

ARTFORUM



Jenna Bliss, *Western Union #2*, 2020, light box and UV print, 17 x 17".
VIENNA

Jenna Bliss

FELIX GAUDLITZ

Werdertorgasse 4/2/13

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At first glance, the eleven photographs and five light boxes in Jenna Bliss’s “Late Responder” resemble images from America’s Gilded Age: brand-new skyscrapers towering over stern-faced, vaguely puritanical folk. In *Western Union #2* (all works cited, 2020), a figure sits with his head bowed and hands clasped, evoking the pose of a devout parishioner, or perhaps that of a watchmaker hunched over delicate handiwork. On closer inspection, viewers will see that the subject is a gloomy contemporary looking down at his smartphone; the logo of the former telegram service company suffuses softly from the center of the UV print on a light box.

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A series of gelatin silver prints, “Untitled (Filmstill #1–#11),” depicts the buildings, streets, and lonely figures of a rapidly gentrifying New York City. *Untitled (Filmstill #1)*, #6, #9, and #11 depict glass-and-steel towers, mausoleums for dead labor. The works’ temporal indeterminacy derives from the Super 8 film; each print conveys an earlier visual sensibility, with echoes, too, of the country’s pioneering Farm Security Administration photographers during the Great Depression. While the images are deceptively grainy, Bliss’s aim isn’t visual trickery. Her critical force is clear: These images index the current physical and emotional landscape of capitalism. The artist’s pairing of pictures that evoke American workers’ strife with sleeker, more opaque light-box ads emphasizes the ways labor is visualized and erased, and even seem to point to how both are ultimately filtered through advertising vernacular—highly stylized and manipulative visions of America.

—Max L. Feldman

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