

RYAN LEE

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RLWindow
Jonathan Allen
Twenty-First-Century Silks
October 18 - November 15, 2016, 4 - 11PM

RYAN LEE is pleased to present *Twenty-First-Century Silks*, a single-channel video installation by British artist Jonathan Allen that explores the cultural history of secular magic and its underacknowledged presence in the political realm. In *Twenty-First-Century Silks*, two hands emerge from darkness to perform with conjurors' silks. The silks unfurl in tantalizing slow motion to reveal visual devices, cryptic messages, popular icons like Mickey Mouse, and abstract nouns like FAITH and EGO. By sequencing and looping these inscrutable communications, Allen encourages the viewer's tendency to construe meaning from unrelated fragments.

As American voters turn their attention to the climax of one of their nation's most belligerent election cycles, the ethical status and effectiveness of the campaign spectacle again take center stage. Politicians have, throughout history, often co-opted the language and technology of stage magicians. During the 2004 presidential election, George W. Bush used techniques honed by professional illusionists to miraculously appear at Madison Square Gardens. In 1959, Fidel Castro trained white doves to land on his body during a political rally to anoint his rise to power following the Cuban revolution. That propagandists have deployed theatrical magic's benign capabilities to promote their ideologies complicates the ethics of reception, and the responsibilities of spectatorship cannot be overlooked.

Allen is interested in unconventional sites of enchantment and the reanimation of the historical *trouville*. Here, *Twenty-First-Century Silks* recalls an era of stage magic when conjuring acts with brightly colored silks and flags were staples in vaudeville performance. Allen's work features historical 'picture silks,' which were developed in the early twentieth century to bear droll slogans and popular motifs, alongside unsettling contemporary alternatives crafted by the artist.

Jonathan Allen (b. 1966, UK) is a London-based artist and writer. A two-channel iteration of *Twenty-First-Century Silks* is currently included in MASS MoCA's exhibition, *Explode Every Day: An Inquiry into the Phenomena of Wonder*. Allen's work has been featured in prominent exhibitions and publications, including at the 1st Singapore Biennale (2006), Tate Britain (2006), Frankfurter Kunstverein (2008), and Arnolfini Bristol (2013). His writing has appeared recently in *Truth is Concrete – A Handbook For Artistic Strategies in Real Politics* (Sternberg Press, 2014), *Notes on The Magic of the State* (Lisson Gallery & Beirut, 2013), and *Curiosity and Method: Ten Years of Cabinet Magazine* (Cabinet Books, 2012). Allen is a curator at The Magic Circle Museum, London, where in 2013 he discovered a forgotten tarot deck hand-painted by the English artist and mystic Austin Osman Spare. His subsequent book *Lost Envoy* is published by Strange Attractor Press (2016). Please visit www.jonathanallen.info to view more of the artist's work.

RLWindow is a dedicated exhibition space featuring video, installation, and performance art designed to engage High Line visitors, viewable from the elevated public park at 26th Street. Utilizing the gallery's position overlooking the High Line and its visibility to more than 5 million yearly visitors, RLWindow is a platform for innovative, experimental, and collaborative projects by international contemporary artists, including both invited and gallery-represented artists. RYAN LEE invites you to join the conversation by tagging #RLWindow and #ryanleegallery in social media posts. Find us on Instagram @ryanleegallery!

Forthcoming projects in RLWindow include Chris Doyle: *The Fluid* (Nov 16-Dec 14, 2016). For press inquiries, please contact Bridget Casey at bridget@ryanleegallery.com or 212-397-0724.