



House Party, 2013

© Anthony Lepore; Courtesy M+B Gallery, Los Angeles, and François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles

Flash: Anthony Lepore

August 16–November 29, 2014

The creak of the door is nearly audible as the viewer peers into a room filled with houseplants. It is an otherworldly scene staged in an otherwise simple domestic setting: white ceiling, wooden floor, lamp fixture without its shade, a singular fluorescent bulb protruding awkwardly. But this is not a typical guest room; the walls have been shrouded in opaque black fabric, and plants populate the floor and hang down from the ceiling. The picture at once conveys extreme flatness and pictorial depth. The edges of each plant appear as graphic cutouts against the black background, but the wide shot of the setup—the choice to include doorway, foreground, and ceiling—reveals the method by which this flatness was achieved, ultimately undoing it. Natural light streams in from the left side of the scene, casting shadows from a window frame onto pots and wall. The afternoon light, dappled through outdoor foliage, lands on the ceiling. The scene is augmented by artificial light from below, emanating from a lamp carefully hidden among the pots. The plants themselves are deliberately staged against the flat black background, peaking out from behind one another. Together they seemingly pose for this peculiar group portrait.

Anthony Lepore's *House Party* (2013) positions the onlooker as voyeur, simultaneously peeking—"like walking in on your parents having sex"—and being invited into the room.¹ The subjects are given a performative space; by this staging, the artist considers his own relationship to nature within the domestic sphere. Lepore explores notions of internal and external domesticity throughout the "Nocturne" series of which *House Party* is part, documenting temporary arrangements of garden hoses, rolled sod, and individual potted plants. These poetic interventions amount to an exploration of the natural and domestic worlds. The leafy plants and succulents here, each potted in its own dedicated quantity of earth, speak to the curious human inclination to harness nature into transportable units.

As with other works in the series, *House Party* was staged for the photograph. Lepore's use of light is an integral component of the resulting picture. Inspired by the night photography of Robert Adams, Lepore

transformed the spare bedroom in his home to accommodate a sort of "permanent night," a darkened space in which to arrange still lifes. Made using a long photographic exposure,² *House Party* is an intricately descriptive document of the plants as they hang, wilting, leaves browning from insufficient sunlight. The prolonged exposure, Lepore proposes, mirrors the slow movements of botanic life. In this way, *House Party* stems from a deeply empathetic and intimate core. The absurdity of these personified houseplants, crowded together into a room, and illuminated by bluish natural light and the mysterious, seemingly internal warm glow of the lamp, evokes magical realism. Furthermore, by echoing the effects of digital editing—constructing what he refers to as an "analog illusion"—Lepore's photograph speaks in a language that it simultaneously subverts. After all, potted houseplants, too, straddle artificial and organic worlds.

—Joanna Szupinska-Myers, CMP Curator of Exhibitions, with Kathryn Poindexter, CMP Curatorial Assistant

Notes

1. All quotes are from conversations with the artist, August 2014.
2. Lepore employed 5-10 minute exposures for the "Nocturne" series.

Anthony Lepore (born 1977 in Burbank, California) is a Los Angeles-based photographer. The artist's work has been featured in solo exhibitions in Los Angeles, Kansas City, New York, and Basel, Switzerland; has been included in group exhibitions throughout the United States, France, and Italy; and was included in the 2010 Portugal Biennial, and the Guggenheim Foundation-organized exhibition *Art in America: 300 Years of Innovation* at the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art in 2007. His work is held in the permanent collections of the Guggenheim Museum, New York; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. Lepore earned his MFA from Yale University in 2005, and his BFA from Fordham University in 2000.

Flash! contemporary art series features single works made within the last year and is organized by Joanna Szupinska-Myers at the California Museum of Photography, part of UCR ARTSblock. *Flash: Anthony Lepore* is the sixth project in the series.