

THIS LEMON IS NOT YELLOW

Jeroen Nelemans

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We are in love with our devices, the modern day theater. Rectangular or square, large or small, in the palm of our hands or in front of our faces, we gaze into them intently. Increasingly so, through these devices we play out the performative emotional narratives of our interpersonal relationships.

Artist Jeroen Nelemans investigates our ongoing relationship to the theatricality of the lit-up digital screen through a series of carefully crafted light boxes. His solo exhibition *This Lemon is Not Yellow* nods to the differing ways we experience color in digital and physical spaces.

Consider the yellow of a physical object, such as a lemon, and the color yellow as it appears on a computer screen. The yellow of a lemon is a result of subtractive light. The lemon absorbs wavelengths that come from a light source, reflecting back the yellow to our retinas. Computer screens, however, use additive light; we never see a real yellow on the screen, instead only witnessing a combination of red and green. The yellow we see on a computer screen or smartphone is an illusion.

Nelemans is invested in the ways that the screens trick our eyes, allowing an entire illusionistic, theatrical color performance to play out,

unbeknownst to our conscious mind. The light boxes contain cellophane arrangements housed in polarized Plexiglas sandwiches, as if they are illuminated post-language manuscripts, or futuristic digital paintings. Our eyes believe the colors. Like the magician hat emoji next to grinning and blushing yellow smiley face emoji, Nelemans masterfully arranges the digital, yet his light boxes are evidence of this strange commitment to bridging the digital with the physical. To him, thinking about the possibilities of materializing the digital is more relevant than the digital itself.

But when we look at the light boxes, aren't we seeing actual physical objects? Our eyes think so, gazing at the variously geometric and digitally oriented structures inside each light box, which are full of overlapping colors almost reminiscent of prisms. The cellophane shapes inside these light boxes look like an 8bit color graphic, where we can only see a maximum of 256 colors at any one time. In this palette, the map offers only red, green and blue values, reminding that yellow exists only as a combination of red and green. As we realize this, the bright light of our smartphone screens may shut off. The light bulb emojis in our brains go off. The glow of Nelemans' light boxes stay on, burning our retinas; it is forgotten only when we see another screen light up, beckoning our touch.

—*Alicia Eler*, Los Angeles-based art critic and culture journalist