

# ARTFORUM

## Claire Fontaine

CCA WATTIS INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

1111 8th Street

June 2–July 2

Two of the four works in Claire Fontaine's timely exhibition are titled *Recession Sculptures*, but the entire show, which is activated and visible for just a few moments at a time via motion sensor, manages to stretch modest, ready-made objects into radical political gestures with the added value of rich formal and conceptual associations. Each of the *Recession* works (both 2009) effectively and literally meddles with power—they are, respectively, an electric and a gas meter fitted with means to stall or wind back records of consumption with the aid of magnets, distilled water, and a Shop-Vac, which sucks back the gas reading, while broadcasting the sound of an appliance attempting to erase its consumption. These sculptures are working demonstrations of survival malfeasance that pisses off the grid instead of abandoning it completely.

The show is illuminated by a fluorescent-light piece, with the text PLEASE COME BACK stretching across a long wall and infusing the room with a harsh utilitarian light; it is at once a nod to Dan Flavin, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and Home Depot. The store's closed, it initially seems, but as the pair of artists who form this Paris-based collective noted in a gallery talk, this work also echoes the practice of the gone-but-ubiquitous Bas Jan Ader and his 1969 installation *Please Don't Leave Me*. Like the lovechild of Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book* and Ader's *I'm Too Sad to Tell You*, the success of Fontaine's work hinges on both the romance and melancholy in Ader's pieces and Hoffman's activist dreams. When the lights are on, visitors might see an emergency key hanging near the entrance. Titled *1111 Eighth Street (22.05.09)*, 2009, it promises entry to the gallery, but since it's rendered in a fragile material, it can be used only once. Fontaine's gesture is a smart, elegant dare to choose the moment wisely.

— Glen Helfand



Claire Fontaine, *PLEASE COME BACK (K. font/American)*, 2008, fluorescent neon tubes, light fixtures, cables, movement detector, 48 x 5 x 1/2".