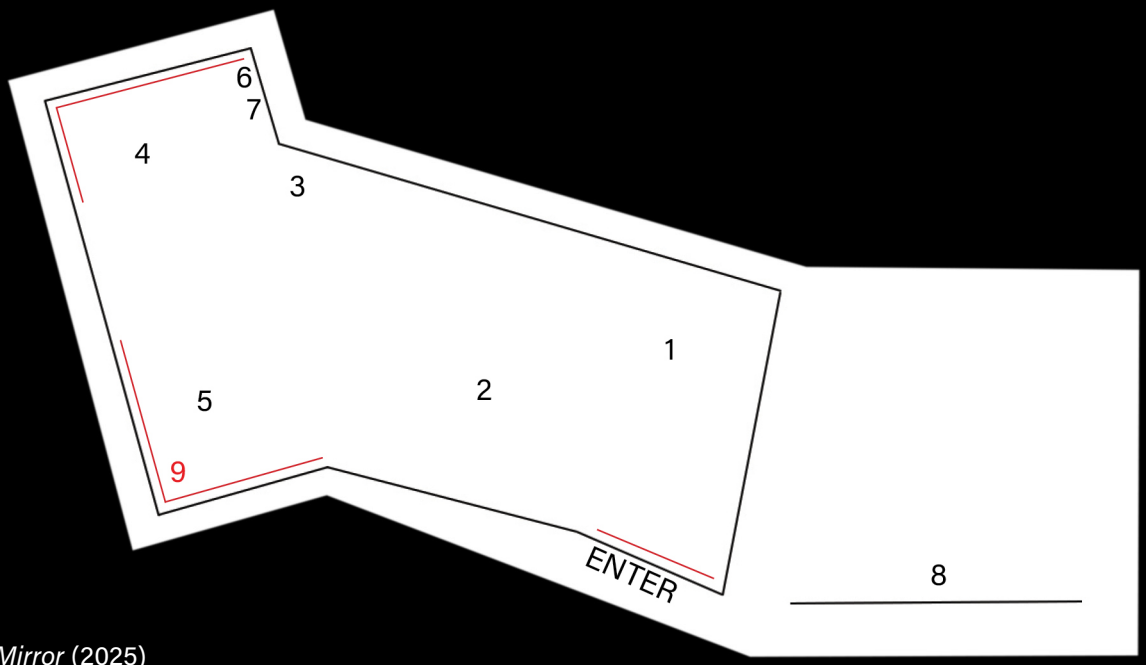


MFA Thesis Exhibition

SEARCH TERM

On view May 3 - 18 2025 > Structural and Materials Engineering Gallery > La Jolla, CA

Search Term shines light on the interface. Through installation, sculpture, video and collage, the exhibition shifts our relationship to the technologies of mediation that govern daily life. I test the porosity of perceived barriers like the screen and the window, interfering with their structure in order to clarify their function. Employing diverse methods of defamiliarization - framing, reflection, disassembly, reassembly, obscuring - I aim to redirect the gaze inwards. The result is a mise-en-abyme of the apparatus itself.



1 *The Bad Mirror* (2025)
50 x 49 ½ x 23 inches
Housing and mirror from 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV, paint

2 *The Inevitability of the Image* (2025)
38 x 66 x 1 inches
2024 Samsung Class DU6950 Series Crystal UHD 4K Smart TV, assorted smartphones

3 *Conduit* (2025)
48 x 28 x 2 ½ inches
Lens and frame from 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV

4 *A Tool for Seeing* (2025)
23 ½ x 23 ½ x 22 ½ inches
Lumber from 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV, lenses from assorted smartphones, RCA XL100 CRT TV, Epson projector, paint

5 *In Obsolescence* (2025)
42 x 25 x 37 inches
Circuit board from 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV, X-Ray viewing box from UCSD medical facility, lumber, paint

6 *Light Memory 1* (2025)
11 x 14 inches
Inkjet print, marker and paint on paper

7 *Light Memory 2* (2025)
11 x 14 inches
Inkjet print, marker and paint on paper

8 *Scopic Me* (2024)
1 minute 27 seconds, looping
Digital animation

9 *Search Term* (2025)
Dimensions variable, site-specific
Duvetyne, gaffer's tape

