

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Ken. Johnson, "Art in Review," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2012

The New York Times

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Art in Review

Frances Stark

'My Best Thing'

MoMA PS1
22-25 Jackson Avenue, at 46th
Avenue, Long Island City, Queens
Through April 30

'Osservate, Leggete Con Me'

Gavin Brown's Enterprise
620 Greenwich Street, at Leroy
Street, West Village
Through April 21

Do you dream of anonymous sex with random strangers but fear actual physical contact? You are in luck. Sign on to any number of Web sites and you can fulfill your fantasies remotely with real, live others via the miracle of Skype.

Frances Stark, an assistant

professor at the Roski School of Fine Arts at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, has been indulging in this activity over the past few years and has distilled her experiences into visually chaste and verbally promiscuous videos. Her magnum opus, at PS1, is "My Best Thing," a 99-minute film that she made for, and presented at, the 2011 Venice Biennale. What you mainly see are two digitally animated, childlike figures resembling dolls made from Lego blocks — a female who speaks in computer-generated standard English, and one or the other of two males, who each speak in heavily Italian-accented, grammatically uncertain English — isolated on green-screen backgrounds. (To create these animations, Ms. Stark used free software avail-

able from Xtranormal.com.)

Intermittent episodes of simultaneous masturbation are represented by expressions like "mmmm" and "omg!" Mostly, the characters talk about art, film, literature, language and philosophy, and about Ms. Stark's plan to make an artwork out of these interactions for the Venice Biennale. Improbably, there unfolds a genuinely affecting story about the vagaries of emotional connection and the difficulties of making art and being an artist.

At Gavin Brown, more of this dialogue is video-projected in two rooms as lines of text accompanied by music. These shorter pieces feel like outtakes from "My Best Thing," which is, against all odds, some kind of masterpiece. **KEN JOHNSON**