

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



The Rejection Letters That Burned Everyone From George Orwell to Aspiring Clowns

Angela Watercutter

MANUSCRIPT RECORD		DATE RECD	September 18, 1945		SERIAL NO.	I 21
AUTHOR Orwell, George		TITLE ANIMAL FARM (bound book published in England by Secker & Warburg) <input type="checkbox"/> TYPESCRIPT <input type="checkbox"/> PROOFS <input type="checkbox"/> SHEETS <input type="checkbox"/> BOOK			NO. PAGES 92	
SUBMITTED BY Francis Arthur Jones 1090 Amsterdam Avenue New York 23, N.Y.		NO. OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND ILLUSTRATOR NONE				
INSTRUCTIONS FOR RETURN NONE		DEPOSITED OF BY WHOM: <i>Francis Jones</i> BY WHEN: <i>9/18/45</i>				
BY WHOM READ:	NAME	DATE SENT	DATE RETURNED	PER		
	<i>Francis Jones</i>	<i>9/18/45</i>	<i>9/25/45</i>			
REJECTED OR RECOMMENDATIONS <i>NY 11489-25</i> REJECT						
REJECTED	BY WHOM	DATE	APPROVED			
ACCEPTED	BY WHOM	DATE	APPROVED			
REPORT Stupid and pointless fable in which the animals take over a farm and run it, and their society takes about the course of the Soviet Union as seen by Westbrook Pegler. It all goes to show that a parallel carried out to the last detail is boring and obvious. Even Pegler gets off a few smart lines now and then but this is damn dull. Very very SFX.						

Self-help books often advise that the fastest way to achieve success is through failure: failing often and failing up. Even great writers like George Orwell suffered setbacks, like when his novel *Animal Farm* was rejected as a “stupid and pointless fable” by Knopf Publishers in 1945. So when the Sundance Film Festival asked artist and photographer Taryn Simon to create something to kick off its Free Fail campaign, a series of panels “designed to embrace failure as essential to risk-taking, innovation, and the creative process,” she decided to make a video flip book of rejection letters.

The 13-second piece, which debuted today on WIRED’s Instagram and is embedded above, begins with Orwell’s rejection from Knopf – previously part of Simon’s “Black Square” series – and ends with a rejected Freedom of Information Act request made by internet activist Aaron Swartz, with whom Simon worked on the *imageatlas.org* project.

But in the blink-and-you’ll-miss-it section between those two bookends is: A rejection letter from the music label Sub Pop that begins “Dear Loser,” a denial from the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College, and a rejection of a *Star Trek* spec script. There is also a letter – recently noted by Meryl Streep in her National Board of Review gala speech honoring Emma Thompson and slamming Walt Disney – that explains to one aspiring female artist in the 1930s

that women were not welcome to do “the creative work in connection with preparing the cartoons for the screen, as that task is performed entirely by young men.”

The point, of course, is that critics are sometimes wrong and that aspiring filmmakers should both learn from the mistakes of their predecessors and persevere despite the haters. One of the Free Fail events will include a Monday screening of Wes Anderson’s fantastic feature *Bottle Rocket*, which was originally rejected by Sundance. Check out Simon’s video above, then use the hashtags #Sundance and #FreeFail on social media to share your own great failures during the festival.

Simon has her own experiences with rejection to draw from as well, including a rejection letter she received from Disney after she requested permission to photograph an underground facility owned by the corporation. “The letter read ‘especially during these violent times... the magical spell cast on guests who visit our theme parks is particularly important to protect and helps to provide them with an important fantasy they can escape to.’ My photograph was threatening this fantasy and consequently denied,” said Simon. “The faxed rejection itself was a far better work than any photograph I could have ever produced.”