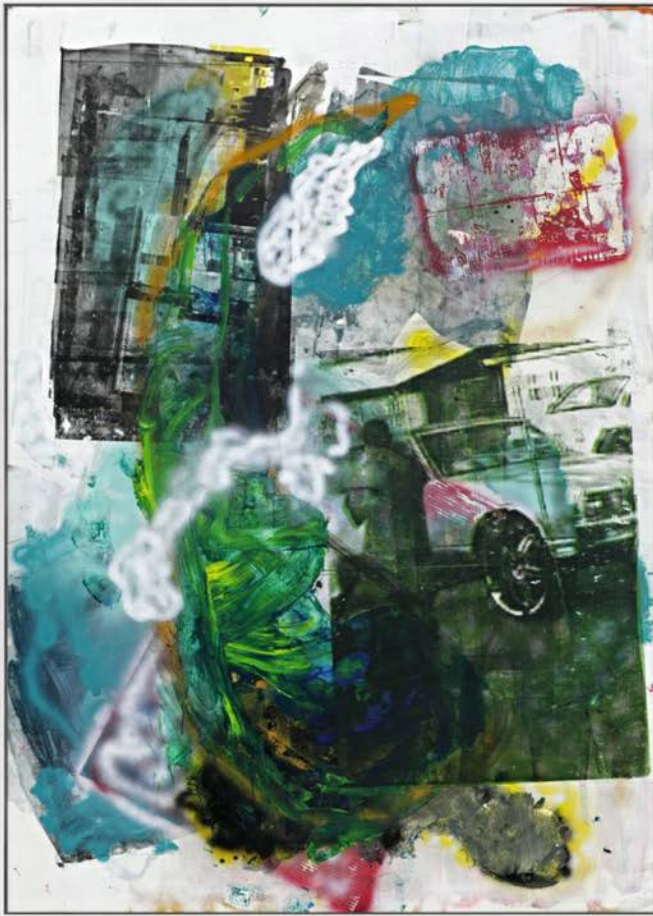




EVENT OF THE WEEK: "TALLAHASSEE" BY LEO GABIN AT PERES PROJECTS

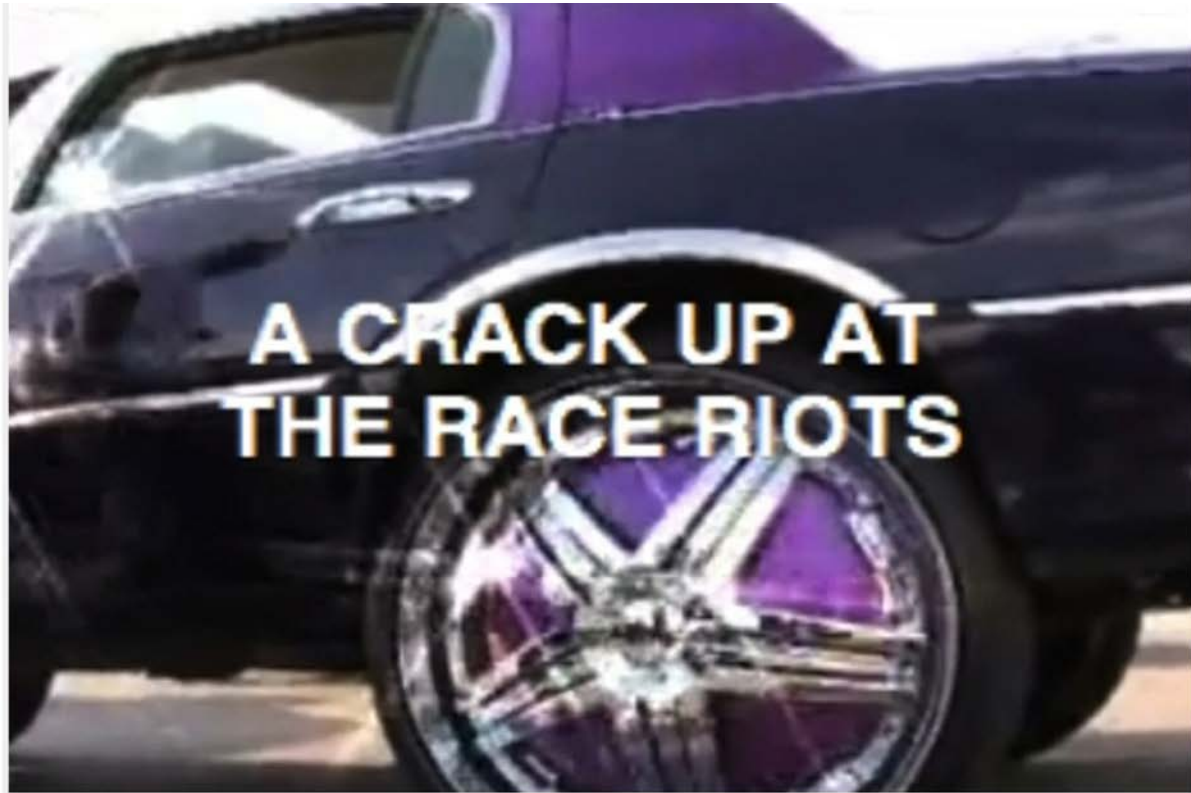
by Sophie Atkinson | November 26, 2013 | Event of the week, Events | 0



