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# MattFlix and chill

by Maximiliane Leuschner • 15.10.2020

Ten days into the nationwide lockdown, Matt's Gallery – an influential artist-led gallery in South London – migrated online to present its most experimental exhibition extension yet: a series of video instalments, each streaming online for two weeks and changing every other Friday, reflecting the gallery's rhythm of short exhibition runs. Matt's Gallery became 'MattFlix'. Currently in their fourteenth chapter, the screenings, which have been scheduled until January 2021, vary in content, length and style. Through the lens of contemporary artists, musicians and filmmakers, MattFlix tackles themes ranging from health-related stigmatisation to a yearning for social interaction and ebullience, including a reflection on the challenging conditions for artmaking during a global pandemic.

The first two MattFlix episodes resurrected content from physical displays at the gallery. Firstly, Paul Eachus & Nooshin Farhid's video trilogy *Variations on a Ballistic Theme*, which closed prematurely as a result of the lockdown, followed by Juan Cruz's ongoing performative series of videos *I don't know what I'm doing but I'm trying very hard*, which is based on photographs Cruz took of himself after his weekly run. When prints of these personal selfies were stolen from the artist's backpack at his former teacher's funeral in 2018, Cruz created short video clips or 'auto-obituaries' for his then-upcoming exhibition at Matt's Gallery. Filming himself with his phone, heavily breathing in post-workout mode, with only his torso in view, the artist referred to himself, his artistic practice, thoughts and life in a third person **FIG. 1**. The filming proved therapeutic to the artist and continued beyond the exhibition. By spring 2020, Cruz had collected over one hundred video messages of various lengths, some eighty of which were made available on MattFlix. Post-lockdown, Cruz's wheezing iterations were far more disquieting to experience than in the Bermondsey exhibition.

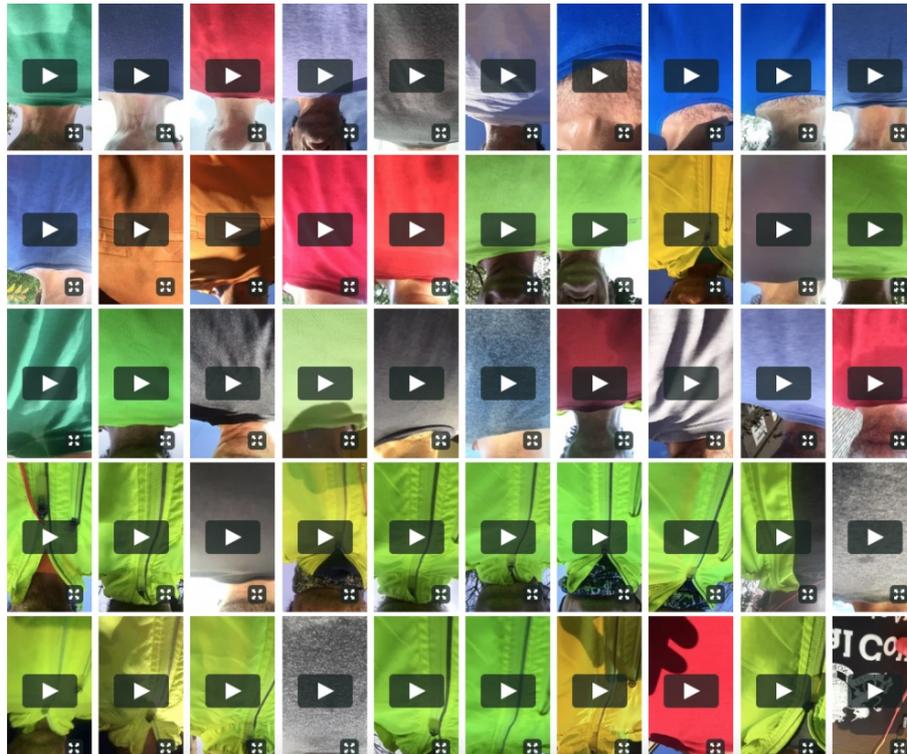


Fig. 1 Still from *I don't know what I'm doing but I'm trying very hard* by Juan Cruz. (2018–ongoing). Approx. 100 digital videos, each between 30 seconds and 5 minutes. (Courtesy the artist and Matt's Gallery, London).

