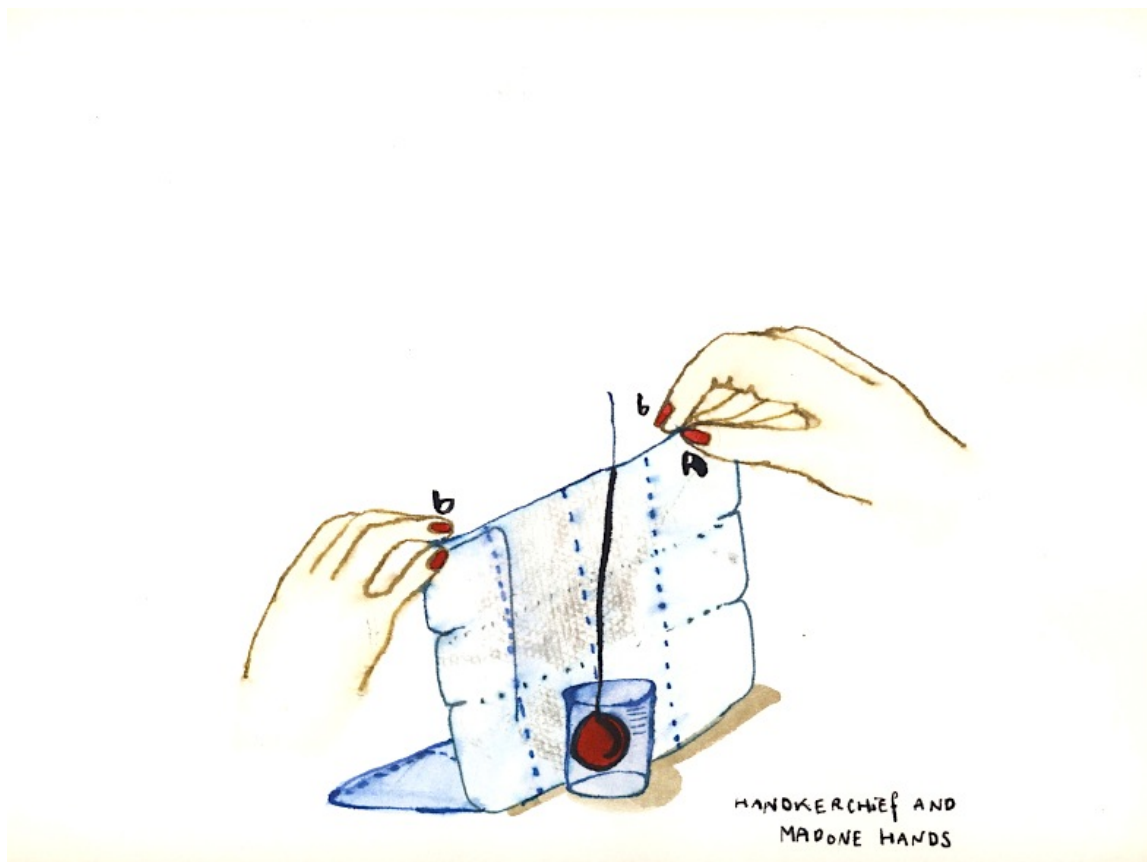


Poison Lecture



Handkerchief and Madone Hands, 2009

Christine Rebet's *Poison Lecture*, originally commissioned by Future Art Research (F.A.R.) at Arizona State University, re-stages the first formal lecture ever dedicated to the art of magic, delivered in Boston in 1927 by renowned conjuror John Mulholland. The re-created text, derived from Mulholland's numerous, now-declassified reports and manuals (*Quicker than the Eyes, The Art of Illusion or Magic in the Making*), carries hidden references to his later career during the Cold War, teaching secrets of the trade to Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) operative agents. Lending his unusual abilities to the service of his country's safety and leadership, Mulholland revealed himself a valuable master of patriotic trickery and deception to American spies in the 1950s. While Mulholland (Zach Rockhill) delivers an authoritative expose about the history and mechanisms of magic, his assistant, a young professional magician (Josh Rand), demonstrates, with the help of makeshift props, tricks inspired by legendary conjurors such as Robert Houdin, Dai Vernon or Harry Lorayne, complementing live the slide-projection of found images culled from textbooks, catalogues and newspapers. Unraveling a dazzling polyphony of text, still and moving illustrations, Rebet's performative piece combines the secretive worlds of magic and espionage, entertainment and geopolitics, mass captivation and government, to wittily expose their kindred spirit.

Béatrice Gross

2009 Poison Lecture, Future Art Research, ASU Fringe Festival, Phoenix, AZ