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Probably the strangest thing about cult director/artist Harmony Korine's weird and wonderful 1998 novel, *A Crack-up At The Race Riots*, is what a challenge it is to adapt into film.

Korine called the novel 'the Great American Choose Your Own Adventure novel with pages missing in all the right places', which sounds about right – the text is composed of a series of short stories, none more than a page or two long that resist any traditional linear narrative in a work Korine memorably described to David Letterman as 'about a race war' which 'happens in Florida...Jewish people sit in trees. And the black people are run by M.C. Hammer. And the whites are run by Vanilla Ice.'



Still from Leo Gabin's video

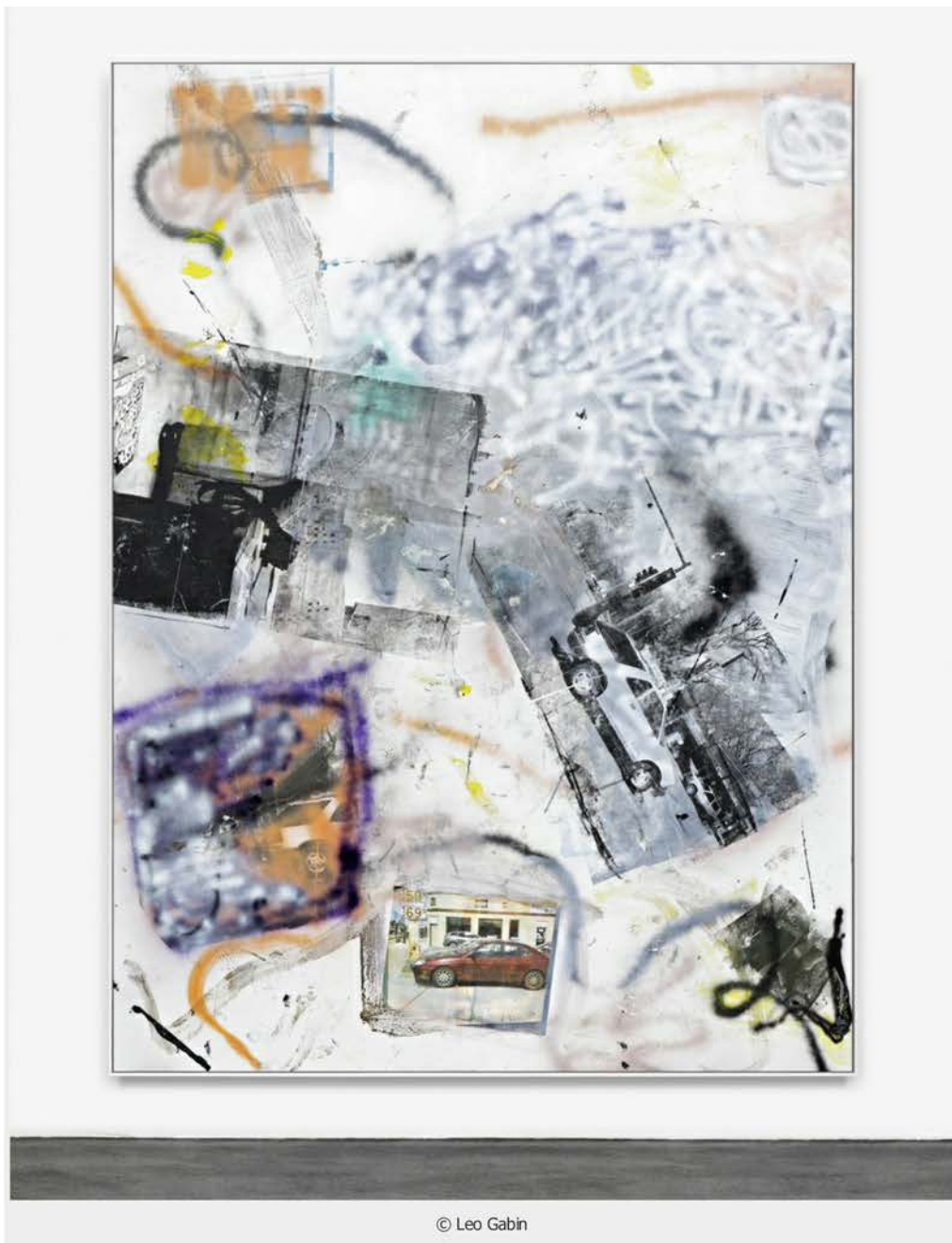
So it's testimony to Belgian trio Leo Gabin's video art that it manages to pay tribute to the hallucinatory work in a way that's elegant, clever and faithful to the original.

Their exhibition Tallahassee at Peres Projects is made up of a series of large-scale paintings and a forty minute video made up of clips from amateur YouTube videos with segments of the novel's text narrated over the top or in subtitles.

In the paintings, graffiti and video stills of American street scenes battle for canvas space and introduce themes that play out in the video: a hip hop mash up of different forms and social tension.

But it's in the film that Leo Gabin's Sunshine State seems the most sinister. The sky's a perfect picture-book blue, the twerking girls are always in hotpants and white Americans, young and old, are sporting blackface.

