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ARTFORUM

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Ann Lislegaard
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By Jason Farago



Ann Lislegaard, *Oracles, Owls...Some Animals Never Sleep*, 2014, color, sound, 10 minutes, 30 seconds.

"The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the coming of the dusk," Hegel wrote in 1820, which is to say, before the world ends, no critique is possible. There is no flight to be seen in Ann Lislegaard's cool, enigmatic two-channel 3D animation of animatronic owls, their faceted white feathers in glistening high definition, and not much Minervan clarity either. The birds in *Oracles, Owls . . . Some Animals Never Sleep*, 2014, seen earlier this year at the Nineteenth Biennale of Sydney, are antiprophets who speak simultaneously in indecipherable bursts that are interrupted with sonic glitches. A few phrases borrowed from the *I Ching* can be made out through the static and feedback: "building relationships," or "destroying machines." Fragments that once prophesied change or fortune now just recede into our perpetual feed of blips and bleeps.

Lislegaard, one of numerous Norwegian artists now winning international prominence, has a long-standing interest in science fiction. *Oracle, Owls* references Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and its dystopian character carries through to her other black-and-white video here. *Dobaded*, 2014, takes its name from a word coined by the experimental Japanese sci-fi writer Kawamata Chiaki in his novel, *Death Sentences*, where characters fall into a realm beyond consciousness after getting the word stuck in their heads. Lislegaard's video takes place in a similar dream state, floating through domestic spaces whose dimensions seem to vary with each passage. Along with a blatant shout-out to J. G. Ballard, whose work appears on a bookshelf, the ghost of Duchamp hovers: There's a spinning wheel, and the camera gets caught in a web of string recalling his 1942 sixteen-mile tangle. Then the owl appears again, auguring a future not of wisdom but of emptiness.