

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

APRIL 29, BY ALEX FEIM

In Case of Sam Spillman at Ulterior Gallery



Installation view, courtesy of Ulterior Gallery

Far from the palatial white cubes of Chelsea or the intimate townhouse spaces of the Upper East Side is a different type of gallery space – one that serves as a reminder of an earlier moment in the art world, and yet persists into the present – the SoHo loft. In his debut solo exhibition, [Sam Spillman](#) has created work that probes at this history in *In Case Of Sam Spillman* at Ulterior Gallery.

Previously located on a ground level space on Attorney Street in the Lower East Side, Ulterior Gallery has moved to a 6th floor loft space in a landmark designated building in SoHo. The gallery is accessible via an elevator that opens directly on the street at 424 Broadway, just north of the major downtown crossing of Broadway and Canal Street.

After arriving at the top floor of 424 Broadway, the viewer walks through a door and down a dimly lit and slightly claustrophobic hallway. Proceeding down the hallway, there is a small kitchen space to the left, followed by a reception desk, and to the right, a large cross-shaped cut that must be somewhat awkwardly stepped through to access the main gallery space.

The cross-shaped cut serves as something of a portal – into the main gallery space, but also to a moment that appears to be somewhere else in space and time. The strange quality of the space is established by a TV monitor that is plugged into the wall with a long cord, lying on the floor, with the screen facing up. Grey pixels flash and then pause, making the viewer wonder whether this is its intended state, or if something has gone awry.



Installation view, courtesy of Ulterior Gallery



Installation view, courtesy of Ulterior Gallery

Adjacent to the pixelated monitor is a large object that operates somewhere in the intersection between sculpture, architecture, installation, and site-specific intervention. As the viewer approaches this object – a large-scale white box, almost reminiscent of a sculpture pedestal blown up, or maybe a work of minimalism – its complexities slowly start to reveal themselves.

Approaching the object from either side, the viewer encounters a door that is cracked open onto a bedroom scene. Yet something is not quite right, beyond the fact that this is a domestic space transported to a gallery – the scale is slightly miniaturized, the furnishings appear oddly retro, and barely discernible whispers can be heard. There's a vague sense of voyeurism, as if the viewer is sneaking a look into a private space that they have not been invited in to. As they move around the object, they encounter the same – or nearly the same – bedroom scene from another door and a different perspective on the other side of the constructed object-room.

This uncanny doubling creates a sense of disorientation, but only for a moment, as one attempts to resolve the question of whether these are two different rooms, or two views into the same room. The resolve never quite occurs, but instead brings one to a place of psychological and phenomenological memory, where we think about how certain kinds of spaces enact on the body in particular ways.



Installation view, courtesy of Ulterior Gallery

Though trained as a sculptor, Spillman draws on previous architecture and construction experience to create his work, and uses architecture as a way to reflect memory and psychological states. He grew up in a family of artists, initially on Walker Street in SoHo a few blocks from the gallery's current location, and spent time in artists' studios and spaces. Through the space, he explores the history of the SoHo loft as a living and working space for artists, and evokes the history of this particular space, which at various points had been a gallery and an apartment.

One thinks of a gallery as a physical location – something of a neutral space, usually with white walls, where paintings are hung on the walls, and sculptures are placed on pedestals. Yet in reality, it is something much less tangible than that – it is a constellation of ideas, artists, and objects which at various points come together in spaces that are never neutral. In Case of Sam Spillman considers Ulterior Gallery's past and future, while also gesturing toward the idea of a gallery itself as a more abstract form.

Further unraveling the experience of art as a static and unchanging object, and thinking about the complexities of phenomenological perception, In Case Of Sam Spillman will unfold in two subsequent phases starting on April 27th and May 4th.



Installation view, courtesy of Ulterior Gallery

In Case of Sam Spillman is on view at Ulterior Gallery through May 7th.

[Alex Feim](#) is a writer based in Brooklyn. She is interested in work that explores the spaces between mediums, as well as intersections between art and architecture. She received her BA and MA in Art History from Binghamton University.