

Citron, Beth, "Liz Magic Laser," *Artforum*, May 2010.

ARTFORUM

Liz Magic Laser

DEREK ELLER GALLERY
615 West 27th Street
May 21–June 26

In her exhibition "chase," Liz Magic Laser renders a contemporary, layered interpretation of Bertolt Brecht's 1926 play *Man Equals Man*—a harsh, if comedic, parable about the perils of capitalist greed. Laser's show features a full-length film shot in various ATM vestibules, an installation of costumes and other paraphernalia used in the production, and a quasi-theatrical set, which served as the stage for "The Elephant Calf," a live performance that occurred halfway through the exhibition's opening night. Brecht wrote "Elephant Calf" as a satirical intermission for *Man Equals Man* in which the main characters—British soldiers in colonial India—perform for their fellow troops to solicit money for alcohol. The apt humor of having this performance interrupt a commercial gallery opening (of an exhibition that took as its subject the critique of capitalism) was not lost, particularly in light of the assertive distribution of Budweiser cans and the seemingly hopeless attempts to charge viewers for the excellent accompanying playbill.

Laser's adaptation is admirable on several fronts. She offers a timely rethinking of Brecht's work, additionally addressing the role and ritual of contemporary ATM use. Perhaps even more ambitious, by executing a gripping performance as an "intermission" of her own opening, she created something that may initially have seemed an easy invocation of theater and performance art but was in fact a carefully staged and fresh interrogation into the edges of both. Conventionally, performance art should be original but theater is restaged; by incorporating regular gallerygoers (playbills and beer in hand) into her own production of a decades-old script, however, Laser artfully blurred these lines.



Liz Magic Laser, *Michael Wiener as Jeraiah Jip (a private in the British Army) in Man Equals Man at the 52 Broadway Branch of Amalgamated Bank, NY, NY, June 14th, 2009. Jip finally finds his comrades and they act like they don't know him in Scene 11, 2009–10, color photograph, 12 x 18".*

—Beth Citron