**Jesse Kanda**

Jesse Kanda (born June 23rd, 1987) is a Japanese, Canadian and British artist working in video, music and digital art.

To pinpoint dominant themes in Kanda’s art, or to map it onto some biographical description of the author, would be to undermine its indefinability. His fluctuating and fluid work eludes singular interpretation in favour of unmoored emotionality and sensual ambiguity. While it is possible to locate in the visuals he has created alongside close friends and collaborators Arca and Björk tender resonances of sensitivity, innocence and beauty colliding with conventionally ugly, aggressive or distorted images, his output is empowered by the very inseparability of these apparently disparate elements. It is impossible to fully grasp, disintegrating traditional binary thought and refusing comforting distinctions between revulsion and admiration.

In his installation for Hull UK City of Culture 2017, titled ***In Awe Cstasy***, Kanda continues to dissolve prejudices and dominant expectations. Here, the work is wholly intertwined with the historical context of club cultures. The selected visuals are comprised of archival footage of 1990s raves, taken from both local and universal sources. This footage, donated by veterans of 1990s raves, is deeply personal and intimate, showing dancers in varying states of ecstatic bliss. The videos are hypnotically innocent, with each raver united in childlike submission to the welcoming music and the womb-like space.

While these videos stand as sublime documents of a time of optimism, evoking nostalgia in the viewer for an era in which clubs were inclusive places of playful identity, it is their historic setting that has inspired Kanda’s installation. We exist in a period in which the very existence of clubbing institutions is threatened, a new millennium marked by the merciless extermination of genuinely subversive raving arenas by the war on drugs and property developments.

Primarily, Kanda’s presentation of this footage highlights the utopian futuristic romanticisms that flooded 1990s raves. The imagery is beautiful, an intimate capsule bursting with positive energy and optimism. His digital manipulation of the videos does not shy from the current state of club culture, however. We do not view clubs with the untainted innocence of 90s hedonism, though we continue to experience moments of ethereality within them. Our memory of this innocent period is shrouded and unclear, reflected in the hazy visuals of Kanda’s installation, but we have not lost our emotional connection to these spaces despite growing adversity. It is this oscillation, this push and pull between loving recollection and heart-breaking yearning, that animates the piece.

We see the distorted faces of the dancers and are both attracted to and repelled by them. We are consumed by the deformed bass notes emanating from the room’s centre and experience concurrent pleasure and discomfort. The orange and red coloration of the footage bring to mind the colours of a womb. This mirrors our current predicament: we dream of clubs as idyllic havens for sexual experimentation, equality and celebrations of fluid identity, longing to separate them from the ugliness that often penetrates these spaces today.

The screens, arranged to reflect the club’s dual role as a womb and a cage, present visuals that continue the ambiguity of Kanda’s wider oeuvre. The videos are sensitive and devastating, futuristic and nostalgic, liberating and restrictive, childlike and corrupted. They present a loving vision of what we hope for and believe club spaces to be, and a violent reminder of those that try to stop them from blooming.

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