

Julien Bismuth

SIMONE SUBAL GALLERY

131 Bowery, 2nd floor

January 12–February 16

If modernism's knell announced medium's loosening into an infinite elasticity, it never quite consigned the latter to anachronism. Medium, that middling condition between subject and world, lingered like some slouching, sallow houseguest: necessary (in-law, relative), if unwanted. Julien Bismuth's pensive show, his second with the gallery, takes art's structural remove from the immediacy of intention, its contingency on some intermediary (verbal, visual, or otherwise) to communicate, as its subject. Limning the deformations and slippages that result from art's essential belatedness, the exhibition's contents—an audio recording, two single-channel videos, and seven silk screens of candied-pink emulsion, variously hung on the walls or propped against them—resolve in the infrathin beat between utterance and image, ideation and realization.

Reader, 2014, finds the artist seated in a shallow space, his back turned to the viewer. His body, like the camera's frame, is fixed, its form folded over the book that he silently reads: Raymond Roussel's ekphrastic text *Le Vue*, 1904. A video on the opposing wall, *Perroquet (Parakeet)*, 2013, trains in close-up on a woman similarly stilled, her face lit by the Technicolor glow of *The Wizard of Oz*, which we watch her watch. Between the two, a pair of pendent headphones plays a litany of anaphoric phrases ("I want . . ."; "I desire . . ."; "I am interested in . . .") voiced by a female narrator. Clipped from art-world press releases, artists' proposals, and corporate statements of intent, the audio collapses expressive and inexpressive language, at times parodying art- and business-speak as verbose pabulum. Lulled by its cadenced inventory, the listener of Bismuth's *Monologue for the Highest and Lowest Points of the Room* cedes to a state of absorption analogous to that of the onscreen personae who flank her. Communication empties into redundancy, the inevitable mediation of experience by words, images, and things forestalling the possibility of thoughts truly shared.



Julien Bismuth, *An image as the excoriation of a surface*, 2014, screen, aluminum, mesh, glue, emulsion, 30 x 30".

— Courtney Fiske