

SARA MAGENTHEIMER



ILL-GOTTEN GAINS

A | Ferry | Fishers Island Sound

Beige Pursuit | Text | book published by Wendy’s Subway | 2019 • *The artist’s first book-length text that reads as both screenplay and poem. A character called X moves through landscapes of words. Driven by her motivated yet contextless pursuit, she feels around for sympathetic energies and familiar faces.*

B | Lighthouse Works | 3 Hound Ln

Sentences | Video (with sound) | 26 min 26 sec (on loop) | 2022 • *A beguiling, hypnotic meditation on the poetics of space. Words appear on screen, slowly warping and swaying to musical fragments by Joe Williams. These elements never quite cohere, evoking an expanded cinematic space all their own.*

Is There An After Taste Of Life In These Graves | 24-hour web-based “clock” | isthereanaftertasteoflifein-these Graves.com | 2025 • *A clock where time is represented by a different flower slowly blooming every hour—24 in total. Movement is barely perceptible, much like watching flowers grow in life. It accurately refers to the corresponding hour when each plant blooms in nature.*

Notes on Art and Resistance A–Z | Text | free printed PDF | 2017 • *A sequence of personal meditations on making art in times of profound political and social change. Written by the artist after the 2016 US presidential election and originally distributed online as part of her solo exhibition at the New Museum in New York City in 2017.*

C | Freight Building | 554 Hound Ln

Some Things You Can Ask Me | Video (silent) | 21 min 45 sec (on loop) | 2022 • *Prompted by Apple’s Siri to ask questions, the artist takes the AI invitation seriously and invents a long list of queries. They appear over scanned images from Architectural Digest magazine’s idealized interiors of 1981—the year Magenheimer was born.*

D | Filling Station | 166 Hound Ln

Best Is Man’s Breath Quality | Video (with sound) | 15 min 13 sec (on loop) | 2016 • *A narrative unfolds from the point of view of a jellyfish drifting through deep and dark oceans. As dense and complex images and sounds appear and disappear, our visual perception of the human is de-centered.*

E | The Ordnance | 202 Whistler Ave

Acetone Reality | Video (with sound) | 12 min 19 sec (on loop) | 2025 • *A conversation between computer-generated voices unfolds in an echo chamber, resonant with chaotic connections. The artist’s latest video, made in collaboration with Michael Bell-Smith. The work premieres theatrically this fall at the 2025 New York Film Festival.*

Art and Theft | Video (with sound) | 7 min 22 sec (on loop) | 2017 • *This video probes the bounds of narrative and the illusion of received wisdom. Images of a Hieronymous Bosch painting, popular cinema, and live news reportage speak candidly to the constructedness of our storytelling traditions.*

Slow Zoom Long Pause | Video (with sound) | 13 min 01 sec (on loop) | 2015 • *A female voice speaks about her life. Along the way, we consider the nature of human existence, the power of bodies, and the physicality of words. Magenheimer edited this video while a Lighthouse Works Fellow in 2014.*

F | Movie Theater | 501 Whistler Ave

Seven Signs That Mean Silence | Video (with sound) | 10 min 48 sec (on loop) | 2013 • *Two disembodied computer voices wonder what things mean. Interrupted by non-verbal utterances, coughs, and the artist singing, their conversation considers the in-between places and negative space where meaning hides out.*

G | Post Office | 1 Oriental Ave

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H | Downtown Window | Equestrian Ave

No Clock (You Can’t Be Late Twice) | Video (no sound) | 3 min 08 sec (on loop) | 2017 • *Images and words cycle to a steady beat. A multilayered visual poem reveals the arbitrary yet meaningful structures that underlie our daily rhythms.*

I | The Beach Plum | 515 Equestrian Ave

New Accumulation | Video (with sound) | 4 min 18 sec (on loop) | 2010 • *From the artist’s first video series, commissioned for a screening event at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive about the four seasons. This work represents spring. Sound by Robert Stillman.*

J | Doctor’s Office | 370 Central Ave

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K | The Legion | 2132 Crescent Ave

Nothing Comes from Talking (But Sound) | Video (with sound) | 1 min 3 sec (on loop) | 2012 • *An absurd demonstration of how the alphabet works. Each letter has an apparent meaning and many sub-meanings that are described using a blue rectangle made of tape, drawing, spaghetti, and a few other props.*

L | Village Market | 446 Crescent Ave

MICKRYS | Video (with sound) | 1 min 46 sec (on loop) | 2011 • *Two mice are falling in love. As they start to dance they get separated by the hand of language, culture, and logic, before they reunite, translated and reinterpreted.*

One Vast Focus | Video (with sound) | 7 min (on loop) | 2011 • *A musician plays the lowest possible sound on her tuba. The artist’s electronically synthesized voice sings a letter that Ada Byron—the world’s first computer programmer—wrote to her mother describing how it felt to discover the power of her own vast intellect.*

No Clock (You Can’t Be Late Twice) | Video (no sound) | 3 min 08 sec (on loop) | 2017 • *Images and words cycle to a steady beat. A multilayered visual poem reveals the arbitrary yet meaningful structures that underlie our daily rhythms.*

