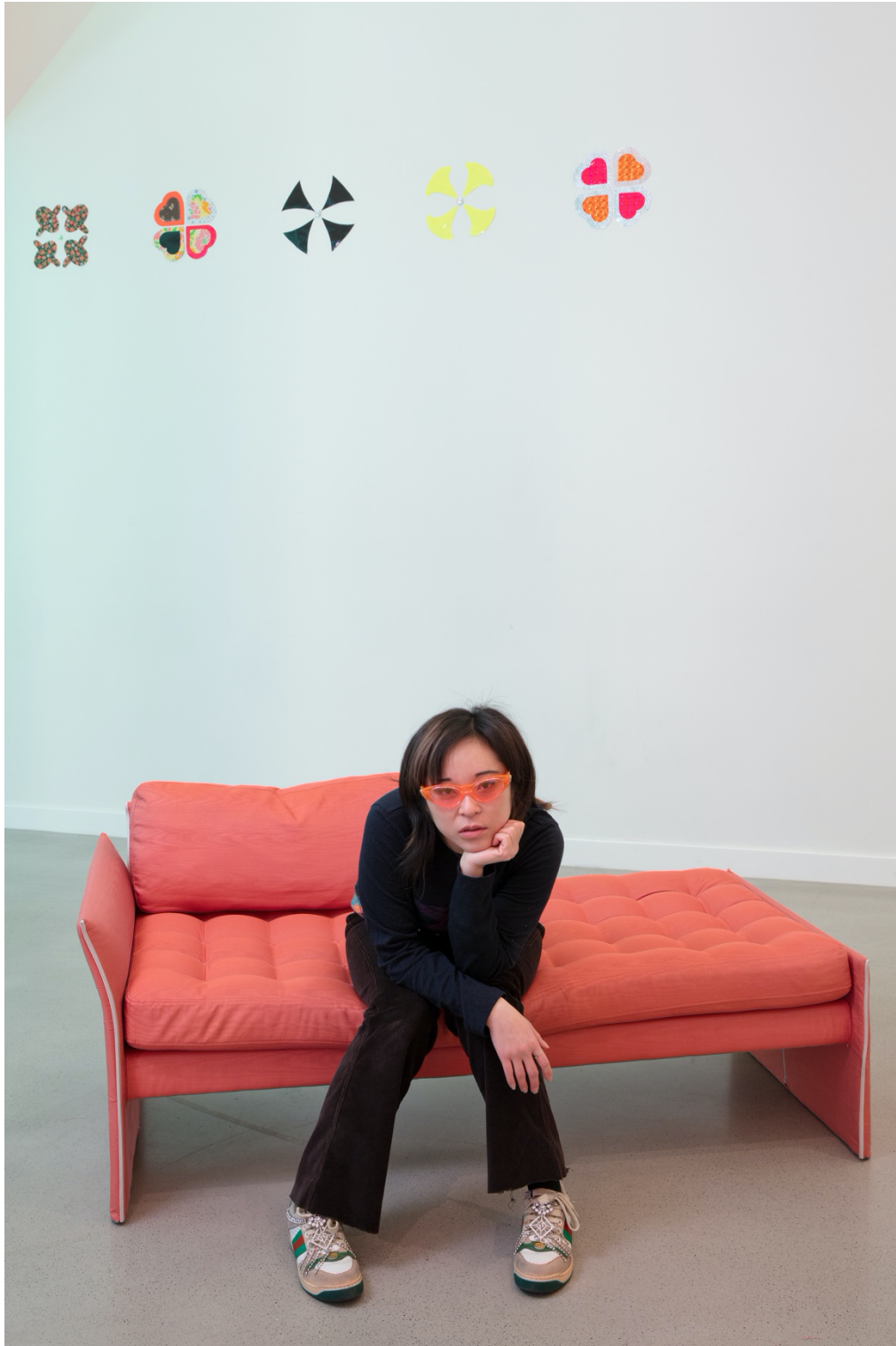


This Ultra-Cool Artist Is So Inspired by Teenagers in Malls That She Created an Installation Specifically for Nordstrom's Flagship

Maggie Lee created the installation in collaboration with the Whitney Museum.

Caroline Goldstein, April 8, 2021



Portrait of Maggie Lee by Connie Zhou. Courtesy of Nordstrom.

You are probably not doing much aimless browsing in stores right now. But if you did find yourself walking through the airy fifth floor of Nordstrom's 57th Street flagship in Manhattan, you would encounter an artist's tender ode to suburban teenage girlhood tucked in between rows of cosmetic displays and candy-colored athleisure.

The installation, by filmmaker and multimedia artist Maggie Lee, is the latest site-specific work in an ongoing partnership between the retailer and the Whitney Museum of American Art's emerging artist program, which began in 2018.

Malls have a special place in the artist's heart; she recalls spending endless afternoons as a child waiting for her mother to finish work at a department store in suburban New Jersey.

"I thought about department stores and malls and how teenagers like to spend time in places for long periods of time and for no good reason at all," the artist said in a statement. Of course, today, teens are more likely to spend time with one another in virtual space than real life. But Lee's work is a remnant of a less connected time, and extends an open invitation for anyone to loiter.

The installation, called *Daytime Sparkles*, is a more sanitized and arch version of other nostalgia trips, like Hulu's cringe-comedy series *Pen15*, which celebrate the awkwardness and joy of coming of age. What Lee wants is for others "to reclaim and be part of something. To see something special in the daytime—a sparkle is irregular."

