

Heinrich, Will. "Michael Bell-Smith." Artforum.com. 11 Nov. 2014. Web.

ARTFORUM

New York

Michael Bell-Smith

FOXY PRODUCTION

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Michael Bell-Smith, *Rabbit Season, Duck Season*, 2014, HD video with sound, 5 minutes, 18 seconds.

Michael Bell-Smith makes jokes about art. Five of the eleven vinyl on white aluminum "paintings" on display are laid out like magazine mock-ups, with dreamlike squiggles and x-ed out colored squares surrounding Groucho Marx's famous summary of set theory as a paradox of alienation, "I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member." But under each iteration of this epigram appears a different name: Thomas Jefferson, Morrissey, Steve Jobs, Oprah Winfrey, Ayn Rand. And *Rabbit Season, Duck Season*, a short, looping video, is ostensibly a heavy-handed explication of the 1951 Bugs Bunny short "Rabbit Fire," in which Bugs and Daffy Duck each attempt to impose on the iconically befuddled hunter Elmer Fudd a reality that results in his shooting one of them. (Bugs, as always, is the winner.) Didactic subtitles, infinite sine waves, and a rotating clip-art Ouroboros insist that their alternation can continue forever, so long as a punch line is suspended.

The implication is that there is no substance but rhythm, and that what goes for Bugs and Daffy goes for every other thought process or social phenomenon, too. But when the view zooms in on a Web browser window and one screen replaces another, instead of the argument expanding to embrace the world, it's revealed that it applies chiefly to itself. Bell-Smith's jokes are tightly wound, transparent, and self-contained. They are equally poised to collapse into empty self-reference or massively expand their emotional and conceptual range.

— Will Heinrich