

# ARTFORUM

## Bik Van der Pol

PÉREZ ART MUSEUM MIAMI

1103 Biscayne Blvd.

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Reports emerged in early 2015 that Florida government officials had unofficially banned state employees from using phrases such as “climate change” and “global warming” or words such as “sustainability” in their communications. Bik Van der Pol, the Rotterdam-based artistic team of Liesbeth Bik and Jos Van der Pol, took this curious censure, which the government denies, as a partial point of departure for their installation *Speechless*, 2015, the result of a residency at PAMM.

The work consists of a custom-made aviary, the walls of which contain letters that if unscrambled spell out the aforementioned banned words. The structure includes five parrots—Cleo, David, Paco, Zach, and Jany—that will be taught to recite various verses from T. S. Eliot’s 1922 poem *The Waste Land* throughout the run of the show. Eliot’s Europe, devastated by World War I, is Bik Van der Pol’s conception of a south Florida overwhelmed by an impending ecological catastrophe. By hearing the Other, language need not be a divisor between humans and animals.

The accompanying wall text indicates that the museum’s avian guests have made public appearances their entire lives and that they are being taken care of by “the nation’s leading” veterinarian and are all on loan from a local private collector to whom they will be returned. While it might be far-fetched to write that the parrots are not treated as (art) objects, the public display of this information is further evidence of the work’s central message, an interest in blurring the human/animal divide, a binary that has led us to our current quagmire.

— *Alpesh Kantilal Patel*



Bik Van der Pol, *Speechless* (detail), 2015, mixed media, dimensions variable.

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