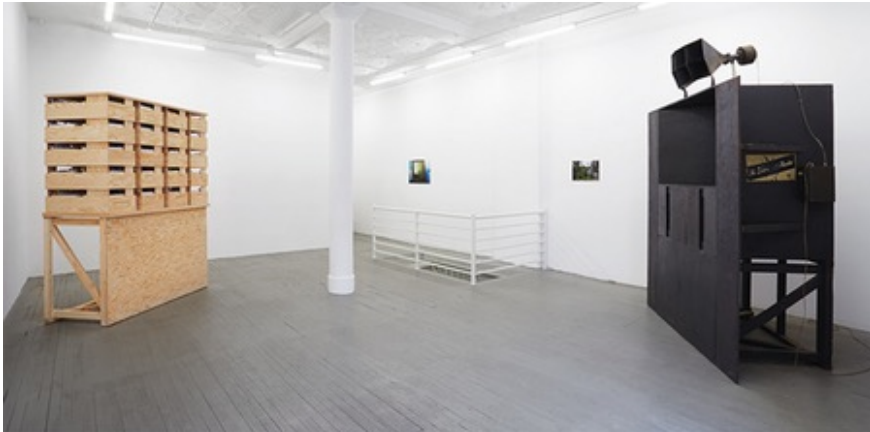


Wilson, Michael. *Review: Jason Simon, Callicoon Fine Arts, Artforum, February 2016, pg. 240, print.*

ARTFORUM

Jason Simon CALLICOON FINE ARTS



View of “Jason Simon,”
2015. On floor: 2LGA5,
2015. On wall, from left:
Production, 2015;
Nobodys Road, 2015.
Photo: Chris Austin.

In an age when the entire history of recorded music is just a click away, it's tempting to dismiss radio as a hopelessly antiquated medium. After all, why rely on a DJ when Spotify and iTunes allow you to compile your own playlists? Yet, as is often remarked, the self-curated online/digital experience, for all its potential, can ultimately become isolating. Conventional radio at its best retains the power to establish and strengthen the bonds of community by making a virtue of broadcasters' idiosyncratic tastes and voices. And local radio can add to that a capacity to respond to specificities of place while also allowing for a shared experience within a given locale.

Jason Simon's recent exhibition "Request Lines Are Open" documented the resonance of one particular example of local radio, a show called Soul Spectrum on WJFF, a public station based in Jeffersonville, New York, close to the town in which this gallery started and from which it takes its name. In addition to playing music, the host, Liberty Green, reads dedications and letters by, from, and to local prison inmates and their friends and families. Simon, whose studio is also within WJFF's reach, juxtaposed photographs of the station and Green's house with a box of metal auto-body-repair dollies, twenty crates containing the DJ's archive of correspondence, and a vintage horn speaker—salvaged from behind the screen of the Callicoon Cinema—that plays Soul Spectrum broadcasts.

Also included in the exhibition, secreted in the gallery's darkened basement, was a Super 8 film, *In and Around the Ohio Pen*, 2014. An eleven-minute edit of quarter-century-old footage showing curator and writer Bill Horrigan wandering around a derelict Columbus jail, it also features the incongruously jaunty piano stylings of Horrigan's sometime collaborator, the filmmaker Chris Marker. In conjunction with the artifacts and images on the floor above, the film conjures a singular vision of the relationship between incarcerated individuals and the culture from which they are excluded. With its fresh-looking graffiti and broken-but-still-present institutional furniture, the vacant building has a Mary Celeste-like quality of mysterious abandonment and aesthetically pleasing decay, one that evokes the "ruin porn" popular in the last few decades.

There's no doubting Simon's committed interest in the subject of imprisonment and the particular kinds of communication that go along with it—a lengthy interview excerpted in the press release and available for perusal in the gallery exhaustively demonstrated as much—but as is the case with all too many research-based projects, we were left wondering what the artist had achieved beyond the mere documentation of an extant (albeit interesting) phenomenon. Simon's photographs are certainly evocative, painting WJFF as a ragtag but sincere enterprise with an endearing residue of signage, equipment, and, of course, records; but the images are arguably a little too melancholic, not just unpeopled but positively ghostly. Even the prisoners' letters are mostly hidden from view, filed away in their envelopes, their writers unnamed. Given that it is a still-vital resource, the station is made to seem oddly static, that transplanted speaker in particular feeling like a relic. The requiem is premature. As a compact encapsulation of a phenomenon, a portrait of an exchange between a medium and its users, "Request Lines Are Open" succeeded, but the connections it attempted to make between a form and its audience, sound and its echoes in the visual, remained blurred.

—Michael Wilson