

Matorin, David, "Liz Magic Laser," *Modern Painters*, April, 2015, page 1 of 1.

MODERN PAINTERS

LOS ANGELES

Liz Magic Laser

Various Small Fires // January 10–February 21

WHAT DOES THE VOICE of authority sound like in an age of uncertainty? Perhaps it's the one of a hired consultant, a guru, or an outside expert: a sage specialist of dubious jurisdiction who reveals to a vexed elite solutions that were in front of them all along.

In "The Thought Leader," Laser turns her deft focus on the media's articulations of contemporary anxieties to the TED-talk phenomenon. TED video lectures have developed a vocabulary of public address especially attuned to the desires of socially conscious capitalist entrepreneurs. The need for relief from the chafing that occurs while striving for both success and magnanimity makes an audience susceptible to charlatan voices proclaiming there is no apparent contradiction between selfishness and selflessness.

"I am a sick man. I am a spiteful man. Are you a good person? Or do you only want to seem like a good person so that people will like you?" a 10-year-old boy in business-casual attire asks an audience of rapt adults in the exhibition's title video. The script, adapted from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, applies its critique of socialist ideals to the market utopianism of TED. The business world's obsession with groundbreaking innovation, often couched in the language of radicalism and sought through the guidance of "creatives," is at the core of TED's appeal. In *The Thought Leader*, 2015, the wisdom of creatives is replaced by the teachings of children. If creativity is seen as a natural feature of childhood, the substitution isn't a far reach. From a market perspective, one need only reawaken creativity to reclaim it and ultimately put it to productive use. But the children counsel against productivity: "The reality is that it's better to do nothing," the child speaker intones, rather than attempt to build "a perfect world, a crystal palace." In another video, *My Mind Is My Own*, 2015, a second child guides adults in vocal exercises, repeating mantra-like affirmations of confidence and self-defense that the adults seem not to possess.

Laser presents scenarios from a world created by adults, which they find too troubling and complicated to navigate on their own. They require the guidance of children—adaptable people comfortable with vast and sweeping change. —David Matorin



FROM TOP: LUCIE STAHL; LIZ MAGIC LASER

FROM TOP:
Lucie Stahl
Close Encounters,
2014. Ink-jet print,
aluminum, and
epoxy resin.
60 x 43 in.

Liz Magic Laser
Still of Alex
Ammerman in *The
Thought Leader*,
2015. Video,
9 min. 22 sec.