



Jesper Just. Still from *The Lonely Villa*, 2004. 16 mm transferred to video. Duration: 5 minutes, 30 seconds.

Educator packet for the special exhibition

Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions

on view at the Brooklyn Museum, September 19, 2008–January 4, 2009



Jesper Just. Stills from *The Lonely Villa*, 2004. 16 mm transferred to video. Duration: 5 minutes, 30 seconds.

Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions

About the Artist

Born in 1974 in Copenhagen, Denmark, Jesper Just has become an influential film artist of the early twenty-first century. Often working as both director and editor, Just composes narrative films with obscure twists. His explorations of the complexities of human emotion, relationships, and identity have been presented internationally.

Background

These six images are digital stills taken from the 2004 film *The Lonely Villa*, in which Jesper Just explores a bond between an aged protagonist and a young man who trade musical lyrics sung over telephones. Although the script identifies the younger man as the “son,” Just does not offer the viewer any clues as to the relationship between the two characters. Upon first glance, it is easy to laugh at the clumsiness of the two masculine figures reciting love songs to each other. However, a deeper examination reveals a tender narrative of solitude and vulnerability.

Description of the Film

The Lonely Villa, as Just interprets it, is the darkened interior of a library room, suggestive of a private men’s club. Scattered throughout the dimly illuminated room are a half dozen elderly men, each alone—their faces crisscrossed by deep shadows that render them barely visible. There appear to be white rotary telephones distributed throughout; the silence breaks when one of these rings, four times. An old man raises the receiver to his ear just as another ring sounds on the phone of a second old man; waiting on the other end, for both of them, is silence and they hang up. A finger is seen dialing number 7. The old man’s phone rings and, seeming anxious, he answers as Just cuts to a shadowed close-up of a young man. This character is presumably situated in the same room, but if so, he is even more shadowed than the older men.

The younger man begins an *a cappella* rendition of the Ink Spots’ World War II–vintage love song “I Don’t Want to Set the World on Fire,” his unpolished but earnest performance soon joined by light musical back-up. The old man responds by singing a different Ink Spots standard, “Address Unknown.” They join together on the second line: “I just want to be the one you love.” As the old man, now standing, begins his final chorus, Just pulls back to reveal in the foreground an unmanned telephone with the receiver lying off the hook. The younger man has presumably vanished, leaving the old man’s song, “Address Unknown,” to be heard not by his desired but merely by the other old men who share his shadowed existence.

Questions for Viewing the Digital Stills

What is going on in these images? Who are the main characters?

Read from left to right, top to bottom. What story connects these images?

What do you think is being shared over the telephone? What do you see to support your idea?

What is the connection between the main characters?

What would the next image look like if the film continued?

Notice the close-up image of the younger man speaking into the phone. How does this strengthen the story even though it does not offer additional visual clues?

Look closely at all the characters in the bottom row. What do you think they are doing? How do they fit into the story?

The title of this film is *The Lonely Villa*. How does this information change your understanding of the images?

Activities

Visual Storytelling

Determine what story connects the pictures and imagine what happens next. Using pencil and paper, illustrate the next moment and color it in. Try to color and shade the image in the style of the director to match the darkened mood and setting of the film. *Materials:* One piece of 4-by-6 drawing paper; pencils; crayons/marker/color pencils

Speech

Imagine the conversation between the older and younger man in the film. Cut out speech bubbles and write in them what you think the men might be saying to each other.

Sequence

Jesper Just often incorporates unexpected shifts in storyline to provide deeper understanding. Cut out the images and shuffle them into a different order. Your story may take a surprising turn.

Resources

www.jesperjust.com

This is the artist's Web site, which highlights Just's work and exhibitions over the years. Stills from other films are also available for viewing.

Patrick Amsellem. *Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions*. New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2008.

This is the exhibition catalogue for the Brooklyn Museum show.

Jesper Just film stills courtesy of the artist and of Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York, and Galleri Christina Wilson, Copenhagen.

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