

USA

JESPER JUST

James Cohan Gallery,
New York

'This Nameless Spectacle' presented three of Jesper Just's most recent, gorgeously produced, films. Of the three, *Llano* (2012) is atypically fathomable, while *This Nameless Spectacle* (2011) and *Sirens of Chrome* (2010) fit comfortably into the Danish filmmaker's oeuvre of metaphorically open-ended but detail-rich narratives.

Just luxuriates in the use of hidden details: a transgendered protagonist in *This Nameless Spectacle* and an entire secondary historical narrative in *Llano*; information that is either never directly provided to the viewer or only vaguely hinted at, but which explains much of the action. By hiding these facts, he legitimizes the voice of the artist from a literary perspective, as the explainer of effects that seemingly have no cause.

This Nameless Spectacle sandwiches the viewer between two panoramic projections. Formally, the horizontally orientated double projection allows Just to experiment with surveillance – viewer and subject – as well as a delightful comic-book-style of sequencing of motion along the length of the panorama. The action is scripted for two points of view: a chase in which a young man follows a wheelchair-bound woman through the Buttes Chaumont park on the outskirts of Paris, followed by a love scene of sorts in which the same youth watches and causes the woman to writhe in either pain or ecstasy viewing her from one high-rise apartment into another. The title of the film is drawn from William Carlos Williams's poem 'The Right of Way' (1923), and perhaps also refers to Oscar Wilde's famous line 'the love that dare not speak its name' as the woman is, in fact, the French transsexual actress Marie-Claire Garcia. By transmogrifying the apparent gender of the youth's object of desire, Just resets the entire register of human sexual attraction, and what it is we pursue when we engage in voyeuristic activity, or even a very rudimentary, albeit creepy, form of courtship.

A single-screen projection, *Sirens of Chrome* comprises a similar two-scene dramatic format. Just seems to thrive on this – arguably a film with a beginning and middle, but no end. Two fanciful visions of Detroit are depicted: three African-American women in a black Chevy with a purple door and mismatched tyres cruise through deserted streets to a plaintive piano soundtrack. They find themselves in an opera-house-turned-carpark, involved in a ritualistic, possibly violent, slow-motion dance sequence. The scene is punctuated by a harsh drumbeat, which is itself propelled by the metallic crunches of a fourth woman rolling herself over the car. Just allows himself to revel in a degree of cultural generalization: he romanticizes Detroit by presenting two floating dream worlds – the American stereotype of the timeless space of driving, combined with the *West Side Story*-esque fabrication of rhythmic urban confrontation. But *Sirens of Chrome* is a stunning balletic piece notwithstanding.

Set in the desert outside Los Angeles, *Llano* raises the issue of whether 'getting it' with respect to a Just film is all that necessary, or satisfying. A simple Sisyphian vignette, the film refers to Llano Del Dio, a small communist community that foundered for lack of water. A girl struggles to reconstruct one of the stone buildings of that community, while a Rube Goldberg apparatus of pipes and tubes uselessly inundates the ruin with artificial rain. This simple plot is interspersed with footage of the water pipes and pumps of an LA basement. There is little room for speculation or discourse in *Llano*; the sounds of the film, more than anything else, lock the viewer into the claustrophobic space of the mind-set of the sole desperate actress. The incessant drip-dropping and the endless click-clack of rock on rock, as well as the more ominous hum of the innards of LA, underline the beautiful and unstable futility of watering a desert, in any sense.

Llano is a glittering morality play – a punchline delivered in response to the two open-ended questions posed by the other films that in totality deliciously let Just off the hook of predictability.

WILLIAM CORWIN

1
Jesper Just
This Nameless Spectacle,
2011, DVD still

2 & 3
Saul Steinberg
illustrations from
The New Yorker

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Jeanie Riddle
'Tenor', 2012,
installation view

frieze

