

## Critic's Guide: London

Highlights of the shows opening around the UK capital for Frieze Week



Marianna Simnett, *Worst Gift*,  
2017, video still. Courtesy: the  
artist and Matt's Gallery, London

**Marianna Simnett**

[Matt's Gallery](#)

6 September – 22 October 2017

'I've come to get the liquid', a woman says to a security guard, who will not let her into the official-looking factory. 'If you don't let me through, I will make the birds sing', she says, and threatens the guard that the singing will have a gruesome effect on him. The woman, played by the artist herself, is attempting to enter the place to retrieve a substance a voice surgeon (played by a real doctor and singer) injects into prepubescent boys' throats in order to lower their voices. She goes to him, asking to make her voice lower 'like the boys', and when he refuses, she goes to get the medicine herself. Simnett's video works tread a fine line between realism and fantasy: the alternate universe in this work, titled *Worst Gift*, is so close to actuality that in her previous film *The Needle and the Larynx* (2016) she really did go through a surgical operation to lower her voice by Botox injection. In *Worst Gift* dark reverie takes precedent: the boys are violent and covered with blood, the surgery dirty and has mice running across the hallways, the doctor almost menacing. The script is delivered like a fairytale and at times told in song, accompanied by a light installation that echoes the action onscreen, making the work even more visceral and haunting.