

ARTFORUM

Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin

by Nicholas Chittenden Morgan
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Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin, *Madame de Void: A Melodrama*, 2018, video, color, sound, 45 minutes.

At the beginning of *Madame de Void: A Melodrama*, 2018, the titular lady laments that her notion of identity as a constructed and performative event has become utterly passé. The video, a collaboration between Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin, is the centerpiece of their exhibition here. Bernstein stars as Ms. de Void, a villainess who harvests dogs for the creation of luxurious fur coats, à la Cruella de Vil. Blot, a pup played by Rubin, is this year's pick of the litter. As time passes, Blot magically picks up critical theory, displaying a remarkable ability to understand such thinkers as Jacques Lacan and Ferdinand de Saussure. This causes Madame to fall in love with him. The animality and animatedness of self, acted out via diva and doggie drag, melts species and gender lines. "Everything today must have a claim to the sincere," laments Madame. It is the work's great virtue to reject sincerity: sexual, theoretical, and otherwise.

Madame de Void is dedicated to George Kuchar, whose spirit is reflected in its abject aesthetics and anarchic approach to the body. Yet rather than adopt Kuchar's madcap pace, Bernstein and Rubin unveil the range of their perversities slowly, producing a stretched-out space for thought that, initially, seems at odds with the video's theatrical affectedness. It's a dilation rather than an explosion—a feeling more in line with the zombified camp of Warhol's cinema. Or perhaps even Jean Genet's only film, *Un chant d'amour* (*A Song of Love*, 1950). Blot, after all, is a fan of the author.