

EVENTS

IN CONVERSATION:
JAMES N. KIENITZ WILKINS AND
SHAMA KHANNA
Saturday 7 July, 2pm
£5/£3 concessions (free for Spike
Associates)

Artist and filmmaker James N. Kienitz
Wilkins discusses his exhibition *This
Action Lies* and the wider themes in
his work with curator, educator and
writer Shama Khanna.

SCREENING: THE ANDRE TRILOGY
Thursday 29 August, 6.30–7.30pm
£5/£3 concessions (free for Spike
Associates)

Join us for a screening of The Andre
Trilogy: three films by James N.
Kienitz Wilkins which explore the
veracity of media and reality as
constructed by entertainment.

This Action Lies was produced by the
Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève
for the Biennale de l'Image en
Mouvement 2018, with the support
from the Fonds d'Art Contemporain
de la Ville (FMAC), the Fonds d'Art
Contemporain du Canton de Genève
(FCAC) and In Between Art Film.

INFORMATION

Spike Island is an international centre
for the development of contemporary
art and design, located in Bristol's
harbour area. Admission to the gallery
is free.

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OPENING HOURS

Gallery: Tuesday to Sunday, 12–5pm
(during exhibitions)

Café: Monday to Friday, 8.30am–5pm
Saturday to Sunday, 10am–5pm

Spike Island

JAMES N. KIENITZ WILKINS
THIS ACTION LIES

6 July – 8 September 2019

“There is no such thing as a Styrofoam™ cup.”

This Action Lies is a solo exhibition by Brooklyn-based
artist James N. Kienitz Wilkins.

Kienitz Wilkins's moving image work combines
documentary sources with original scriptwriting to
investigate the role that narrative plays in the construction
of truth. Characterised by an economy of means, his films
engage with issues that relate directly to his personal life:
from social relations in his native New England to labour
conditions in the digital age. The results are both funny –
full of wordplay, wisecracks and ideas collapsing in upon
other ideas – and provocative – peppered with matter-of-
fact observations and fragments of uncomfortable truth.

The exhibition features *This Action Lies* (2018), a
thirty-minute film about the limits of observation, or
about staring very hard at something while listening to
something else. Framed as an apology, the fast-paced
monologue that echoes throughout analyses the common
and underappreciated commercial product on view: a
Dunkin' Donuts foam coffee cup.

The 'action' of the work's title refers to cinema itself as a
continuous action or sequence of actions, rather than the
action, or lack of it, that it captures. In material terms, the
projected video is made up of a digital scan of three reels
of black and white 16mm film intercut in sequence. No
frame is repeated, with each shot comprising a 10-minute-
long closeup of a cup of coffee cooling down on a
pedestal. In this way, Kienitz Wilkins embeds a key trope of

durational, observational documentary cinema – looking
closely at objects or people for a long time to reveal
something that may not be seen otherwise – in a movie
that sounds as though it carries the opposite intent.

Like many of Kienitz Wilkins's existing works, the film also
questions the veracity of cinema to the extent that the
accuracy of the artist's own voiceover is constantly put in
doubt. This becomes clear, for example, in the discussion
of 'genericide' with which the video ends: a legal term
for the process by which a brand name or trademark is
transformed through popular usage into a common noun.
By this point we already know that the Dunkin' Donuts
coffee cup we are staring at is not in fact from Dunkin'
Donuts, but was bought directly from the supplier. And
the word 'styrofoam', used casually by the narrator, is
both a classic case of genericide and a misnomer, since
Styrofoam™ is a brand name for 'extruded' polystyrene
foam rather than the 'expanded' foam used for food
products. This destabilises the artist's authority at the
same time as supporting his thesis, causing the work to
hold – and seemingly to insist on holding – this and other
contradictions together in tension.

