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A Choreographer Goes Video, Featuring a 99-Year-Old Star

These days lots of choreographers are trying their hands at video — lots more, unfortunately, than are good at it or even seem to know what it's about. Those artists might consider

ART

CLAUDIA LA ROCCO

ambling over to the Kitchen, where Ralph Lemon's quiet but richly layered video installation is the central element in "(The efflorescence of) Walter."

Organized by guest curators, Anthony Allen and Claire Tancons, this mixed-media exhibition is his first solo show in New York, and a graceful public foray into visual art.

Mr. Lemon has long mesmerized audiences with his ambitious, heady performances; his "Geography Trilogy," an exploration of race, history and memory, spanned a decade and three continents. But like Bruce Nauman, a key presence in this show, Mr. Lemon is a slippery artist, even evasive, and it is not surprising that he would move so nimbly between disciplines. (A smaller show, a result of Mr. Lemon's residency at the New School's Eugene Lang College, is on display at 65 West 11th Street in Greenwich Village through the summer, and offers glimpses into his thoughts on his artistic process as a form in itself.)

The Kitchen exhibition, both spare and nuanced, features drawings, paintings on paper, a homespun "Spaceship" sculpture, and "Attic Space," a steel-and-plywood re-creation of a humble interior that was used in the final installment of "The Geography Trilogy," called "Come Home Charley Patton" (2004).

On a suspended monitor a video animation of James Baldwin, also featured in "Patton," furthers Mr. Lemon's complex relationship with this African-American intellectual, who functions as alter ego, sage and conduit.

But the real star is Walter, as in Walter Carter, a 99-year-old resident of Yazoo City, Miss., who undertakes meaning-laden tasks on various video screens, while Mr. Lemon directs him off camera. As viewers move through the space, the relationships among the screens change, complicating an already fragmented, yet deeply rooted, reality.

"The past is all that makes the

"(The efflorescence of) Walter" runs through June 23 at the Kitchen's second-floor gallery, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 255-5793.

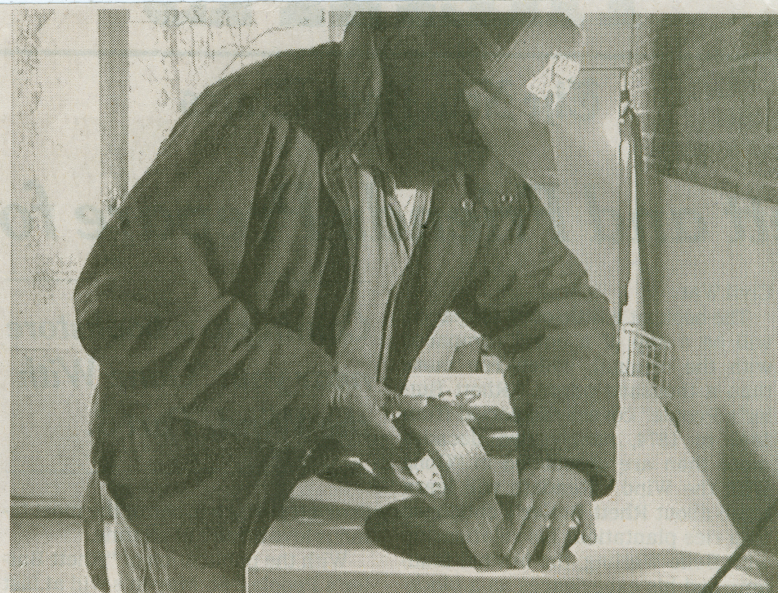


An animation of the writer James Baldwin provides commentary.

present coherent," Baldwin wrote in "Notes of a Native Son," and in the video his warm, gravelly voice offers: "This will be contested. Nevertheless, it's got to start somewhere."

The notion of coherence vying with contested versions (not to mention subversions and stereotypes) of the past runs throughout the installation. As Mr. Carter, a living embodiment of Southern history, destroys a ceramic rabbit in his front yard, Mr. Lemon, in a bunny suit, aims a pistol into a winter field.

A smaller monitor shows a wounded Mr. Lemon, still in bunny suit, fleeing across the field's brown stubble. Will the Brer Rabbit stereotype, attacked by itself, make it? Mr. Lemon does have to start somewhere. But, wisely, he points to no definitive endings.



Photographs courtesy of Ralph Lemon

In "(The efflorescence of) Walter," a video, the 99-year-old Walter Carter performs various tasks. In this still he "repairs" a record with tape.