

GBE  
439 W. 127<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
NY NY 10027

ED ATKINS

*I like spit now*

NOVEMBER 15 – DECEMBER 21, 2019  
OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 6-9 PM

For his second exhibition at GBE, Ed Atkins presents *I like spit now*.

The exhibition features two bodies of work, *Old Food* and *Refuse*.

On the second floor, *Old Food*, in this iteration, is made up of nine synchronous videos, two large racks of plastic-wrapped suits, and numerous information panels written by Contemporary Art Writing Daily and lasered into trash wood and metal.

Spanning the first and fourth floors, *Refuse*, made and conceived for this exhibition, is comprised of acoustic panels, bread, paintings, a disassembled kitchen and a two-channel real-time 3D simulation, authored in a custom version of the Unreal Engine.

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*I like spit now* stems from the untitled sandwich video in *Old Food*, falls through Artaud's list of wants — as seared into the slab of hardtack bread at the entrance — and ends with *Refuse.exe*, the simulation of some crap falling to a stage. Expression is trammled, here: the heart is thwarted. The works in *I like spit now* are impoverished in one way or another: animation is merely gravity's effect; tears roll incessantly and without cause; literature's treacle, the list, is everywhere. If 'etcetera' is the dreck that need not be named, there being no *point* to that which is contained within the category — then Atkins' work is perhaps an attempt to spend time in that place of digression, uselessness and poignancy. It's reclamation.

*Refuse.exe* is an exercise in the profound impoverishment of redemption, grace, and recuperability. *Refuse.exe* dramatizes the seeming return of repressed, deferred and otherwise metaphorized matter, by way of a theatrical play reduced to crude:

ENTER	<i>Drop</i>
ACTION	<i>Fall</i>
INTER-ACTION	<i>Land</i>
DEATH	<i>Cease</i>
REFUSE	<i>Remain</i>

The physics simulation of *Refuse.exe* is calculated and rendered in real-time. This means that every run-through is unique. While the meter is the same every time — with the crap falling in the same order — the rotations, paths of travel, and interactions with other objects are subject to the glum, chaotic will of entropy.



'Refuse' is a homonym resolved only in speech; it signifies at least both 'unwilling' and 'trash'. Most of the works in *I like spit now* are either unwilling or trash or both.

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Hardtack bread — or ship's biscuit — is a preppers' staple because it lasts indefinitely. Food might be thought of as another axiom for the show: obstinate literality and practical deniability segue into figurative, interpretative feint. The figurative is present by dint of art's context, but gets done in by literality's immutability. You could think of the animations throughout similarly, where the possibilities of the medium — liquid-like absence, pure image — are put to work conjuring excessive material, analogue dumbness. This is a kind of realism, maybe. The forcible grounding of virtuosity is bathetic.

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The acoustic panels that border the fourth floor perform a practical duty, dampening the reverberant space. They're enwrapped in embroideries of text on used, creased, discarded linen. Cued by Artaud, the texts are all lists of one sort or another, gleaned from history: Isaac Newton, Sei Shōnagon, Roger Hilton, Thomas Traherne, Annie Baker, Henry Vaughan, nursery rhymes, liturgy, Michel Leiris, etc. They're delicate quotes 'up in the gods', stilling waves, counting gone things, mute.

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The animations in *Old Food* depict a pseudo-historic world of peasantry, bucolic landscapes and eternal ruin: characters weep continuously, their lives devoid of dramatic redemption; a looping piano piece by Jürg Frey is the haunting leitmotif; crowds of people plummet while credits roll; inedible, impossible sandwiches assemble and collapse in lurid advertisements; and corporate sponsorship appears sporadically, desultorily and apparently unbidden.

Countless cheap suits throng the space, displayed in the manner of their storage, hemming in the audience and baffling the air, underscoring the absence of life in the videos. Information panels written by the anonymous critics at Contemporary Art Writing Daily inform us of so much — too much — saturating the work hyper-textually, parodying institutional authority with a tone that lurches between overly familiar vernacular and revelatory oversight.

Like a McDonald's hamburger or a cockroach or the Global Seed Vault, *Old Food* perseveres beyond mortal reason and enters a Beckettian afterwards. We cannot know the reason for all those tears.

— Vivian Rycroft