There's blurrily filmed violence in it and video suicide notes – disturbing material when you consider that all the clips are made by real people. But the really unsettling element on film is its running theme of bystanders watching grotesque acts dispassionately, as if mirroring the audience at home, watching YouTube with half an eye on their Facebook tab.



Perhaps the bystanders are unable to engage with watching others because they're too busy watching themselves. There's clip after clip of white girls either talking vacuously or shaking it for the camera in skimpy clothes, exploring what Peres Projects' director Nick Koenigsnecht suggests could be one way to interpret the piece: how these girls "think they'll become famous, how they want other people to perceive them."

Even happiness is taken to a grotesque extreme, as we watch a clip of a sunny American suburban street over which a distorted voice intones 'I know I look like I'm sobbing but I'm happy. I'm just really emotional. I just love my life, I'm one of the luckiest people in the whole world.' The voice keeps talking. They've had such wonderful opportunities. They can't believe how lucky they've been. It's their twenty-fifth birthday and they're just so happy. The length at which they speak undermines the sentiment: we start to wonder who the speaker's trying to convince.

Perhaps the best anyone can hope for in Gabin's Florida is to be comfortably numb. The loop closes on a voiceover from the novel: 'To feel nothing was peace.'

Peres Project

Karl-Marx Allee 82

Berlin, Germany



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