

---

## William E Jones

The Modern Institute Glasgow

18 March to 20 May

Visitors to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh currently have the chance to see Andy Warhol's 1972 double portrait of the art dealer Alexander Iolas on loan from Tate. What might initially seem like one of the artist's vanity portraits proves to be an ambivalent, poignant study; Iolas appears at once openly confident and hesitantly imploring, looking out from behind a faded silvery-grey scrim of silkscreen blots and bars, his replicated image almost physically decomposing under the viewer's gaze. Warhol's screen-print was made at the height of the dealer's influence, in contrast to the retrospective filmic portrait of Iolas by William E Jones showing on the other side of Scotland at the Modern Institute in Glasgow. Both works, however, are inflected by melancholy and distancing strategies, and are comparably entwined with the compelling life of a personality who, despite an exhibition dedicated to his taste-making at Paul Kasmin in 2014, remains on the margins of art history.

*Fall into Ruin*, 2017, explores the relationship Jones forged with Iolas as a young student from Cleveland, Ohio, when a college friend, who turned out to be the dealer's great-niece, invited him to Greece in 1982. It is composed of individual still photographs that spool past rapidly like a slide show, accompanied by a monologue in which Jones details the sad unravelling of Iolas's ambitions for his collection. Iolas worked as a dancer in Paris and Berlin before becoming a dealer in New York. He subsequently established his own

gallery, at one point operating several outposts across Europe, before dying of AIDS in 1987. Although he wanted the villa he had built on the outskirts of Athens to become a permanent museum for his collection, a stalemate between Iolas's heirs and the Greek authorities led to the artworks being mysteriously dispersed to locations unknown and the abandoned house vandalised. While objects gathered by figures that Iolas advised, such as John and Dominique de Menil, occupy carefully tended institutions, anything of value has been stripped from his villa's carcass, and its walls writhe with graffiti.

Jones combines photographs that he took of Iolas's house and collection in the 1980s (also exhibited in the gallery) with images of contemporary Athens, including the now derelict villa, and shots of classical sculptural fragments in the city's National Archaeological Museum. His monologue weaves these together with reflections on the homoerotic poetry of the Egyptian-Greek poet Constantine P Cavafy, memories of Iolas in Greece surrounded by friends and hangers-on and accounts of his interactions with art-world figures such as Warhol, of whom he was an early and significant supporter. Yet Iolas by no means focused only on high-banking art stars: he remained invested in the surrealists even when their work was wildly unpopular, and helped artists like Paul Thek through poverty and ignominy. Although Jones mentions the latter in passing, the implicit correlation made between Thek and Iolas, both of whom died in the late 1980s from AIDS and whose life work became scattered and uncared-for, indicates that one way of reading *Fall into Ruin* might be as a recuperation of queer histories.

This would cohere to a certain extent with Jones's previous archival films, which have incorporated found footage taken from gay porn and surveillance of cruising. Jones establishes moving resonances between the story of loss that he tells and the images of damaged and battered artefacts – a bronze disembodied arm, a sleek marble torso with a broken-off hand placed sensuously on its musculature – that flash by almost brutally on the screen. The film's opening sections, meanwhile, seem infused with the tortuous sweetness of nostalgia: while describing his experience of Athens as one of intense 'culture shock', the time he spent there was clearly significant for Jones, and he refers to the few mementos he has as 'precious now' because 'in most cases, the subjects of the photographs have vanished'.

And yet the rapid progression of photographs, as if in an academic lecture, together with the affectless, even clinical intonation of Jones's voice, seem designed to fend off the power of these intensely cathected objects and images in order to hold memory and desire at bay. The material loss is explicit, but equally the shots of ancient Greek sculpture underline the impermanence of things and prevent the history offered here from being irrevocably tragic. The overall effect is arguably very far from one of nostalgia; ultimately, *Fall into Ruin* feels like a deeply considered refusal to tell marginalised histories as merely traumatic and constitutes an attempt to balance out the intangible, sometimes unaccountable triumphs alongside the undeniable failures of any life. ■