

Jesper Just: 'This Nameless Spectacle'

Grand mal, la petite mort or divine revelation? The question lingers in the wake of the Danish artist Jesper Just's astounding 13-minute video "This Nameless Spectacle."

On opposite walls, two extremely wide-screen projections follow the peregrinations of an attractive, middle-aged woman rolling herself along in a wheelchair in Paris. First she progresses through the Buttes Chaumont park, passing by forests, cliffs and a waterfall. Then she is on a deserted street where a young man follows her from a distance, staring with enigmatic, possibly menacing intensity.

Reaching the safety of her apartment, she gets out of her chair and putters about in high heels and a tightfitting dress. She pauses to look out her living room window, where she is transfixed by a beam of sunlight glinting off a high window in a building far away. We see then that the young man who was following her is pivoting the window on its hinge, directing the light into her eyes.

Suddenly she falls to the floor in what seems at first to be an epileptic seizure but then begins to seem like sexual or religious ecstasy. Eventually coming to rest, she rises and walks out of the camera frame. The young man, wild-eyed and distraught, bangs on his window, evidently desperate for reconnection.

Mr. Just's film resembles a scene from David Lynch's "Inland Empire." A single-screen video also on view, "Sirens of Chrome," is similarly mystically tantalizing. In it four black women in a nondescript car have a strange, possibly erotic encounter with a mysterious fifth in a run-down palatial interior in Detroit. The gods have not forsaken us; it is we who have abandoned them. That is the terrible lesson of Mr. Just's stunning cinema.

-Ken Johnson