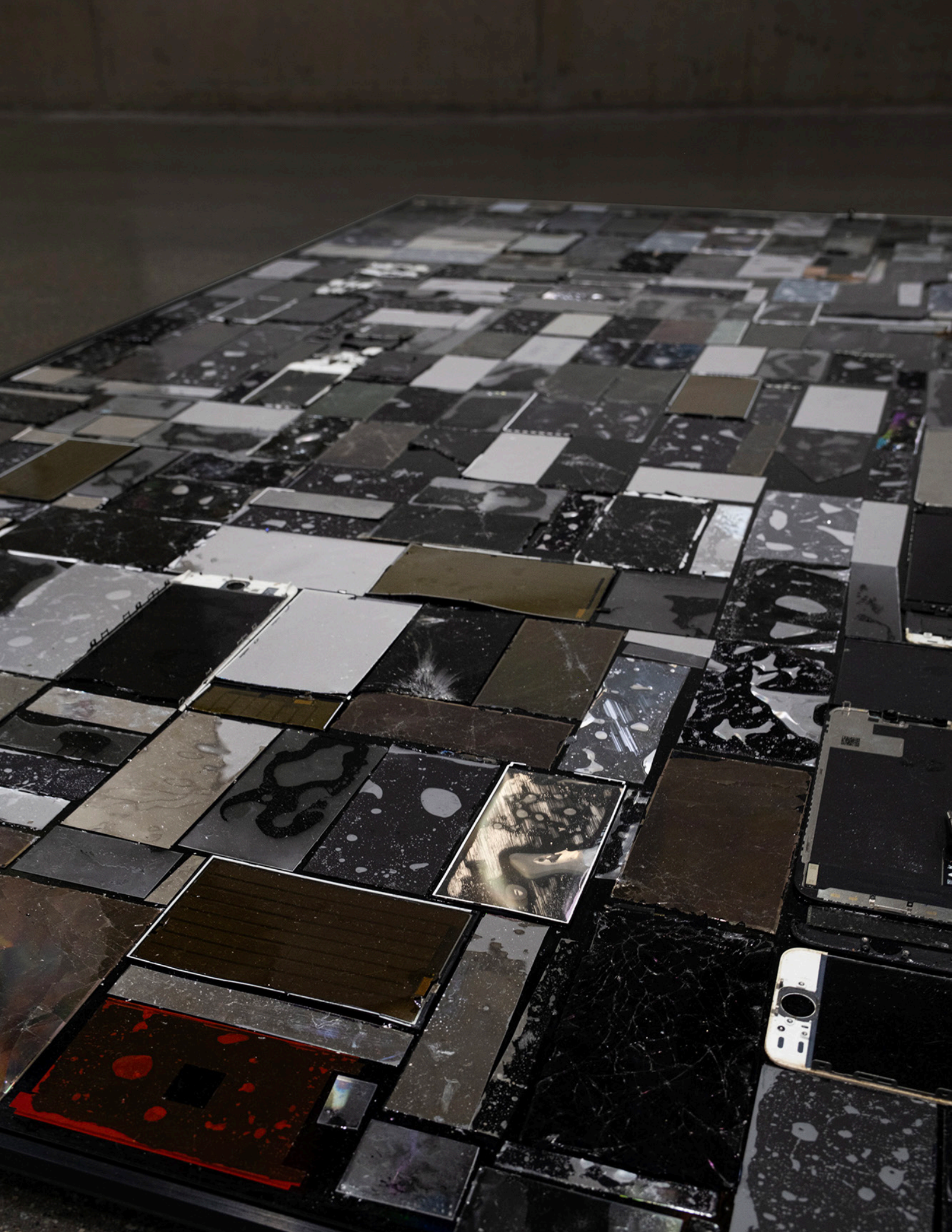


The Bad Mirror (2025) > 50 x 49 ½ x 23 inches > Housing and mirror from 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV, paint