M | Mobile Station | 49 Central Ave

Which Arbitrary Thing Are You? | Video (silent) | 7 min (on loop) | 2014 • *A silent, moving poem. This video juxtaposes a wide variety of text sources into one scrolling script with visuals shot through the window of a salon showing a demonstration video of eyebrow threading.*

N | Hardware Store | 741 The Gloaming

The Rhythm of Plain White | Video (with sound) | 6 min 54 sec (on loop) | 2014 • *This video is the result of objects being manipulated for the camera. Sound effects trigger an off-screen narrative and letters rain down in a thunderstorm. Magenheimer filmed this video while a Lighthouse Works Fellow in 2014.*

O | Four Corners | E Main Rd

LOL SOS | Road painting | 2025 • *LOL SOS combines contemporary text-messaging shorthand for laughing out loud with an enduring maritime distress signal invented in 1905. With their pairing, the artist questions the seemingly natural everyday workings of language—a theme present across all of her works.*

LIGHTHOUSE WORKS



Ill-Gotten Gains is the first survey exhibition of artist Sara Magenheimer’s genre-defying video work which disrupts, manipulates, and defamiliarizes language with bold combinations of image, text, and sound. Borrowing strategies from collage, writing, and music, Magenheimer inventively explodes narrative convention. Her singular videos draw in the viewer and invite interpretation.

This exhibition brings together for the very first time Magenheimer’s videos made over the past fifteen years, alongside text-based works, and more. Dotted across Fishers Island, these works punctuate day-to-day life—on view at Lighthouse Works, the supermarket, movie theater, hardware store, gas station, ferry, and many other sites. This exhibition format allows for unexpected encounters where the rhythms, textures, and temporalities of the everyday frame the work.

The world’s first computer programmer writes a letter to her mother. Human perspective is subverted as a jellyfish narrates his worldview. Hieronymous Bosch paintings rub elbows with popular cinema and an ancient military treatise. An infamous mouse explores the liberatory potential of a dance party. Siri is inundated with existential questions. Spaghetti sticks to and falls from the wall in a quest for meaning.

Magenheimer’s moving-image work, created between 2010–2025, parallels shifts in technology and culture which have positioned video as an indelible part of our screen-mediated lives. As the medium continues to shape our social sphere, daily habits, aesthetic norms, and attention spans, the artist asks us to consider it differently—synthesizing legacies of experimental film, documentary, poetry, cinema, music videos, and online culture into a dialect all its own.

Sara Magenheimer is an artist preoccupied with language whose work has spanned filmmaking, video installation, writing, performance, collage, sound, and sculpture. She is based in New York and was a Lighthouse Works Fellow in 2014. Recent exhibitions include Timeshare, LA; University Art Museum, Albany, NY; New Museum, NY; Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, OR; The Kitchen, NY. Her videos have been widely screened including the Flaherty Seminar, Oberhausen Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam, Brooklyn Academy of Music, the New York Film Festival, Images Festival, Anthology Film Archives, EMPAC at RPI, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. She was the recipient of a 2014 Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant, 2015 Artadia Award, the Prix De Varti at the 2015 Ann Arbor Film Festival, a grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts in 2020 and awarded a Rauschenberg Residency on Captiva in 2021. In 2019 Wendy’s Subway published *Beige Pursuit*, Magenheimer’s first book. She is an Associate Professor of New Media at SUNY Purchase College and faculty in the Moving Image discipline at the Bard MFA Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts.

Sara Magenheimer: Ill-Gotten Gains is curated by Lighthouse Works’ Curator-at-Large, Laurel Ptak with the support of Community Coordinator, Claudia DeSimone and Fellowship Coordinator, Eliza Schmidt. Thanks to Video Data Bank, Wendy’s Subway, Joseph Logan, Michael Bell-Smith, and Eric Nylund. **Special thanks to all the collaborators across the island generously showing artworks in their spaces, without whom this show would not be possible.** For further information about the exhibition contact Nate Malinowski at nate@lighthouseworks.us or (631) 788-7713.

SARA MAGENHEIMER ILL-GOTTEN GAINS

Exhibition On View
September 20–December 20, 2025
At Lighthouse Works and across Fishers Island

Opening Reception
Saturday, September 20 at The Ordnance
5pm Cocktails and 5:30pm Exhibition Tour

New York Film Festival Screenings in NYC
Saturday & Sunday, October 4 & 5 at Lincoln Center
Theatrical Premier of *Acetone Reality* with artist Q+A
Full details at: www.filmilinc.org/nyff

Exhibition Tour
Saturday, October 11 at The Ordnance
4pm Led by artist Sara Magenheimer and curator Laurel Ptak

Learn More
www.lighthouseworks.us/exhibitions

Front, Video Stills (left to right, top to bottom): Seven Signs That Mean Silence (2013), Some Things You Can Ask Me (2022), Best Is Man’s Breath Quality (2016), MICKRYS (2011), Slow Zoom Long Pause (2015), Art and Theft (2017), Which Arbitrary Thing Are You (2014), Sentences (2022), Is There An After Taste Of Life In These Graves (2025).