The same is true when Kienitz Wilkins makes an awkward
reference to his own 'brand' at the start of the film, or
googles the email address of the MoMA curator that he
schemes on trying to sell the film to eventually. Pacing
through these and other admissions, questions and
contradictions, the forward momentum of the quick-
witted monologue never quite give us the time we need
to take it all in and think it all through. There is however

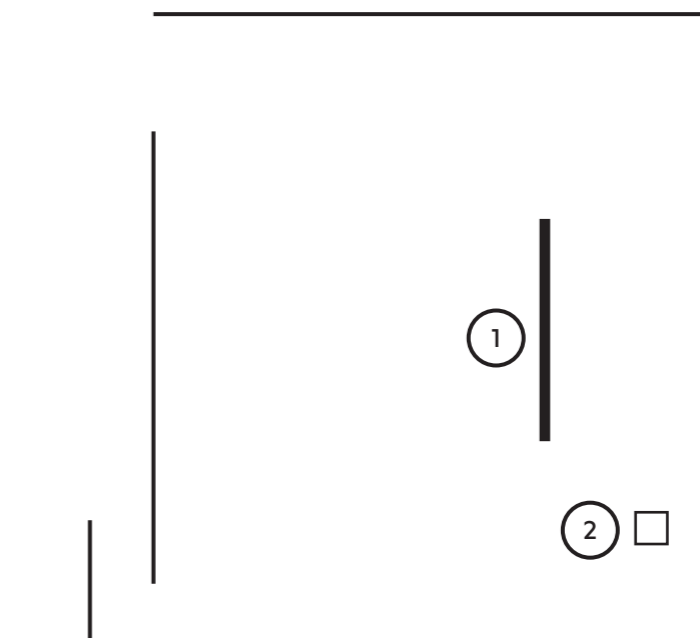
a short period of respite midway through, when Kienitz Wilkins gets up from his computer to tend to his new-born baby and a J.S. Bach harpsichord fugue begins to play like a lullaby. At the same time, the film transitions temporarily from digitally-scanned but otherwise unedited 16mm footage to a mesmeric kind of frame-by-frame animation. And here we catch a glimpse of the artist's recent change of circumstances – becoming a father – in a scene that gives an 'authentic' biographical slant the documentary impulse that is repeatedly demonstrated and undermined throughout the film.

Presented alongside *This Action Lies* are two sealed 35mm film canisters painted matt white and dimly lit by a spotlight. Lurking in the shadows behind the screen, they read like the ghosts of the 35mm reels hinted at in the digitally-projected video. With their contents inaccessible and elevated to the status of pure form, they subtly poke fun at the value and authenticity of analogue film as a medium, creating a disconnect between the experience of watching film and its materiality.

BIOGRAPHY

James N. Kienitz Wilkins is a filmmaker and artist based in Brooklyn, New York His work has screened at the New York Film Festival, Toronto, Locarno, Rotterdam, Migrating Forms, Ann Arbor, CPH:DOX, MoMA PS1, BAMcinemaFest, Images, and beyond. In 2016, he was awarded the Kazuko Trust Award presented by the Film Society of Lincoln Center. In 2017, he was included in the Whitney Biennial, and a retrospective of his work was showcased at Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montreal (RIDM). In 2018, he premiered new work in a solo show at Gasworks (London) and the Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement (Geneva). He is a graduate of the Cooper Union School of Art in New York City.

FLOORPLAN



LIST OF WORKS

1 James N. Kienitz Wilkins *This Action Lies* (2018, 32 mins), 16mm film transferred to digital video

Image/editing/writing/
voice by James N. Kienitz Wilkins
Sound mix by Eugene Wasserman
Production company: Automatic Moving Co.

2 James N. Kienitz Wilkins *35mm motion picture film canisters lying on plinth* (2019) 35mm motion picture film canisters, plinth. Courtesy of the artist

SCREENING TIMES

The film is 32 mins in duration. Start times: 12:05, 12:45, 1:25, 2:05, 2:45, 3:25, 4:05, ends 4:45.

ACCESSIBILITY

Please note the exhibition has low level lighting and features some flickering lights. Please take care as you move around the space. If you need any assistance during your visit, please talk to a member of staff at reception or a volunteer in the gallery who will be happy to help.

A large print version of the exhibition guide is available at reception.