The Inevitability of the Image (2025) > 38 x 66 x 1 inches > 2024 Samsung Class DU6950 Series Crystal UHD 4K Smart TV, assorted smartphones





Conduit (2025) > 48 x 28 x 2 ½ inches > Lens and frame from 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV

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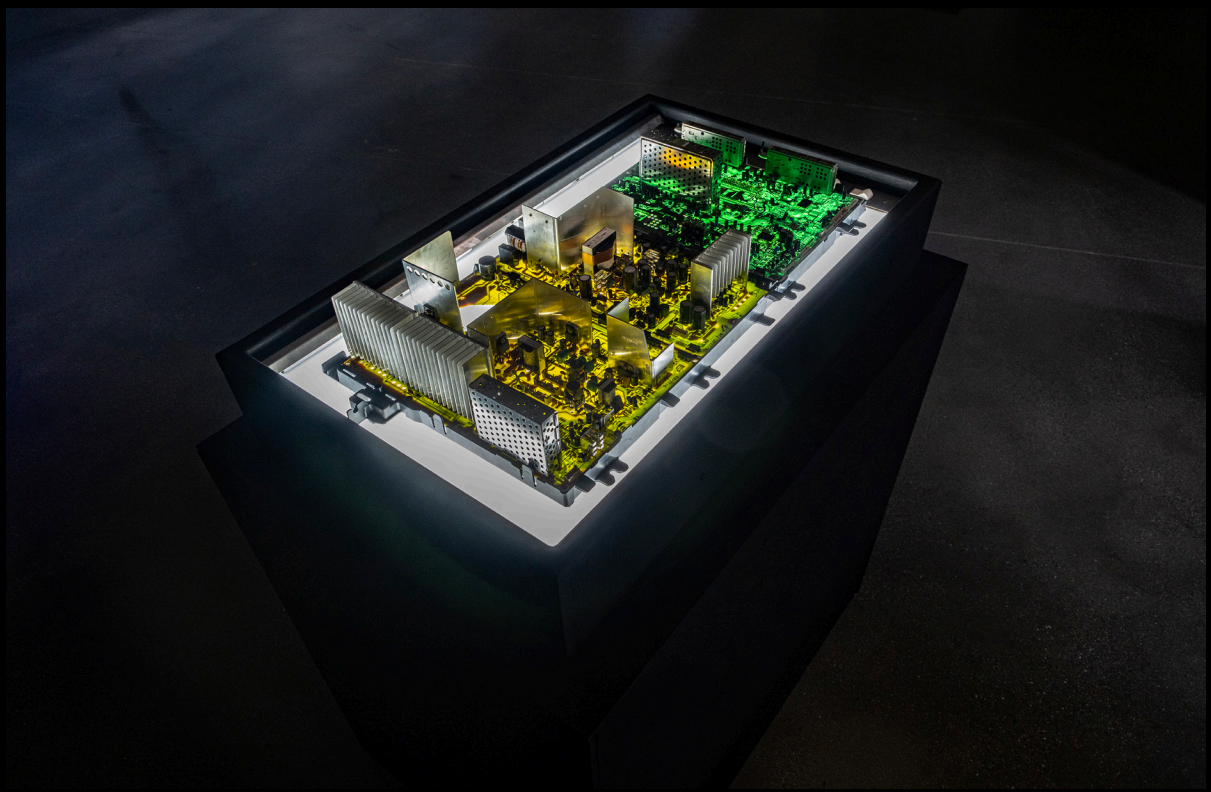


A Tool for Seeing (2025) > 23 ½ x 23 ½ x 22 ½ inches > Lumber from 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV, lenses from assorted smartphones, RCA XL100 CRT TV, Epson projector, paint



In Obsolescence (2025) > 42 x 25 x 37 inches > Circuit board from 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV, X-Ray viewing box from UCSD medical facility, lumber, paint







