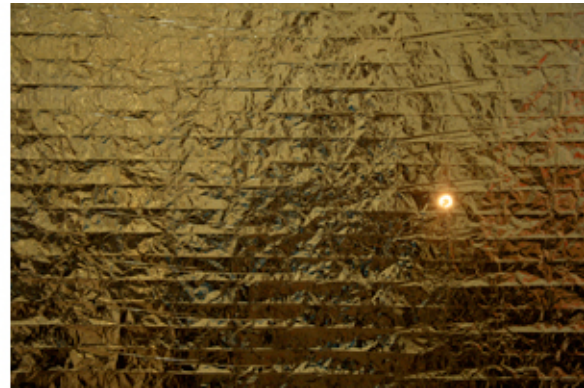


## Emilie Halpern

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Left: **Emilie Halpern, *Lost Weekend* (detail), 2009**, 540 sheets of photocopied paper, 11 x 8.5 x 6". Right: **Emilie Halpern, *Apollo* (detail), 2009**, space blanket, halogen spotlight, 86 x 56".

*The Los Angeles–based artist Emilie Halpern incorporates subtle explorations of time, memory, and longing into her films, photographs, drawings, and sculptures. Here she speaks about the new works that will debut at her solo exhibition at Project Row Houses in Houston on May 2 and the process of preparing for the show.*

**I WAS VERY AWARE** of the various parameters at Project Row Houses when putting together this exhibition. For example, the work typically isn't for sale and the space is left unattended. It seemed like an opportunity to shift the way I was working, and the timing was ideal: I was asked to do the show shortly after my gallery in Los Angeles [Anna Helwing] had closed and while I was questioning how my work had evolved in recent years. Things that might have seemed like potential limitations went into fueling the exhibition and helped me return to making work that is more ephemeral.

I didn't want it to be a problem if someone took or touched something in the gallery. Several pieces began as photographic ideas but then became photocopies. *Lost Weekend* is a stack of 540 sheets of paper. The top image, which is the clearest one, is a picture of John Lennon's mouth. I photocopied the image over and over again, until it became lighter and lighter, so that in its final reproduction, it's just a faded blur, a little smudge. The idea is that when people come into the exhibition they'll take a photocopy from the stack, and as more and more are taken away, the mouth will begin to disappear.

I recently watched *Journey to the Far Side of the Sun* (1969), a sci-fi film about the discovery of a planet in the same orbit as Earth, but located on the exact opposite side of the sun and invisible to us. The film depicts a world that mirrors Earth, wherein everything looks the same but is backward. I liked this idea that there was a counterpart to Houston on the opposite side of the Earth. Western Siberia occupies the time zone twelve hours away from Houston, and the largest city in this zone is called Omsk. So, Houston and Omsk, and their relative investments in space travel during the cold war—as well as the idea of coupling—inspired the show. The title of the exhibition is “Zvezda” or “Star” in Russian. The show includes a sculpture titled *Apollo* that is made of the same material used to wrap the lunar modules during the American moon missions.

Originally developed by NASA in 1964, the metal-coated plastic is sold today in the form of first-aid blankets used in emergency situations to prevent body-heat loss. The slightly translucent gold film floats in the space, hung from the ceiling, and a halogen spotlight shines through it from behind, like a tiny sun.

Andres Janacua and Julie Spielman, who organize the nomadic project Galería Perdida (originally based in Mexico), are curating the show. It feels different to work with artists; it's almost like collaboration. For the press release they selected an excerpt from Dostoyevsky's short story "White Nights" (1848), which was part of the inspiration for the show. The last story Dostoyevsky wrote before he was deported and imprisoned in Omsk, it inspired several films including Bresson's *Four Nights of a Dreamer* (1971), which will be screened in conjunction with the exhibition.

When I was looking for Houston's geographic antipode I thought it was going to be a tropical island in the Indian Ocean, or an atoll in the Maldives with turquoise water and white sand, or some other kind of idealized escapist fantasy. Finding out it was Siberia took me in a completely different direction—from the Dostoyevsky connection to my grandfather and his deportation to Siberia during the czar's anti-Semitic purges in the early 1900s. The only framed photograph in the exhibition, *sunrisesunset*, started as a reference to the sun rising in Houston and setting in Omsk, but it also recalls the 1971 film *Fiddler on the Roof*, which concludes with the deportation of Jewish families in pre-revolutionary Russia.

— As told to Lauren O'Neill-Butler