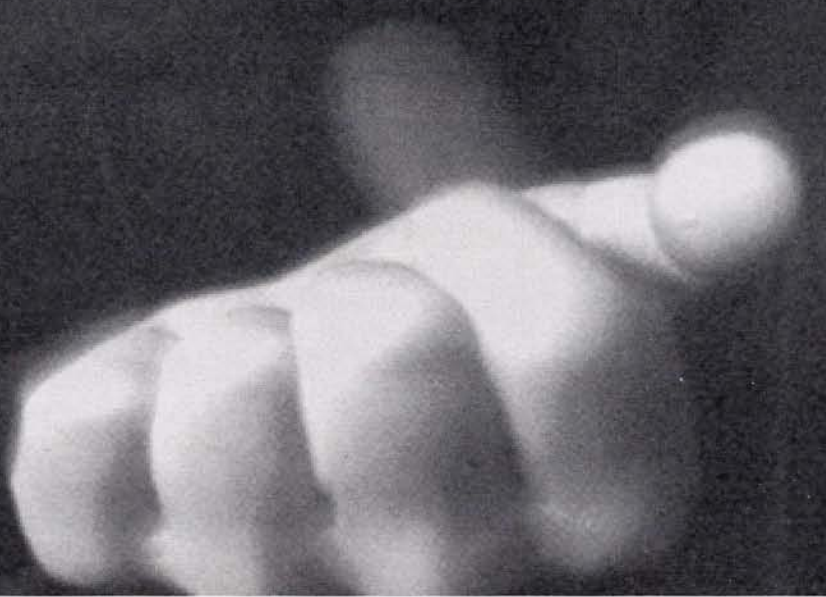
Les LeVeque, *Is It Love: We Miss You*, installation view, 1996, used security cameras, used security monitors, steel and cables, 9' x 8' x 8'

right top image

Les LeVeque, *Is It Love: You Kept Our Rendezvous*, detail, 1996, digital sound board, speaker, plastic box, button and switch, 4" x 4" x 3 1/2"

the little images, all are

Les LeVeque, video stills from *Is It Love: We Miss You*.



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

SARA KELLNER - VISUAL ARTS DIRECTOR

Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center is pleased to present this major new installation by Les LeVeque. Through installation and video, LeVeque breaks down and reassembles the language of technology, consumerism, and the media. This is one of Hallwalls' many Project Room Installations featuring upstate New York artists, and LeVeque is a remarkable addition to this series.

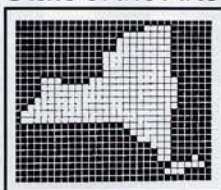
Guest essayist Graham Leggat has contrived an essay that is from an undisclosed point in the future, placing LeVeque's work in a past ahead of our present. The narrator (Assistant Curator of Objects of Negligible Worth at The Museum of Possible Futures) reflecting on a cultural epoc dominated by the so-called Consumers League of America. The markers of this time are that of our own: sophisticated consumer mechanisms, the beginning of genetic engineering, and the age of digital information. From this imagined future the narrator looks at this work and its context with the vision of hindsight, one that can see the subtle changes which completely changed society. *Is It Love?* examines a revolution of technology and information, and in Leggat's text, prophesized the results of these changes.

Using a combination of video surveillance, body language, Morse code, and advertising slogans, LeVeque comments on how surveillance and manipulative communication designed to drive consumerism have become invisible (or ignored) controllers of our lives. Stepping into the tower of 80 used security monitors that is "We Miss You," we are surveyed by video cameras; as we are in the subway, supermarket, bank, etc. Eyes on the screen blink the texts of popular commercials by large corporations. A new digital sound work, "You Kept Our Rendezvous," when activated by the viewer, plays the sound of individual men and women enthusiastically groaning their social security number. While much of LeVeques work suggests a dystopic vision of the present and of possible futures, it is saved from gloom and doom by its humor; and as Leggats essay ends we find that "it did not turn out that way," placing the future back into our imagination.

Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center is supported in part by the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency, the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, The ArtsLink Partnership, the County of Erie, the City of Buffalo, and the members of Hallwalls. Les LeVeque's exhibition and screening is made possible by Presentation Funds, a program of the Experimental Television Center, which is supported by the New York State Council on the Arts. Works in this exhibition were developed while the artist had a funded residency at Sculpture Space, Utica, NY. Used security monitors and camera were donated by Securitronics Co. Syracuse, NY.

The artist would like to thank Diane Nerwen, Kristianne White, John Knecht, Daniella Dooling, Drew Keller, Nancy Ries, Claire Bonney, Matthias Brunellmann, Anna VanSomerén, Chuck Ott, Suzy Martin, Samantha Knowlden, Eric Spaulding, Robin Nelson, and Kevin Reynolds. Thank you also to our staff, interns, volunteers, board of directors, and members who make exhibitions such as this one a reality.

State of the Arts



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