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Ligature

DOCUMENT

Mary Helena Clark

Natural selection comes from misidentified mockingbirds. On a string of Galápagos Islands Charles Darwin collected data on slight variations amongst a species of finches (that were actually mockingbirds), the results of which later became the basis for his theory of natural selection. The tidy humanist idea that she--nature--molds and reforms our bodies per the specifics of her landscape. She reaches down our throats and engineers the mysterious fact of song of speech of sound-making. She tunes the bird's call and the human's hum. In Mary Helena Clark's *Ligature*, the chorus of disembodied sounds, the phantom of the finch, proposes a world heard haptically, a touching of a song, an illumination of the inner chambers of the larynx. As "ligature" may connote medical binding, textual twinning, or musical harmonizing, Clark proposes a multiplicity of connotative possibilities so that each may commingle in the atmosphere of the gallery.

Inherited traits of the female avant-garde sound and filmmakers of the twentieth century percolate in the Clark's work. In this artist-cum-species lineage we find another story of creation: *Alien Resurrection* (1997), an alien-human hybrid is born. In the movie, avant-garde sound artist Joan La Barbara gave voice to Newborn, the alien sapien. Known for her 1970's experimentations with the limits of long vocalizations, polyphonics, trills and whispers, La Barbara's extended vocal technique operates on the crack of the voice, voice as evidence of a constellation of bodily mechanisms. How strange that this artist's articulation of the vocal edges of the human form would be selected to animate alien otherness. La Barbara's animation of the medical miracle of an alien/human body creates a circuit of woman/sound/apparatus/embodiment/alien/film/mimesis that provides a useful halo over Clark's project.

Follow the ligatures of the exhibition: touching is tied to hearing, shell is tied to ear, laser is tied to throat, bird is tied to invisibility, projected images are bound to each other in multichannel call-and-responds. Clark uses contact microphones to record and amplify sound by pressing the mechanical ear into the places on the body that seem to produce it; a device kin to the stethoscope, producing recordings of the tongue, throat, and mouth. Bird songs throughout the exhibition announce an invisible presence - a sound we all know and understand though rarely see its source or witness the act of its making. Projections appear on tilted screens, bent and confronting you from below. Each of these elements build Clark's ethereal, tactile project that calls into question the very fact of seeing and hearing and the forces that make those sensations reproducible to an artist. The viewer is rendered alien in *Ligature's* speculative world.

- Erin Jane Nelson

Mary Helena Clark is an artist working in film, video, and installation. Her work uses the language of collage to explore dissociative states through cinema, bringing together disparate subjects and styles that suggest an exterior logic or code. Using the transportive qualities of cinema - rhyming sound and image, the constructed spaces of montage - her films explore shifting subjectivities and the limits of the embodied camera.

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Her work has recently been exhibited at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Germany, JOAN, Los Angeles, Kadist, San Francisco, the 2017 Whitney Biennial, New York, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Finland, e-flux, New York, NY, Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, Austria, Laura Bartlett Gallery, London, UK, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, and at festivals including the International Film Festival Rotterdam, the New York Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival, and the Hong Kong International Film Festival.

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This is her second exhibition at DOCUMENT.