



# William E. Jones: Gutter Collages

BY DREW SAWYER

While editing his 2017 film *Rejected*, which consists of over 420,000 "killed" negatives from Farm Security Administration files, the Los Angeles-based artist William E. Jones strained his shoulder. The unexpected injury gave him not only a break from the constant glow of his computer screens but also an opportunity to work with his hands in more tangible mediums and with pre-digital tools. He began collecting books and magazines—and making sculptures and collages by removing their pages. In the summer of 2018, Jones assembled these folios into what he has called "gutter collages." The title is a double entendre that refers to both the space between two facing pages on a spread and the racy or "low" source material. Like much of his work in film and photography, the collages explore the disciplinary frames of sexuality, visual culture, and capitalism, particularly how they intersect with his own biography.

Many of the collages juxtapose pages from art history books, pornographic magazines, news journals, and pamphlets on Cold War politics, such as *Gutter Collage 2* (*Lyndon Johnson—jerk off—Warhol—taint—Lenin*), *Gutter Collage 11* (*Edward Kennedy—centerfold—Pollock—seashore—volcano—marine*), and *Gutter Collage 22* (*Johns—presidential motorcade—fake holly—ass crack and balls—John F. Kennedy*). Like their matter-of-fact and jumbled titles, the collages mix reproductions of Abstract Expressionist and Pop artworks with images of world leaders and ideals of masculinity and life in post-World War II America, functioning as critical reflections on and appreciations of the disparate yet connected historical and cultural events of his youth.

These new works are a return to Jones's artistic beginnings. He began making collages as a teenager more than thirty years ago and extended his experiments while an undergraduate at Yale Univer-



*Gutter Collage 14 (Swiss Alp—Vietnam—fists—Barney—teabagging)*, 2018

sity and a graduate student at California Institute of the Arts, where he studied film with Thom Andersen. The themes of the Gutter Collages were already apparent in these early investigations. In a collage from 1988, *Blue Poles*, he paired a magazine spread depicting anal intercourse between three white men with reproductions of paintings by Jackson Pollock. Jones says he was partly inspired by Warhol's recollections of the homophobic New York art world of the 1950s and '60s.

Though Jones did not make collages for three decades, he continued to collect and juxtapose found imagery in his film and video work. In films like *The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography* (1998) and *v.o.* (2006), he re-mixed footage from gay porn movies, some of which he encountered while editing compilations for porn mogul Larry Flynt as a day job. *The Fall of*

*Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography* uses clips from gay erotic videos produced in Eastern Europe to explore the new relationship between money, sex, and power in the region after 1989. For *v.o.*, the artist paired non-sex scenes from pre-AIDS-era gay porn movies with sound clips taken primarily from classic European avant-garde films by Jean Renoir, Luis Buñuel, Guy Debord, and Manoel de Oliveira. These films, like Jones's Gutter Collages and so much work of the twentieth-century avant-garde, allow us to reflect on history by reframing its raw evidentiary forms, opening them up to the ambiguities and poetry of new contexts.



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Top to Bottom:  
Gutter Collage 15 (Rockies—Louis—Biatran children—Richard Nixon), 2018 Gutter Collage 20 (Lee Harvey  
Oswald—Francis—cowboys—Jack Ruby), 2018  
Gutter Collage 21 (Spain—Warhol—Hanns Martin Schleyer—Aldo Moro—Dine), 2018



## Credits

### William E. Jones

*Another Democratic  
Upheaval*, 1986  
Collage  
29 1/4 x 23 1/4 in

*Gutter Collage 14 (Swiss Alp  
-Vietnam- lists-Barney-  
teabagging)*, 2018  
Collage  
12 1/8 x 22 7/8 in

*Gutter Collage 4 (Still-blow  
job-Hirst-Murakami-butt  
fucking-Pollock)*, 2018  
Collage  
10 7/8 x 16 1/2 in

*Gutter Collage 15 (Rockies-  
Louis-Biafran children-  
Richard Nixon)*, 2018  
Collage  
12 1/8 x 18 1/2 in

*Gutter Collage 20 (Lee  
Harvey Oswald-Francis-  
cowboys-Jack Ruby)*, 2018  
Collage  
13 x 27 1/2 in

*Gutter Collage 21 (Spain-  
Warhol-Hanns Martin  
Schleyer-Aldo Moro-Dine)*,  
2018  
Collage  
12 1/4 x 21 1/4 in

*Gutter Collage 18  
(Democratic Convention-  
Wesselmann-ass-painter)*,  
2018  
Collage  
12 3/8 x 26 1/2 in

Courtesy of the artist and  
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Los Angeles