



John Massey - Clip 8

The Jack Photographs: A Vanitas Project

In the case of Jack, as I became more concerned with photography and understanding the nature of what photography was, I thought it would be interesting to try to make a series of photographs where the pictures were the result of looking through the lens the wrong way so you would see the photographer as opposed to the subject. And so in that sense I was the photographer, a male photographer. Ultimately, I understood the work to be a vanitas project, meaning that the series as a whole was a contemplation on the idea of desire and death.

And so it starts with a tumescent Jack waking in black space..., ..he wakes, he feels, he looks but the principal thing that happens to Jack is that Jack touches his eye. For a visual artist, your eyes, the what and how you see, is the culture you are working with. You are connected to your eyes, what is happening when you look, what do you want to have happen. I have always been interested in the experiential side of seeing and one aspect of this is the haptic idea of touching.....being able to in some way touch what your eyes are seeing. In a way art actualizes this process. Jack's particular situation is compounded by his monocular vision being connected to his sexuality. He is a bit scopophilic. He is preoccupied with the act of looking and unconscious that this is directly

connected with a sexual impulse. He is born to touch.

So I wanted to make a series of pictures that in a very fundamental way would express these basic impulses.....I wanted to trace in a consecutive narrative the trajectory of an impulsive and subjective desire that transforms into a greater consciousness through an act of reflexive meditation. So in the first 23 pictures Jack wakes, Jack feels, Jack looks, Jack touches and in the end, he looks ahead..... and then there are five pictures which are a kind of synopsis of the whole work and they represent the vanitas idea in a more literal way. They qualify the pictures as being about consciousness. So there is a picture of a sun, followed by a skull with light bubbles in its eyes, then the light explodes. In the next picture the skull returns with no light in the eyes and finally there is a single speck of light in a black universe. These are little pictures about a big story.

