



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jesper Just lives and works in Copenhagen and New York. He works exclusively in film, shooting a variety of film stock, including 8 mm, 16 mm and 35 mm. His latter works are shot in film and then transferred to HD videos. The resulting images are dense and atmospheric. Their prominent soundtracks are conceived specifically for each film in cooperation with different musicians. His works have been shown throughout Europe and the United States, including: the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2005), the Miami Art Museum, Miami, FL (2007); and the Witte de With in Rotterdam, The Netherlands (2007).

For more information, visit jesperjust.com

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RELATED EVENTS

Exhibition Reception

Saturday, January 14 | 6-9 PM

Artist and Curator's Walkthrough

Saturday, January 14 | 7 PM

IMAGES: Production stills from *Sirens of Chrome*, 2010. Courtesy of James Cohan Gallery, Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, and Galleri Nicolai Wallner





JESPER JUST *Sirens of Chrome*

December 17, 2011 - January 21, 2012

Sirens of Chrome (2010) is a single channel video presentation by New York-based Danish artist Jesper Just. Known for his short cinematic videos, Just's works are often emotionally charged with ambiguous narratives that never reach a moment of conclusion. Gender, relationships and identity are recurring themes in his work. His previous works have explored the relationships between men while challenging prototypical masculine personae as typically represented in motion pictures and popular culture. His work on display at the Sweeney Art Gallery, *Sirens of Chrome*, similarly takes on the complexity of the human condition, but shifts its focus on the representation and interpretation of African-American women and women in general. Contrary to Just's exploiting the outward emotions and vulnerability of men, *Sirens* explores a woman's emotional inhibitions. They are casted emotionless and non-reactive to their surroundings, and the shift in their dispositions appears subtle.

Gender and identity come into play as Just re-imagines the role of women to contradict mainstream pop-culture's association with men and cars – the archetypal relationship between object and desire. In classical Hollywood cinema, as feminist film theorist, Laura Mulvey defined it; women are almost always represented in a sexualized way in order to appeal to a male audience. The spectator is in a masculine subject position and the woman as the object of desire.¹ Just defies this argument in creating a reversal of roles where the women are the protagonists exhibiting two modes of the male gaze – the voyeur and the fetishist.

Just presents his unconventional storytelling with conventional elements of slick Hollywood films by exploring the dynamics of African-American women and defying their portrayal in mainstream cinema. Just has said, in making *Sirens of Chrome*, he wanted to challenge the long list of films that depicted African-American women as one-dimensional sexual beings, savages and lascivious. From *Birth of a Nation* in the early 1900s to the "Blaxploitation"² films of the 1970s, Black women were type-casted as carnal and promiscuous, often as prostitutes or "jezebels."³ According to Just, the actresses in the video were allotted the opportunity to tamper into the persona of their role. In essence, the actresses took control of their portrayal by either confronting the associations with Black women cinema stereotypes or appropriating the identity commonly conveyed by the opposite sex. While the physical presence of a male figure is non-existent in the storyline, the women become lead figures embodying their being in a masculine domain.

- Jennifer Frias, associate curator, UCR Sweeney Art Gallery

¹ Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* defines the male gaze or the objectification of women in visual texts. Mulvey states that in film women are typically the objects, rather than the possessors of gaze.

² A genre of American film of the 1970s featuring African-American actors in lead roles and often having antiestablishment plots, frequently criticized for stereotypical characterization and glorification of violence. While African-American filmmakers were substantially involved in making early movies in this genre, their participation in subsequent productions was minimal.

³ Jezebel was a Phoenician princess, wife of Ahab who was king of Israel; according to the Old Testament she was a cruel immoral queen who fostered the worship of Baal and tried to kill Elijah and other prophets of Israel (9th century BC). Her reign as queen was marked by similarly deceitful actions. The name Jezebel came to signify a deceitful and immoral woman.