

## Forming the Loss in Darkness

Curator: Jo-ey Tang

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Elaine Cameron-Weir, Thomas Fougeirol, Jesse Hultberg, Wayne Koestenbaum, Marlie Mul, Carlos Reyes, Ben Schumacher, Jo-ey Tang, Donald Urquhart, David Wojnarowicz

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This is not a tribute.

In the 1988 silent super-8 film by David Wojnarowicz<sup>1</sup> titled *Beautiful People*, the black-and-white film turns into color at precisely the moment when its central and sole character, played by Jesse Hultberg, dressed in daytime drag, came into contact with an upstate New York lake in what appears to be a suicide attempt. Elation and death, held together and compressed into a singular graspable moment, uproots the previous state of consciousness. What have we been seeing when we watched him waking up, putting on makeup, hailing a cab in an escape from New York to the woods? What did he pack into his plastic box besides a framed image of Siamese twin skeletons?

Tracking the journey from slumber to death, for this exhibition, nine artists' works set an alternative mise-en-scène of the rarely-screened film. The exhibition title is a reworking of the chapter "Losing the Form in Darkness" in Wojnarowicz's book *Close to the Knife: A Memoir of Disintegration* (1991). To draw on the mundane history of the artist, telephone answering machine messages puncture the silence of the exhibition.

Each work in the exhibition lays open a different territory of Wojnarowicz's video, but above all, as attempts to give form to something as fugitive as loss. Predominately abstract and concerned with the history of material as a form of narrativity, they embody a sense of life, of fate, of necessities. Fate with a sense of knowing that this might not be it, but it's necessary.

Let's hope.

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<sup>1</sup> An important figure in New York's East Village art scene of the 1980s, David Wojnarowicz (b. Red Bank, New Jersey 1954. Died 1992) is primarily known for his several volumes of fiction and memoirs, and for his art work in most media including painting, photography, installation, sculpture, film and performance. From 1970 until 1973 Wojnarowicz lived on the streets of New York City as a street hustler. He formed the band 3 Teens Kill 4 with Jesse Hultberg, Brian Butterick in 1980. Their first performance was at the staff party of Danceteria, where Wojnarowicz and Hultberg met while working there. After being diagnosed as HIV-positive in the late 1980s, Wojnarowicz engaged in widely publicized debates over medical research and funding, censorship in the arts and politically-sanctioned homophobia, creating deeply political art even as he became a target for the Right-wing. In the 1990s, he fought and successfully issued an injunction against Donald Wildmon and the American Family Association for their distortion of his work in violation of the New York Artists' Authorship Rights Act. He died of complications due to AIDS in 1992 at the age of 37. Wojnarowicz has been the subject of two retrospectives, at the galleries of the Illinois State University in 1990 curated by Barry Blinderman, and at the New Museum in 1999 curated by Dan Cameron.