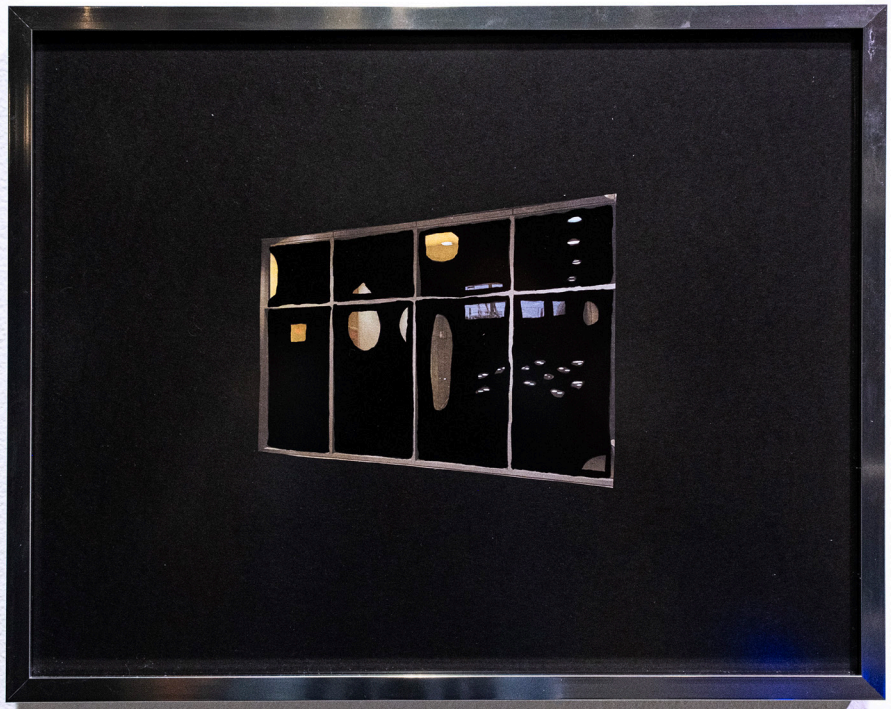
Search Term (2025) > Dimensions variable, site-specific > Duvetyne, gaffer's tape







Light Memory 1 + 2 (2025) > 11 x 14 inches > Inkjet print, marker and paint on paper



Light Memory 2 (2025) > 11 x 14 inches > Inkjet print, marker and paint on paper



Scopic Me (2024) > 1 minute 27 seconds, looping > Digital animation

https://vimeo.com/1092871235

SOME REFLECTIONS

Search Term was presented in the ground floor gallery of the University of California San Diego's Structural and Materials Engineering building. The architecture of this space reflects the research pursued within it: raw concrete floors support exposed steel beams while the open ceiling reveals the internal network of pipes and ducts that keep the building breath-ing. Half of the gallery's walls are made of glass, creating visual porosity between the streets outside, the building's lobby and the gallery itself.

This exhibition first sprouted out of consideration of the form and function of the space in which it is installed. *Search Term* is a site-specific installation work that responds to the mechanical feel of the gallery and the layers of looking its design provokes.

I began by photographing the empty gallery. I focused specifically on the windows, making images that capture their network of light and reflection. I then drew and collaged on top of the printed photos, tracing around the perceived light sources as they appear in the flat im-age and blacking out the rest of the glass. These works, *Light Memory 1 + 2*, are included in the show and function as a key to unlocking the rest of the exhibition.

I covered all the gallery's windows with a velvety black fabric called Duvetyne. A staple on theatrical and film sets, Duvetyne is known for its light-blocking properties. The fabric's thick weave absorbs light and destroys dimensionality. I cut voids into the fabric mimicking those from the drawings, selectively allowing light to enter the space and creating multiple frames of bi-directional viewing in and through the room.

I do not use overhead lighting; the works are illuminated only by the sun or the lighting mechanisms embedded within them. Look closely inside *A Tool for Seeing* and you can see a projector beaming out its idle blue light. The effect changes depending on the weather conditions and time of day. When the sun lines up just right, the whole room is transformed into a camera obscura.

