

Matthew Brown

Dan Herschlein

The Long-Fingered Hand

633 N La Brea Ave

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In an iconic scene from the expressionist horror film *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922), the title vampire ascends a foreboding staircase under the cover of night. Yet *Nosferatu* himself is absent from the frame. Instead, the camera tracks his stark silhouette in the dim light. His outstretched fingers are elongated in their shadow form. They extend impossibly, inhumanly to graze the threshold of an open doorway. His intended victim is concealed from view by the darkness and the architecture of the door frame, yet we fear she's nearly in his reach.

Taking its name from this genre-defining moment, Dan Herschlein's *The Long-Fingered Hand* uses the visual language of horror cinema to chart the expansive reach of the immaterial psychosocial forces that shape our experience of ourselves, one another, and our surroundings.

The paintings, sculptures, and wall reliefs on view continue the artist's exploration of the many ways in which our expectations, fears, and most private desires become embedded within the domestic apparatus. Throughout the exhibition, Herschlein deploys tropes from folklore and film to transform a familiar domestic environment into an uncanny stage where our shared notions of identity, security, and secrecy manifest.

Like an establishing shot in a haunted house film, the small painting *Nestled Into Nowhere* (2023) sets the tone and introduces the setting where the exhibition's action will unfold. A small house is set into the side of a dark and scraggly mountain. Its windows and foundation glow an acidic green, illuminating the small clearing where it stands. There is not another house or soul in sight. This occult chiaroscuro situates the exhibition's interior scenes within a landscape of physical and psychological isolation.

Permeated by a gothic proclivity for leaky boundaries, Herschlein's work typifies cultural critic Mark Fisher's theory of the uncanny by "process[ing] the outside through the gaps and impasses of the inside." Herschlein's weird and eerie scenes probe the physical and psychological thresholds that separate our private interior lives from the exterior environments we inhabit.

In the life-scale *In The Room Behind Your Eyelids*, *The Will of the Wisp*, and *The Lure* (all 2023), windows become peepholes for our penetrating gaze. Boundaries are visibly under stress in *Extension Cord* (2023): the wall bulges, droops, and swells. Could there be something attempting to breach the walls from the outside? Or is something lurking within the walls themselves?

A spirit of repression pervades the exhibition: rendered in pallid flesh tones, the walls express the physical effect of repression on the body. They also express the extent to which repression is, on the one hand, an innate condition that is built into our social structures, and on the other hand, an impossible condition to maintain. Those integral aspects of self and culture, so deeply embedded, create cracks and fissures as they bore their way to the surface.

In *We Can Go Through Keyholes* (2023), a fishing line is affixed to the knob of a cracked door. The faint shadow of a reclining figure follows the fishing line to its mysterious end point, just out of frame. The title suggests some immaterial force (perhaps a ghost, a shadow, or a concept) that can transgress boundaries and enter our homes—not just despite, but by means of the very mechanisms meant to keep them secure.

This fishing line functions as a prosthesis throughout the exhibition, allowing Herschlein to track off-frame movements, their influence, and their reverberations. A long-fingered hand, it lures the unseen into view. So too does the camera: it directs our gaze and understanding by

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framing and processing reality for consumption as an image; it enables us to transform our own ever-changing selves into stable images to revisit later.

Herschlein's sculpture *VHS CAMERA* (2023) wields this power to chilling effect. The artist's own VHS camera is meticulously reproduced in wood. This facsimile elicits the same sense of self-conscious discomfort as a functional camera might, despite our knowledge that we are not actually being surveilled or asked to perform for it.

The VHS camera, through its self-contained functionality, promises a kind of privacy that feels like a relic of the pre-digital age. Favored by movie murderers, perverts, and mad-scientists, the VHS camera is used in cinema as a shorthand for secrecy, deviancy, and the transgression of social boundaries.

In a famous sequence in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), serial killer Buffalo Bill dons makeup and performs a tuckered dance for a VHS camera. In this gender euphoric moment, Buffalo Bill's trans identity is affirmed dialectically, through her private moment of respite with the VHS camera. That Buffalo Bill is the film's villain creates a false association between extreme violence, secrecy, and the creation of new identities. The message is clear: there's a danger in nonconformism and transgression, whether done secretly or out in the open.

Like Nosferatu, Buffalo Bill embodies our cultural fear of Otherness, and the alchemic power of storytelling, which can transform a human being into a monstrous image.

The exhibition's title work gestures to the monstrous transformations. A gruesome hand is shriveled and curled: we assume this fragment is normally tucked away, like those concealed aspects of ourselves that, if fully expressed, could grant a feeling of wholeness. Herschlein delicately displays this relic atop a readymade dresser for contemplation. A personal memento of a past-self, it becomes something to hold onto while reaching out towards something else, something stranger, something private.

Dan Herschlein (b. 1989, Bayville, NY) lives and works in Los Angeles. They received their BFA from New York University in 2010.

Solo exhibitions include *Crickets in the City of Spare Parts*, Matthew Brown, Los Angeles (2021); *Dweller*, JTT, New York (2020); *Plot Hole*, Matthew Brown, Los Angeles (2019); *Night Pictures*, JTT, New York (2019); *The Architect*, New Museum, New York (2018); *Safe As Houses*, JTT, New York (2017); *The Stillness of Eddies*, 56 Henry, New York (2016); *Worm*, AALA, Los Angeles (2016).

Selected group exhibitions include *Papertrail*, Matthew Brown, Los Angeles (2023); *River Styx*, Sea View, Los Angeles (2023); *The Tale Their Terror Tells*, Lyle & King, New York (2022); *Recent Sculpture*, Matthew Brown, Los Angeles (2022); *Theorem X*, Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York (2021); *Ecce Puer*, PACT, Paris (2020); *Horology*, Jack Hanley, New York (2019); *The Pain of Others*, Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles (2018); *NVV_2018*, Museum of Modern Art, Dubrovnik, Croatia (2018); *Pine Barrens*, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2018); *Dinner that night*, Bureau, New York (2018).

Their work is currently on view in the Hammer Museum's biennial *Made in LA: Acts of Living*.