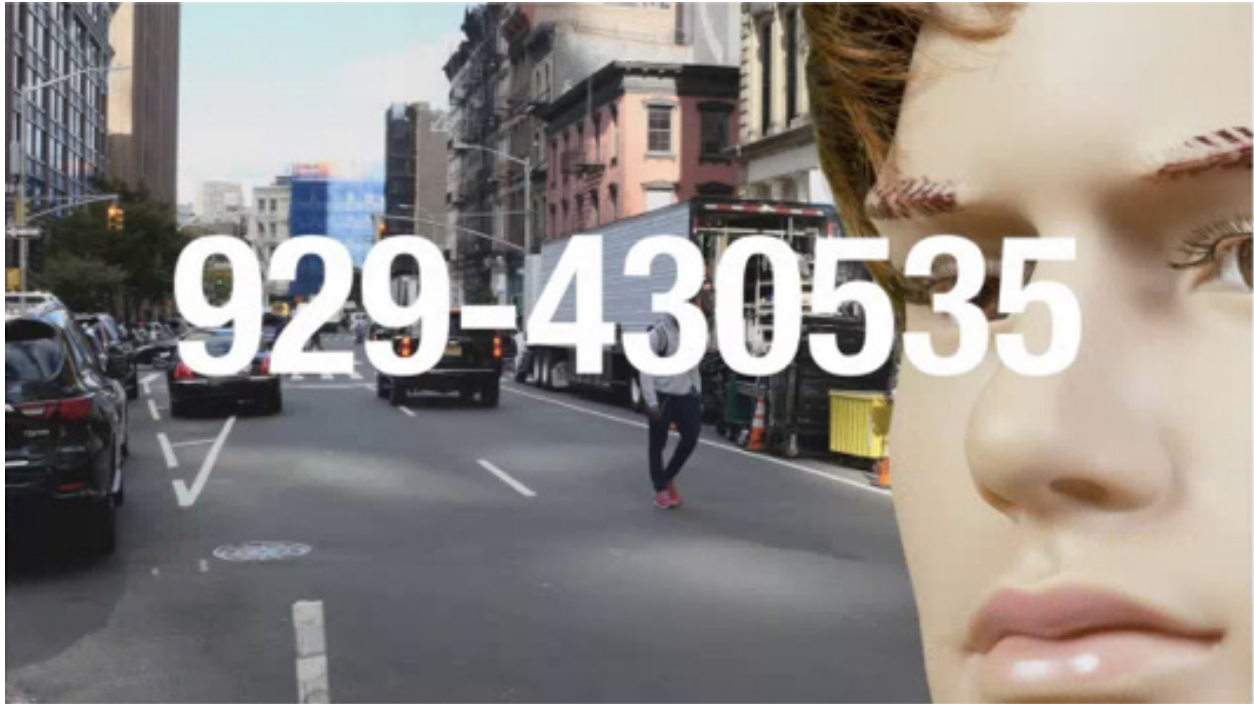


# METRO PICTURES

Kelsey, Colleen. "Is It Just Us or Would It Be Great to Be a Mannequin Right Now?," *Garage.Vice.com* (May 15, 2020).

## GARAGE



John Miller, *Toll Free* (film still), 2019. Video with color and sound, 6 minutes 8 seconds.

I never thought I would be bored of having a body. Of eating, of walking. Of remembering pulling a piece of fruit down from a branch, palming its gravity, or swimming in the ocean, slicing through the weight of the water before going too far out and getting pummeled by the waves. Getting spit up on the shoreline, covered in salt. But after weeks of self-isolation spent listlessly unfocused, something shifted. A blip of jealousy registered randomly—I saw online that Lil Miquela, the computer-generated avatar/influencer, was recommending books to her followers. Even Lil Miquela, a fabricated form of sentience primarily used for marketing purposes, was reading. (I was not, but I was *trying*.) I've never seen the positives of fusing man with machine, but now I thought how nice it would be to not worry about my muscles growing slack, to just be turned off and plugged in for a while. I would sleep more that way. Maybe I could reboot.

That pleasurable displaced feeling resurfaced while I was watching John Miller's *Mannequin Trilogy* as part of Metro Pictures Online Film Festival. Each weekend, the New York gallery shows a film or selection of shorts on their Vimeo page. Camille Henrot started the series; this week it moves to Miller. (Cindy Sherman, Judith Hopf, and Robert Longo are among those who will follow in the next few weeks.)



John Miller, *What Is a Subject?* (film still), 2020. Video with color and sound, 11 minutes 5 seconds.

Miller's exhibition "The Collapse of Neoliberalism" was at the gallery back in February, taking as an icon the mannequin as a vessel of human identification and consumerist projection. His video *Toll Free* (2019) screened in the back gallery, and it's now part of the three available online. Running just over six minutes, images of a mannequin's frozen face, disembodied arms and hands, and a series of office desk phones temporarily obstruct rotating camera footage of the busy junction of Church Street and Sixth Avenue in Tribeca. Audio of busy signals, answering machine prompts, and the automated gargle of robocall scams drone on, the anxious ambient noise that punctuates a normal day—or what counted for one, once—the fatigue of commuting to work or not-work, screening and decoding the questionable incoming data on your personal device. I was jealous, again. That mannequin was in Manhattan.

Also screening is Miller and Richard Hoek's *Mannequin Death* (2016), a nearly three-minute freefall that gave me the satisfying thrill of pure alienation. After a slow pan up the sculpted legs of a female mannequin dressed in denim cutoffs and accessorized with a gauzy scarf, sunglasses, and bangle bracelets—seemingly plucked fresh from a store window—a hand of her own kind (that is, not human) pushes her over the edge of a remote Alpine cliff. She careens down, smashing into the side of a rock formation. This kicks off a succession of other wigged and conspicuously dressed mannequin men, women, and children snapping and cracking down the mountainside, until their broken fiberglass viscera amasses at the quarry at the bottom. Equally arresting, though, is the vacuous artificial intelligence layered in *What is a Subject?* (2020), where close-ups of a floppy-haired mannequin in a gray suit are intercut with titles and an ascending and intensifying series of staccato beats with a computerized voice looping on repeat, "It's me," until you expect it to spontaneously, glitchily combust. Miller's deployment of soullessness is expert—eerie. For me, hopefully it's just a pose.