The living room-style space is configured around clunky television sets, which screen commercials Lee created to advertise products that teenage girls could only dream of affording: luxe Diptyque candles with scents like Mimosa, Fig Tree, and Tuberose and \$65 Byredo Suede hand wash (perhaps the 2021 equivalent of Bath & Body Works cucumber-watermelon body spray).

On the walls, glittery floral cutouts and origami folding stars are arranged in clusters, alongside a few large "NO LOITERING" signs. A pop song the artist produced in collaboration with Stefan Tcherepnin is played over the speakers.



Installation view, Maggie Lee, "Daytime Sparkles." Photo: Connie Zhou. Courtesy of Nordstrom.

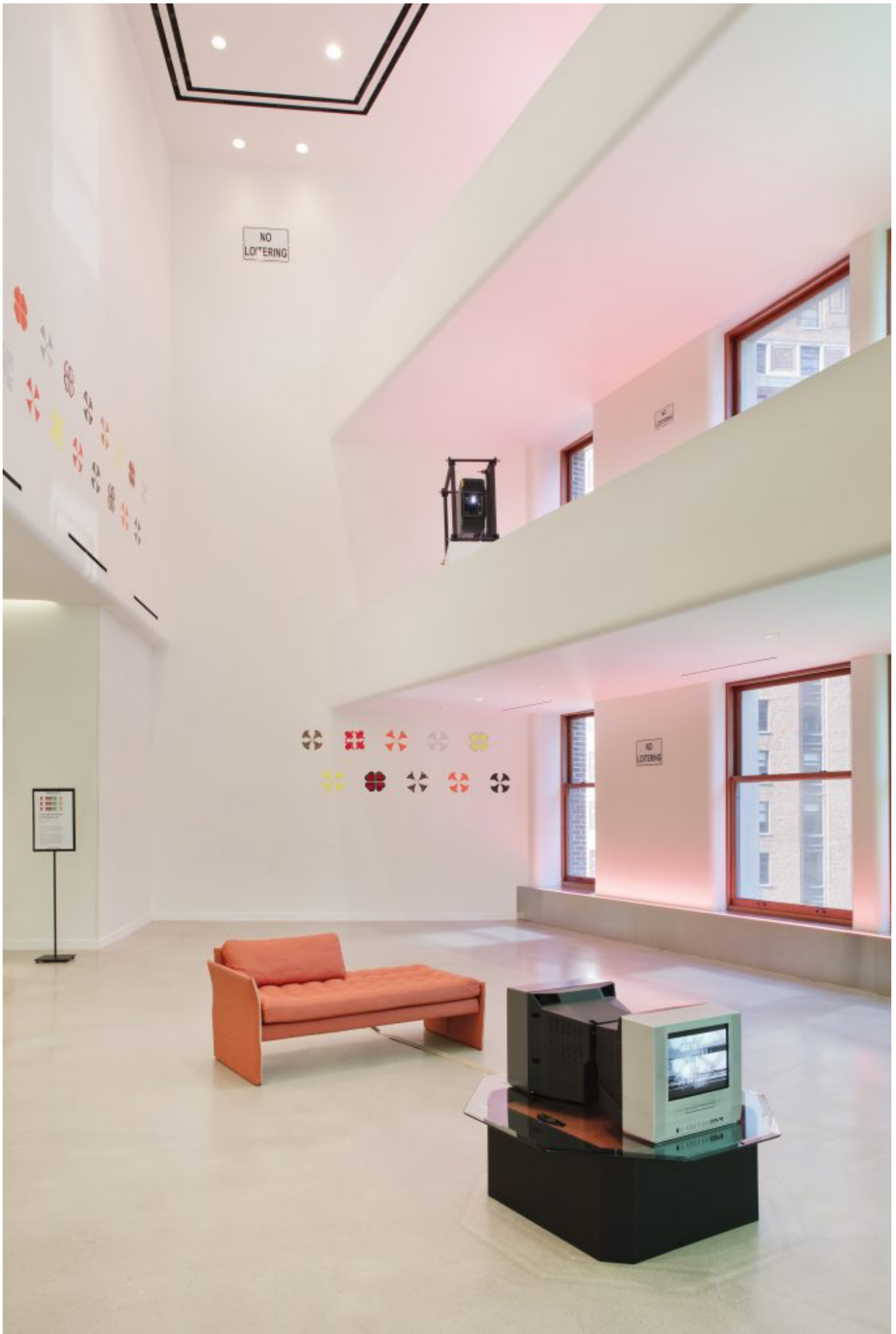
The seeds for this project were planted when Lee's mother died unexpectedly in 2012 and she found herself thrust back into her childhood home in suburban New Jersey. At the time, Lee was constantly blogging to work through her grief, and her posts caught the attention of producer Asher Penn, who invited her to turn her musings into a film. The result, a feature-length film called *Mommy*, was released in 2015 by Beta Pictures, and also figured in group shows at Greene Naftali and the Whitney.

Combining snippets of home videos, voicemails, family photographs, stuffed animals, and internet screen savers, *Mommy* is a sort of memorial time capsule. *Daytime Sparkles* continues this thread—but what is trapped in amber now is Lee's younger self and a past-time at the mall that may soon go extinct.

Daytime Sparkles is on view through May 16, 2021 at Nordstrom NYC Flagship, 5th Floor



Installation view of Maggie Lee's *Mommy* (2015) at the Whitney Museum of American Art.



Installation view, Maggie Lee, "Daytime Sparkles." Photo: Connie Zhou. Courtesy of Nordstrom.



Installation view, Maggie Lee, "Daytime Sparkles." Photo: Connie Zhou. Courtesy of Nordstrom.