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Sayre Gomez, *Behind Door #9*, 2018, acrylic- and urethane-based paints on canvas over panel, 84 x 120".  
NEW YORK

**“Make Believe”**

MAGENTA PLAINS

94 Allen St

January 13–February 17, 2019

“Ladies and gentleman, by way of introduction, this is a film about trickery and fraud, about lies,” purrs Orson Welles in *F for Fake*, his 1973 paean to art as illusion and the nebulous nature of authenticity. Films, he suggests, are elaborate sleight-of-hand deceptions, but their fictions can ring truer than reality. “Make Believe,” a selection of works spanning more than six decades and deftly curated by Bruce W. Ferguson, takes artifice and cinematic alchemy as its themes.

Meg Cranston’s installation based on a performance, *Women Who Would Play Me If I Paid Them (Partial Facsimile)*, 1994, presents the headshots and tragicomic résumés of actors who responded to her casting call for a surrogate. (One eager hopeful lists “badminton,” “office machines,” and “forklift driving” among several dozen “special skills.”) The project probes the strange business of pretending to be someone else, in a compelling if ethically murky manner that recalls Sophie Calle. *Behind Door #9*, 2018, a life-size trompe-l’oeil painting of a derelict deli by Sayre Gomez, could pass for an actual facade, complete with lovingly rendered gray sticker residue on the glass. A sun-bleached image of a tropical bay, a faded fantasy, fills the storefront window. The work, with its game-show title, evokes luck, longing, and the market for escapism. In *Master Study: Snow White Clapping*, 2018, Elliott Jamal Robbins superimposes a cartoony black child over the Disney princess. Whether the animation effectively employs, as the press release claims, “a slapstick style to explore the intersection of societal readings of black and queer identity” is questionable, but its hypnotic loops do make one aware of one’s own passivity as a viewer. *The Six Minute Drown*, 1977, a seven-inch record by the late Jack Goldstein, delivers desperate splashes, gulps, and splutters. At first the sounds cue pathos, but one soon detects the artificiality of this sonic death. Certain effects are repeated; the choking is overdone. For millennia, audiences have sought the catharsis of simulated trauma in art. Vicarious tragedies are therapeutic, and so is this exhibition. For those viewers suffering from heightened exposure to scatterbrained group shows, this elegant, discerning effort is an antidote.

— Zoë Lescaze