

JULIA SJÖLIN

*JIFFY*

3 APRIL–18 APRIL 2020

Julia once told me about a project which point of departure was to collect glass that had been formed by lightning striking sand. The project never happened but the glass and the discharge of energy from which the lightning emerge, still plays a central role in Julia Sjölin's practice and consequently in this exhibition which has been given the title *Jiffy*.

In the video work *6* (2020) two persons are seen acting in front of the camera. Or perhaps I should say cameras, because there are actually two. Six seconds is, according to the instruction manual belonging to the Super 8 camera appearing in the work, the ultimate amount of time for a shot, no more no less. The instruction that the manual provides has in turn become instructions for the actors and their unanimous monologue. We are being directed; instructions have come to govern our language and actions through mechanisms that we are not conscious of. Perhaps this is an ancient drama with all its masks. I am driven by forces and act in a way that I do not understand – I am blind! When I see myself from the outside I do not see myself, it is someone else. It is like hearing your recorded voice; it sounds false.

The two characters are posing in front of each other, performing their gestures that are being interrupted by the mosquitos' infestations. They are filming each other while being filmed, retake after retake. There is a consistent sense of presence that permeates the work. From the speakers we hear the buzzing mosquitoes and the filmmaker's panting breath together with other bodily sounds. In Agnes Varda's film *Le Bonheur* from 1965 the turning points in the narrative are being played over and over through different retakes. Because how should that which is essential be portrayed? And what was it that happened? I do not remember any more, but the memory keeps playing the same scene again and again, though always in a different light. The two characters keeps repositioning and the frozen image, the desired object encapsulated, appears elusive. The screen, the lens and the glass shields: hither but no further.

*Red Light* (2020) is recorded in Amsterdam's De Wallen, perhaps more commonly known as red-light district. Looking at the images we see the empty storefront windows where the sex workers usually appear. Now, however, they are not there and left is the backdrop, the glass and the red and blue lights, which has been etched in on the 16 mm film. The beautiful coloured light leaves a sour taste though, and reminds of a prerequisite in the current economical system: to sell ones labour, to be bought and not owning what one produces. In other words the paradox which is called bourgeois freedom, to be free to sell ones labour which means ones enslavement. Something that does not only apply to the district De Wallen, but is present everywhere all the time. A window of an office interrupts the images of the red ones.

Romance, eroticism and love has long been the site for conflict and political struggle. In art, literature, film, advertisement, fashion and so on, now and throughout history, the image of an ideal and a desired object has constantly been presented. But the image is a chimera and behind its ideological function, behind the glass and behind the door exists an underlying structure and a reality. A reality that is uppermost material, just like the film rolling through the film projector. The glass acts like a lens, an extension of the camera that in turn is an extension of the eye. What is it that the gaze is seeking? What does it want to fixate? Red signifies love, desire and roses as well as blood, anger and violence; a signal signalling "come" and "stop" simultaneously. The light enraptures me but likewise makes me see red. "Your eyes, lit up like shop windows" wrote Baudelaire, and what we actually see in these eyes is in the end determined by our own position, our history and our context. Hence, shines a clear message in red with its absence.

Albin Skaghammar