

Dazed Digital, September 2014

DAZED

Alex Da Corte's visual tricks

By Kate Neave



According to this four-channel immersive video installation "magic is not some moonbeam Hogwarts shit coming out of a wand." No, this is magic right here in the fresh visual tricks of Alex Da Corte's dazzling film sets born out of a strange dialogue with Brooklyn artist Jayson Musson. The ICA Philadelphia's Assistant Curator Kate Kraczon commissioned these two artists to work together in terrain less familiar to their practice – for Da Corte in video and for Musson in language. They've directed their wild imaginations to creating an elaborate soap opera – entitled Easternsports – playing on the desires and expectations of our contemporary consumer culture. We speak to Alex Da Corte about his collaboration with Jayson Musson and find out about the original music that accompanies the films by Blood Orange aka Dev Hynes.

Where did you get the name Easternsports?

Alex Da Corte: The name comes from a poem that Jayson wrote in the early 2000s. In the poem, he makes reference to a westerner's knowledge of Buddhism as 'easternsports'. Westerners are encouraged to 'find themselves' and in that process we try on, then discard many ideologies, thus reducing them to trite intellectual garments, or a light pastime much akin to sports. The multichannel play cycles through five cycles of these ideological archetypes in attempt to chart and map the kinds of rituals we go through to achieve these cultural ideals.

Dazed Digital, September 2014

With your film sets you've created a surreal, magical wonderland. How did you go about creating that environment?

Alex Da Corte: I have long been interested in stages – all types – whether the stage is a television set or a music video, an opera or a cartoon. My work often points to how these stages can deceive us, as there are often sides of a stage that cannot be seen, and there are many tricks and special effects at play to create awe or manifest power over the audience. Jayson and I were interested in using these types of systems along with his 12,000 word script to poke holes in these stages we rely on, and expose the mechanisms at play behind these cultural veils.

You play with our expectations, shifting and surprising us with unusual pairings and unexpected ideas. Does this reflect your take on contemporary reality?

Alex Da Corte: (laughs) Well Shakespeare does say, 'All the world's a stage...' and I'd have to agree with him. For me this implies that artifice is everywhere and the employment of the 'mask' and the use of props is a common cultural practice necessary for preserving oneself, and our rituals. The surprising shifts and unusual pairings found in these rituals, in these videos, is nothing spectacular, but rather just framing and isolating the absurd and relocating it to the stage, front and centre.

So how does this tie in to today's culture? What's your personal response to our commercial, self-centered, social media lifestyle?

Alex Da Corte: I rather enjoy it. Jayson and I both do quite a bit. We use it as fodder for exploring deeper into this strange abyss of psyche. Both of our work hinges on noticing the parallels in history and contemporary culture – be it in images or in language – and how these redefined patterns of behaviour locate where we are right now in 2014. We are nothing without a selfie, or a mirror. If they can be used to better understand the ideals that shape our lifestyles as we know them.

How did the collaboration with Dev Hynes come about?

Alex Da Corte: Dev and I had mutual friends. We both enjoyed each others work quite a bit and I approached him about scoring Easternsports. I knew Dev was very interested in theatre and dance, so it seemed like it would be a good fit. Dev was one of the easiest people to work with, and really understood the mood and texture of our project. Easternsports wouldn't be what it is without his score, and Jayson and I are still in awe about it.

So how did the collaboration work?

Alex Da Corte: When we started working together, I explained that I wanted it to be scored like Peter and the Wolf; so each character would be assigned a different instrumentation. The score is a combination of this idea and his synesthesia, which shaped the music and sounds in relation to the colours on the screen. Similar to any collaboration, working with musicians is refreshing because it brings you and your work outside of yourself, it rephrases your visions and adds mood or colour in places there was not.

Anything more you would like to say about the piece?

Alex Da Corte: Jayson and I are happy that it is ready to go into the world. Amen. Easternsports runs until December 28th at the ICA Philadelphia a