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Jordan Baseman: Deadness, Matt's Gallery - exhibition review

London-based American artist Jordan Baseman has weaved together voice and image to create two compelling works



Macabre collection: Jordan Baseman, Deadness, 2013. Still courtesy the artist and Matt's Gallery

Ben Luke



24 June 2013

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An unsettling atmosphere lies at the heart of Deadness (2013) by the London-based American artist Jordan Baseman.

Like many of his recent works, it's based on an interview, this time with Dr John Troyer from Bath University's Centre for Death and Society. Troyer speaks fascinatingly about the history of embalming, its aim to make the dead look as they do in life, to soothe grieving families and much else.

But as he talks, we see slides of dead people lying in caskets, a macabre collection assembled by Baseman from online auctions. Most are snapshots, though some are more posed historical images. At face value, they're rather boring, but the cumulative effect of seeing this procession of cosmeticised corpses, added to Troyer's matter-of-fact delivery, is a growing sense of unease.

In The Last Walk (2011), the dynamic is reversed. The imagery is more benign – footage of fairy lights in trees shot on film developed crudely in buckets, giving it a degraded, abstract almost painterly appearance. But the accompanying voiceover is jarring, as the artist Stuart Brisley recounts (or perhaps concocts) a story about walking his dog on a wasteland and witnessing a horrific scene of self-immolation. He describes witnessing the "extraordinary and yet at the same time quite delicate" image of a man on fire and his thoughts and actions with relative indifference, almost as if it were a dream. But neither he nor Baseman lets on if we are hearing a true story or fiction.

Baseman has weaved together voice and image to create two compelling works; dark and troubling, they are also unforgettable.

Until July 21, 020 8983 1771, mattsgallery.org

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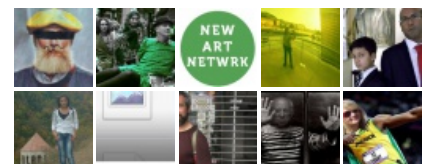
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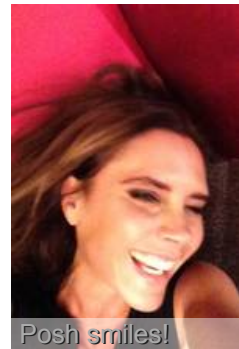
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