

M A R I A N G O O D M A N G A L L E R Y

ARTFORUM

James Coleman
M A R I A N G O O D M A N G A L L E R Y | N E W Y O R K
24 West 57th Street
January 17–February 18

By Kaelen Wilson-Goldie (February 3, 2017)



James Coleman, *Working arrangement – horoscopus*, 2004, video installation, color, black-and-white, sound, 54 minutes.

Every hour, a drama plays out across a pair of huge screens in a project room strewn with cables, audio equipment, and some folding chairs. Frequently, the two screens subdivide into eight. Occasionally, the smaller screens go black, show vivid distortion, and clear to reveal a setting, or an actor: one of eight members in a theater company who are rehearsing a play in a space that looks like a former slaughterhouse. The action builds in fragments. About halfway in, one of the actors is shown frantically searching for something throughout multiple screens. Soon after, he appears on a single screen to the left, talking to a woman on the screen to its right. Their exchange is a lovers' quarrel, piercing but at the same time clichéd. She has left him without warning. He wants to know why.

In fact, their dialogue is adapted from the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, which the actors improvise all the way through James Coleman's video installation *Working arrangement – horoscopus*, 2004. One of nine pieces in a show spanning nearly five decades of work,

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Working arrangement is the most explicitly cinematic projection on view, braced between Still Life, 2013–16, a gorgeous digital projection of a larger-than-life poppy plant, and Untitled, 2011–15, a stutter-stop LED of revelers on a carnival ride.

These two works arc across the extremes of human experience—art, contemplation, and introspection on one side, and thrill-seeking spectacle and canned entertainment on the other. Working arrangement deals with the more delicate notion of passage in between. Filmed with a few hand-held cameras and a series of “button” cameras affixed to the clothes and glasses of the eight actors, the footage conveys the difficulty and magic of moving from camera to screen, artist to viewer, intention to reception. But transmission here is also a perilous journey to hell and back. Will art allow a lover to return? Perhaps, but it’s possible that she—like meaning, like myth—could be maimed or utterly changed by her travels.

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