

## Eileen Maxson

MICROSCOPE GALLERY

1329 Willoughby Avenue, 2B

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"I'm gonna unwrap *Reality Bites*, and I'm gonna watch it," Eileen Maxson announces in a video currently on view at the artist's first solo exhibition in New York. The statement follows a careful recitation of the 1994 film's cast, characters, and overarching premise as well as an appraisal of the current price for an unwatched, shrink-wrapped VHS copy—\$21—one of which Maxson is shown covetously unwrapping for the duration of the piece. Its plastic sheath gleams against a '90s-informercial-blue backdrop as she slowly rotates the tape, forcing the viewer to scrutinize the container of the film to which the entire show is devoted.

*Reality Bites* aspired to map the territory of Generation X, steering four recent college graduates through jejune Houston and their respective swamps of disenchantment. They're bogged down by unforgiving bosses, conservative parents, and—worst of all—working at the Gap. Maxson dedicates her videos, sculptures, and images to the film's best one-liner cries of ironic detachment. Janeane Garofalo's character laughingly remarks that "Evian" is "naive" backwards; Maxson hires workers from around the world to photograph themselves holding a banner that reads either of the two words, and she prints the images on a thirteen-foot scroll of receipt paper. In a nearby half-hour-long video, the artist prompts scores of women to define the word irony, in a re-creation of Winona Ryder's iconic ordeal.

Nothing kills a joke quite like repeating it, and Maxson cleverly plays upon *Reality Bites*'s strained affect of coolness by bestowing it with the studied zeal of a teenage fan. The film yearned to cultivate a metanarrative that could escape the materialistic dead end of mainstream '90s culture, and Maxson is adept at playing upon the contradiction of its own manufactured discontent. Does the VHS tape she clasps in her hands hold the power to conjure generational ennui? Her subjects don't have to explain irony; she has already shown us for them.

— Juliana Halpert



Eileen Maxson, *Evian Is Naive Spelled Backwards*, 2015, double-sided inkjet print, 36" x 13' 1/3".