Instalment number 3, *On Wine, Hashish and Molly* FIG. 2 by the musician and conceptual artist Dean Blunt, introduced London's counter-cultural club scene of the early 2010s. In the video a generic, digital female voice monotonously recounted a recent night out with Blunt. Accompanied by an Alice Coltrane soundtrack, fragmented photographs of two partygoers lounging in a vehicle alternated with a faintly flickering cigarette butt appearing to hover over the blacked-out screen. The pandemic, which confined us to our homes, added another layer to this video from 2014: it intensified the yearning for physical contact and frivolous social gatherings. This particular episode also linked MattFlix to counter-cultural electronic record labels rather than to blue-chip gallery's online viewing rooms (OVRs). One of the platform's most distinctive features – the little-to-no-information available on the videos screened as well as the 'sporadic' release of new content – echoes the London underground music scene.

# On Wine, Hashish and Molly

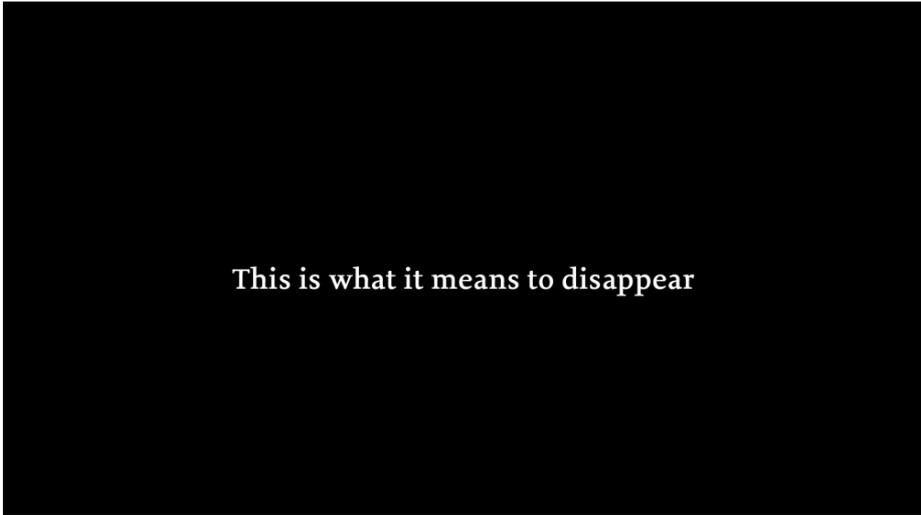
Fig. 2 Still from *On Wine, Hashish and Molly*, by Dean Blunt. 2014. Digital video, 21 minutes 40 seconds. (Courtesy the artist).

The episodes that followed ranged from an elaborate TV mini-series (by Nathaniel Mellors) to a flickering, illustrated clip of a road-killed squirrel (by Marianna Simnett), a ninety's sitcom-style episode on artmaking during the COVID-19 pandemic (by Janette Paris) as well as a mysterious indie documentary on endangered European eels (by Joey Holder). Three further episodes stood out to this reviewer. In *Early Years* [FIG. 3](#) Morgan Quaintance draws a beautiful portrait of the mixed-race artist Barbara Samuels, specifically about her childhood and her arrival in England. The shots vary between close-ups of personal family photographs, a rain-blurred train ride through the English countryside, glistening breakwaters at sea and archive materials from Samuels's studio. The film is narrated by Samuels herself. She only appears on camera seated, with a photo album on her lap, when she addresses herself as 'I' or 'myself'. We learn that during her childhood in Southend-on-Sea, Samuels found escape in ballet dancing; a particularly rigid discipline, where her 'exotic appearance' was a subject of her teacher's admiration. This biopic leaves the viewer yearning for more – a sequel of Samuels's work and her unfolding life story. The film demonstrates a familiarity between the protagonist and the viewer, mirroring an intimate conversation between family members, with eye contact between the artist and the viewer in select moments.



**Fig. 3** Still from *Early Years*, by Morgan Quaintance. 2019. 16mm and standard-definition video, 15 minutes. (Courtesy the artist).

Willie Doherty's *Unquiet* **FIG. 4** interrogates the death of Federico García Lorca during the Spanish Civil War. The poet was executed in August 1936 and secretly buried somewhere on the road between the towns Víznar and Alfacar near Granada. Doherty, who is known for responding to stricken terrains and places with a traumatic past, travelled to Spain to attend several unsuccessful excavation attempts of García Lorca's remains. The resulting MattFlix video, first shown together with landscape photographs of the excavation site at Galería Moisés Pérez de Albéniz (MPA), Madrid, in 2018, is a text-based, nineteen-minute-long monologue from the deceased's viewpoint, interrogating his passing, its circumstances and aftermath. White words appear on a black background, accompanied by a cellist score by Brian Irvine, like mysterious, divine messages from beyond the grave. MattFlix attempts a new curatorial presentation: for the first time, Doherty's text-based work is shown alone, liberated from its photographic or pictorial (and therefore geographical) context. This alienation adds a particular emotional depth to the poetic iterations.