With *Search Term* I am passing light through different mediums (photography, drawing, collage, sculpture) until it comes out the other end as an embodied experience. I am thinking about the human voyeuristic impulse, the way a viewfinder urges us to look. Viewers and passers-by become part of the work as they look and are looked at, creating photos and videos by responding to the frames of the room. My research over the last three years has increasingly focused on tearing apart the machine; now, the viewer is put inside it.

One hole displays a series of red velvet chairs immediately reminiscent of a theater. From afar, a viewer is lured in by the bright red of the seats; it appears as if a screen has been placed behind the fabric curtain. As one walks closer, the perspective shifts: it is not a screen or an image but in fact a window into the room next door, a theater with stadium seating. It is a destabilizing realization, a broken illusion which calls into question the structure of the entire institution.

Inside this theater, an animation plays on the big screen for an absent audience. This animation, *Scopic Me*, is composed of thousands of hand-rotoscoped frames of digital video. The footage depicts a figure disassembling the same Rear Projection TV that became the basis for many of the sculptures in the show. Everything in the frame is erased except for the angular shape of the apparatus itself. The device thus appears to be disassembled by magic, opening itself up via ghostly intervention.

If the Duvetyne installation represent the camera obscura – the original photographic technology – the rest of the sculptures in the gallery fill out an abbreviated history of imaging mechanisms. From the CRT TV to the projector, the flatscreen and the smartphone, these technologies are layered, hollowed out and recombined into hybrid vehicles of looking.

The Inevitability of the Image is made from hundreds of recycled smartphone screens layered over a flatscreen television. The TV is broken in such a way that it turns itself on and off in perpetuity, illuminating and then going dark as it searches for a fix. The screens are made of several thin layers of material each with a different level of opacity and reflectivity. These have been separated and adhered to the screen, fingerprints and air bubbles lending hu-man texture to this cyber mosaic.

The sculptures titled *Conduit*, *The Bad Mirror* and *In Obsolescence* are all crafted from a single recycled TV, specifically a 2003 Hitachi 51S500 Rear Projection TV. I am drawn to this specific technology because of its anachronism: it contains traces of an entire lineage of imaging technologies within it. Large and bulky, their form resembles a puppet theater or an architectural model of a stage. Their internal mechanisms are surprisingly simple: three colored projection lamps project onto a mirror, which bounces the image onto a large Fresnel lens. It represents the last time light actually moved through the air inside a device. These objects are part magic lantern, part Pepper's Ghost, yet firmly associated with the 1990s and 2000s in our cultural memory.

The Bad Mirror presents the TV stripped of everything except its external housing and mirror. The area of the screen is split in two: half a void that frames the gallery behind it, half a mirror that reflects the viewer back at themselves. Mirrors have a rich relationship to psychoanalytic and technological history; much of my work could be read as a ripping apart of Lacan's idea of mirror stage as expressed through our digital tools. I keep thinking of this work in relation to the classic magic show trick of sawing a woman in half: the illusion of an impossible bodily feat, facilitated by a complex machine. The title is a reference to the "bad object," a term used by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein to refer to the part of an external object onto which a person projects negative or frightening internal beliefs.

To make *Conduit*, I used a scribe to etch into the Fresnel lens of the TV. The image is an interpretation of the circuit board from inside the same TV. The lines appear and disappear depending on the viewing angle and what is on the other side of the lens. This work grew out of a series of drawings I made last year, in which I used the process of blind contour to combine digital detritus into imaginary machines. In my practice, drawing is an intermedi-ary. I use it to sketch out a sculpture or clarify a form in my head. The drawing is an artifact of a thought process, an idea gaining a body. In this way, I approach drawing in the same way as I approach disassembling the TV. It is a process of haptic apprehension, about creating a conduit between human and artificial brains.

The goal of *Search Term* is to shine light on the interface. I want to shift our relationship to the technologies of mediation that govern daily life – and have for centuries. The exhibition tests the porosity of perceived barriers like the screen and the window, interfering with their structure in order to clarify their function. Employing diverse methods of defamiliarization - framing, reflection, disassembly, reassembly, obscuring - I redirect the gaze inwards. The result is a mise-en-abyme of the apparatus itself.

Maddie Butler, 2025

