

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery New York is pleased to present Survey, an exhibition of film and video works made by William E. Jones over the last three decades. His first New York survey exhibition in an art-specific context, the show will be on view June 24 through August 5, 2022. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, June 23 from 6 until 8 PM. The exhibition features a representative selection of ten videos divided among three simultaneous projections. Two projections account for a single program, mostly featuring works with sound, that repeats every other hour; the third is dedicated to Rejected (2017), a single silent work almost eight hours in length.

William E. Jones is a Los Angeles-based artist, filmmaker, and writer whose work transcends traditional boundaries of genre and subject matter. His videos, which take a wide variety of forms, range from the documentary essay The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography (1998) to kaleidoscopic arrangements of found footage like Shoot Don't Shoot (2012) in which elaborate mathematical formulas are used to weave together archival material in bracing new ways. Jones occupies a stance in which formal experimentation is inseparable from sociopolitical critique, but his position cannot be reduced to platitudes of the sort that often characterize artists' forays into charged or topical material. Rather, he seeks to immerse himself in the insoluble contradictions that rise to the surface when historical documents are excavated, rearranged according to new parameters, and seen in new contexts.

For this reason, Jones has gravitated towards subjects that have been excised from the official record, whether willfully or due to neglect, collective amnesia, or simply the passage of time. Overt acts of excision sometimes come under scrutiny, as they do in Rejected, in which Jones weaves together 3,000-plus negatives commissioned—and later “killed”—by the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression: a vertiginous series of zooms into and out of the black holes that were punched in the negatives to render them unusable for the FSA's purposes.

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Much of the work Jones selected for inclusion in this survey focuses on foreign affairs. There is a particular emphasis on material related to Soviet-U.S. relations during and after the Cold War. Born during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, Jones has gone on record about his once unfashionable—and now unfortunately, prescient—interest in this period, as well as anxiety about imminent nuclear war. These works begin with research and the identification of footage that hides in plain sight, buried in official repositories like the Library of Congress and National Archives of the United States, which also includes the CIA Film Library.

The editing strategies to which Jones subjects these materials, however, render them unmistakably contemporary. In some videos, he creates dense, even stroboscopic sequences in which color and pattern appear in new ways; the result of painstaking editing according to rigorous organizational systems, the videos transform pieces of the historical record into living things that evoke the shock, disorientation, and visceral pleasure felt by viewers of early cinema. Works like [The Soviet Army Prepares for Action in Afghanistan](#) (2011) and [Bay of Pigs](#) (2012) are also frank reminders that geopolitical processes put into motion during the Cold War never ceased, not during the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall and certainly not now.

Perhaps because of the cross-genre nature of his interests—his work has received retrospectives at film festivals, taken shape in books as biography and fiction, and informed curatorial projects—Jones remains difficult to classify, a situation exacerbated by his willingness to openly critique the economic models by which art, literature, and ideas in general are disseminated in an increasingly market-driven society. In [Counterfeit](#) (2011) and [Model Workers](#) (2014), two videos in which minimal editing techniques are used to present appropriated materials in an unadorned and forthright way, monetary instruments themselves become centers of attention. The former is essentially a recut version of a film from the CIA Film Library about the counterfeiting process, while the latter is a slideshow-style presentation of figurative images appearing on paper currency from around the world.

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While both of these works are filled with matter-of-fact aesthetic pleasures, thanks to Jones's editorial eye, they also reveal how psychological manipulation, false outrage, and distorted values are—like the physical coercion and violence they often accompany—employed by authorities as tools for social control. Nowhere is this more apparent than in The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography, a video in which Jones trains an unflinching eye on the intersections between sexual exploitation, the struggle for cultural and political dominance, and the pervasive reach of commerce. Like all of the works in this show, however, it is not merely an intellectual exercise, but a personal, self-aware look at what is truly at stake when epoch-making forces shape the lives of real people.

William E. Jones (b. 1962, Canton, Ohio) has been the subject of many solo exhibitions and retrospectives at institutions including the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2015); St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri (2013); Austrian Film Museum, Vienna (2011); Anthology Film Archives, New York (2010); and ar/ge kunst Galerie Museum, Bolzano, Italy (2009). Recent and notable group exhibitions include Histories of our Time, Kunsthaus Baselland, Basel, Switzerland (2019); FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art, Ohio (2018); Ordinary Pictures, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2016); and Whitney Biennial 1993 and 2008, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. His work is in the public collections of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne, Australia; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; St. Louis Art Museum; and Tate, London, among other museums. His latest novel, I Should Have Known Better, was published in 2021. He is also the author of True Homosexual Experiences: Boyd McDonald and Straight to Hell, Halsted Plays Himself, and I'm Open to Anything. Jones lives and works in Los Angeles.