This is what it means to disappear

**Fig. 4** Still from *Unquiet*, by Willie Doherty. 2018. High-definition video, 19 minutes. (Courtesy the artist; Alexander and Bonin, New York; Kerlin Gallery, Dublin; Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich; Matt's Gallery, London; and Galeria Moises Perez de Albeniz, Madrid).

People with different eye colourations, either as part of an injury or resulting from two sets of DNA, one of which belongs to an undeveloped twin, are the subject of Lindsay Seers's most recent video *S/He is still inside you*. Playing with the interview style of a police interrogation, short clips of anonymous protagonists with multiple eye colours appear on screen and detail their personal experiences and struggles with this particular physical phenomenon. Different layers of voices, not always matching the lip syncing, alternate with additional story plots, dreams, wishes, snippets of conversation and flickering background imagery of mystic symbols, molecular structures and a forest hut that thwarts the coherence of the video. Seers presents her work in the iPhone form: the video screen turns into a photo application with the interviewees facing the camera. Bullet points appear on the screen like iMessages, sometimes doubling as subtitles, summaries or alternative means to communicate with the viewer

**FIG. 5.** Building on Seers's recent work and exhibition *Vanishing Twin (Tetragametic Chimerism)* at Fotogalleriet, Oslo, the artist draws a link between the racially profiled, stigmatised and diseased members of our society.



Fig. 5 Still from *S/He is still inside you*, by Lindsay Seers with Keith Sargent. 2020. Digital video, 13 minutes 26 seconds. (Courtesy the artists and Matt's Gallery, London).

With its eponymous name, MattFlix is not only a testament to Matt's Gallery's humour and its ability to adapt to the current circumstances, but also a formidable adversary to blue-chip gallery OVRs. Representative of the experimental and inquisitive nature of contemporary moving-image and video-art practice, it tackles timely topics ranging from race to gender, climate change and health anxieties. Whereas some of the episodes have been previously shown either at Matt's Gallery or elsewhere, the majority of work has been commissioned by MattFlix during lockdown. And although the affiliation to the gallery remains, the online feature includes artists that are not part of Matt's Gallery's roster. These independent investigative voices make for a wide-ranging, eccentric and eclectic mixture of moving imagery – which the gallery achieves without 'diluting its brand!' in the words of Richie Moment of episode 13 **FIG. 6.**



Fig. 6 Still from *Richie Moment is Slipping Through the City Unseen*, by Richie Moment. 2020. Digital video, 1 minute 8 seconds. (Courtesy of the artist and

Matt's Gallery, London).

- Exhibitions details** MattFlix (Matt's Gallery, London)  
<https://www.mattflix.video>  
3rd April 2020–ongoing
- MattFlix 13:  
Richie Moment: *Slipping Through the City Unseen*  
18th September–2nd October 2020
- MattFlix 12:  
Morgan Quaintance: *Early Years*  
4th September–18th September 2020
- MattFlix 9:  
Willie Doherty: *Unquiet*  
24th July–7th August 2020
- MattFlix 5:  
Lindsay Seers: *S/He is still inside you*  
29th May–12th June 2020
- MattFlix 3:  
Dean Blunt: *On Wine, Hashish and Molly*  
1st–15th May 2020
- MattFlix 2:  
Juan Cruz: *I don't know what I'm doing but I'm trying very hard*  
17th April–1st May 2020
- MattFlix 1:  
Paul Eachus & Nooshin Farhid: *Variations on a Ballistic Theme*  
3rd–17th April 2020

## Footnotes

- 1** See <https://www.mattflix.video/>, accessed 15th October 2020.
- 2** Press Release: Juan Cruz: I don't know what I'm doing but I'm trying very hard, available at <https://www.mattsgallery.org/artists/cruz/4-PR.pdf>, accessed 15th October 2020.
- 3** See the press release for *Inquieta Willie Doherty*, available at <https://galeriampa.com/en/inquieta-willie-doherty-17-03-2018-19-05-2018-2/>, accessed 15th October 2020.

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