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VICE

Three Amazing Young Artists Made a Baroque Surrealist Masterpiece of a Video

By Matthew Leifheit

Last Friday night in Philadelphia, a holy trinity of hot young contemporary artists unleashed Easternsports, a four-channel video of elaborate proportions, onto the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art. The dream team is spearheaded by Alex Da Corte, a 2010 graduate of the Yale School of Art whose career could be described as "blowin' up," as the kids say, and Jayson Musson, an interdisciplinary artist famous on YouTube as satirical art critic, Hennessy Youngman. To complete the trifecta, Dev Hynes, popularly known as recording artist Blood Orange, composed an original score for the video in real time while watching it projected in Da Corte's studio in Philly. If the contemporary art world were a game of fantasy football, this is the team I would pick.

Alex Da Corte and Jayson Musson: Easternsports (video still), courtesy of the artists and Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Joe Sheffen Gallery, and Salon 94



Easternsports is Da Corte's fifth time showing work at the ICA. It's by far his biggest presentation in the space to date, although it hosted a two-man show consisting of Da Corte and Andy Warhol in 2011. De Corte frequently presents his work alongside that of other artists, and his list of recent collaborators includes wunderkinds Sean Patrick Fitzgerald and Sascha Braunig, fashion brand Eckhaus Latta, and Red Hook, Brooklyn-based collective the Still House Group. It was one such group presentation that brought Hynes and Da Corte together.

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Dev Hynes, New York, September 2014. Photo by Matthew Leifheit



"I went to a group show that included his work in London at White Cube gallery," Hynes told me. "In true fashion I took a lot of Instagram pictures, because the room with his work was so good! We have mutual friends who tagged him in the posts, and they connected us."

Hynes had explored various media in the past, but this is his first involvement with an installation in a museum. The collaboration with Da Corte and Musson seemed like a natural progression, as he recently scored Gia Coppola's first film, *Palo Alto*. His approach to scoring the installation was intuitive.

"I went to Philly, and in a couple days just plotted it out," he said. "I would watch the whole video, then try and get a mood from it. He [Da Corte] uses a lot of color, which is good for me, because I use a lot of color, to help with sounds and stuff [Hynes is synesthetic]. I would take one instrument, and do a live whole pass as the video played. I'd then do it again, and try to find specific moments to accent. The first couple videos set the tone, and characters reoccur. So I would find sounds that I thought were best for the characters, and use them all the way through. There are recalls to earlier melodies."

If anyone is surprised to see Hynes, who is best known as a musician, working with artists on a museum piece, they may misunderstand his practice. "I think some people don't know that Blood Orange isn't like a band. To play this album live, I used a band," he said. "So I think people are a little confused. It's really just me, doing whatever I do next. I've only played 17 shows on my most recent album;; I don't really care about touring. I don't like traveling all the time, and I don't like to play stuff over and over again. It doesn't make me feel good, and that in turn is not a nice thing to put out into the world."

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Da Corte is another artist who isn't interested in producing anything he doesn't fully believe in. Although offers for shows and "co-branded" collaborations arise frequently, Alex is reticent of working on anything he didn't come up with on his own. This careful economy of output is surprising, considering much of his work is made up of the mass-produced plastic crap you'd buy at a dollar store. On a recent afternoon in his Philadelphia warehouse studio, he told me how this ambitious project began and why he dedicated months to making this baroque four-channel video installation a reality.

VICE: How do you and Jayson know each other?

Alex Da Corte: We're really old pals, Jayson and I. We went to undergrad together, and we've always talked about working together or doing a show together. But it never really fit, maybe because at the time we were both making objects. We are both pretty critical of each other's work, like old friends are. But recently the curators at ICA, Kate Kraczon and Amy Sadao, thought it would be interesting if they put us together.

They wanted to highlight parts of our work that aren't normally viewed. When he was an undergrad, Jayson was mostly making text work, and now he's making paintings and things, which he shows at Salon 94. They were really interested in his use of language, and him as a critic, the way they seem him criticizing on Instagram or Twitter. He's really active on those platforms, and the curators recognized that part of his work as being really powerful. Similarly, they knew I made videos, but had never really shown them.

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How long have you been making videos?

Well, I studied film and animation in undergrad—and made several videos in the early aughts—but I have been making videos more frequently for the past five years. I think about film and video all the time. But I tend to make objects, and if the videos happen, they just end up on my Vimeo. They have been kind of outside of my world of making.

ICA wanted to focus on the parts of our practice that are lesser known, and that was something that finally made us excited about what we might do. If the show was just an object with an object, like one of Jayson's sweater painting with one of my sculptures, that wouldn't seem married the same way. This becomes much more intimate.

Were the videos made entirely by you, or did Jayson and Dev have a hand in their production as well? Their aesthetic is clearly yours; they look a lot like your work.

The title Easternsports was taken from a poem Jayson wrote in the early 2000s, where he was talking about fantasy and accessing and fetishizing what is outside our grasp. He likened the ways in which we adopt other cultures and schools of thought to sport. Jayson and I are both interested in allegory, and myths, the worlds that we create in second life, or travel via video games, and how these runs close to, or are a reflection of the past in some ways. There's all of this mirroring happening. So the ideas very much came from both Jayson and I. Because the prompt was video with language, it made sense for me to generate the images, and then for Jayson to respond to that and construct a dialogue or a script that could run over the top of it. There are subtitles in the videos, because the narration is spoken in French.

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Alex Da Corte's studio, August 2014. Photo by Matthew Leifheit



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Why French?

Francophilia is one of the sports we were thinking about—and how that particular lifestyle choice is performed. How does it broaden or elevate one's philosophical stance, or not when performed in a country that is largely English-speaking?

There's also something really stylish about having French narration and subtitles.

Yes its funny and romantic, but also "cool" and exotic. Its completely absurd to think that the French are all wearing black-and-white striped T-shirts and quoting Baudrillard all day long while smoking cigarettes, but... what if?

That sounds funny.

Yeah they're funny. I think they're funny. Jayson is really funny.

Easternsports will be on view at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia through December 28.

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