

Jesper Just, "This Unknown Spectacle"

Curator: Frank Lamy

Solo exhibition, October 22, 2011-February 5, 2012

Opening on Friday, October 21, 2011, from 6:30 PM

Press Release

During the autumn of 2011, in the context of Paris' international celebration of artistic creation, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Val-de-Marne in Vitry-sur-Seine (MAC/VAL) will present a major event with the first solo exhibition in a French institution of the Danish artist Jesper Just. The project's curator, Frank Lamy, invited this young artist to show his work for four months in the museum's temporary exhibition spaces, projecting no less than six of his films, including his most recent project, shot in Paris during the summer of 2011 specifically for the occasion of the MAC/VAL solo show. Throughout the exhibition "This Unknown Spectacle", (also the title of his latest film), Jesper Just will offer MAC/VAL's visitors with a new artistic and cinematographic experience. Through the nature of their lighting, the strangeness of their settings, the absence of a clear narrative, and a refusal to use dialogue, Just's films are transformed into captivating "visual poems", strange moving tableaux. The exhibition traces a path through a set of films that are as fascinating as they are troubling, creating a dreamlike environment conducive to introspection. Issues of identity, social transgression, and humanity dwell at the heart of Just's enigmatic oeuvre with an esthetic that is both refined and referential.

Although Jesper Just's films seem to have much in common with traditional cinema, it is easy to be fooled by their attractive surface. The intoxicating beauty of his images saturates the screen, and by meticulously eliminating any parasitic elements, the artist has created atmospheres that verge upon the disturbing. There is no story-board prepared in advance. Taking a location as his starting point, a place, a park, a building, and island, Just creates a his films' scenarios as he goes. By focusing his attention to carefully sculpt the lighting and obtain images of an evanescent, ambiguous beauty, with the same suddenness of his scene changes, he transports the viewer to an unexpected "elsewhere".

Just's films, with their stories of meetings and guilt, have a startling melodramatic continuity in spite of sudden shifts in the scenery and action. Why does a character break into song? Why is another crying? Without the defining presence or characterization provided by a plot, the images communicate only the effect they create in the viewer who experiences them. At times, the atmosphere becomes so heavy that the viewer feels they have become an intruder, that they are uninvited voyeurs.

One should never underestimate Just's caustic sense of humor, for he is an artist who clearly takes pleasure in offering up an unexpected vision of the world capable of upending our stereotypes of desire.

Among the films projected in the exhibition, *It Will All End in Tears* depicts a partly mystical sensation of being in love between two men from different generations. The first of three acts (all set in New York) unfolds in a misty Asian garden where an older man wanders in search of a younger man. He sings "Only You" while his companion plays a drum. A gong sounds. The young man disappears in a rain of rose petals. The second act refers to a citation from Jean Genet's *The Miracle of the Rose*. Here the two men are found in a deserted courtroom. Other men, who might be members of the jury, begin to comically shout the lyrics of Cole Porter's "I've Got You Under My Skin". The final act takes place on the roof of the Silver Cup cinema in Brooklyn where we see the two men before fireworks light up New York's horizon. In spite of the changes in scenery and action, that might make this sequence of three acts incomprehensible, the story of a meeting between two people has an astonishing melodramatic continuity.

Some of the other films in the exhibition seem more reflective. *A Vicious Undertow* is centered around a middle-aged female character who whistles the melody from "Nights in White Satin" in a bar. The camera slips over the nape of her neck, her skin, and her hips before turning towards a second, younger woman who is humming the same melody. A man joins them. In a succession of quick cuts, the camera captures the older woman waltzing with the younger woman, then dancing with the man, then dancing with the younger woman again as though she is caught in a hallucination. Suddenly, she freezes and turns to the exit, before turning to contemplate the two other characters one last time on her way out the door. As she leaves, the scene changes. Thrown into the dark of night on the steps of a never-ending staircase, the woman seems to be trying to flee her melancholy by moving through a space outside of time.

Jesper Just merrily manipulates "the clichés of cinema" to surprise his viewers and take them to unexpected places. With *This Unknown Spectacle* he succeeds in yet another *tour de force*, offering up images of Paris of a particularly somber and disturbing beauty. Through a series of shifts in time and space he leads the public through an unknown world where the beauty of his images creates a gripping sense of uneasiness.

Jesper Just was born in Copenhagen in 1974 and holds a degree from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. He lives in New York. His work has been presented at the MoMA, the Tate Modern, and the Vienna Kunsthalle. He is represented by the Emmanuel Perrotin Gallery in Paris, the Perry Rubinstein Gallery in New York, and the Galleri Christina Wilson in Copenhagen.

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