

ARTFORUM

## William E. Jones

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

William E. Jones first met the legendary Greek art dealer Alexander Iolas (1907–1987) in 1982, in the bedroom of the latter's house in Athens, where the gallerist was readying himself for the day as his

namesake museum in Houston today remains one of the best ways to get a sense of the gallerist's aesthetic sensibility.

Although Iolas gave Warhol his first solo show, he remains a neglected figure. The current state of his home speaks volumes. He had attempted to donate it to the Greek government as a museum for contemporary art, but this proposal was nixed by his opponents. Iolas, it seems, was more hated than loved—reviled for his combination of cultural snobbery and overt queerness (his vocal support for keeping the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum can't have helped, either). In his 1898 poem "Waiting for the Barbarians," Cavafy wrote: "What's going to happen to us without barbarians? / Those people were a kind of solution." In that sense, the vilification of Iolas was the result of a certain configuration of heteronormative nationalism. In Jones's *Fall into Ruin*, he emerges as a more complex figure: equal parts enigmatic, charismatic, and problematic.

—Andy Campbell



William E. Jones, *Villa Iolas* (Paul Thek, Lucio Fontana, Takis, Harold Stevenson, René Magritte, *Egyptian Sculpture*), 1982/2017, hand-coated ink-jet print, 16 × 20".

chauffeur lay in bed. He first spoke to Jones in French (a language the artist did not know) and followed up in English, asking the young Midwestern boy—fresh from his first year at Yale—whether he knew of the poetry of Constantine Cavafy, adding, "He is one of us." This question, the large Harold Stevenson watercolor of a column/phallus (*COLUMN*, ca. 1965) hanging next to the dealer's bed, and the chauffeur as putative lover made it crystal clear to Jones that Iolas was a homosexual with luxurious and refined taste.

As primal scenes go, it doesn't get any better. This anecdote is narrated by Jones in *Fall into Ruin*, 2017, a slide-show video featuring a voice-over focusing on the time he spent with Iolas accompanied by historical and essayistic reflections on the gallerist's life and times. "Iolas showed me," Jones says, "what can be done with a compelling story and a good eye." In this sense, Iolas had a profound influence on the kind of artist Jones became, in much the same manner that Cavafy impressed a young Iolas. That Iolas communicates this lineage of transmission and affect clearly to Jones upon first sight is a touching reminder that queer genealogies are created out of both necessity and affinity—sometimes within the space of a single question.

Jones is best known for his research-based projects, which have, over the years, illuminated topics as various as Morrissey fandom (*Is It Really So Strange?*, 2004), police surveillance of queer cruising (*Tearoom*, 2007), cultural editing and historical memory (*Punctured*, 2010), and representations of labor (*Model Workers*, 2014). Yet in this case he has made a work around the biography of his subject. Illustrating this tale are three suites of images, taken in 1982 and 2016: photographs of Greek monuments and landscapes, of the Villa Iolas as it appears now (ransacked and covered with graffiti), and of the villa as it was when Jones first visited it. In this way the form of the slide show—with its conventions of narrating a time or an event via exegesis and anecdote, as well as its inevitable nostalgia—is made to work against itself, forcing viewers to reconcile the opulence of Iolas's villa and its collection with its current pitiable state.

Iolas's collection takes precedence in the accompanying twenty photographs, taken by Jones in 1982 and not printed until now. The marble hallways and mirrored rooms of his villa were littered with paintings and sculptures by Surrealists (René Magritte, Victor Brauner), Nouveaux Réalistes (Niki de Saint Phalle, Yves Klein), and queerer, less codifiable figures (Paul Thek, Stevenson). Jones's photographs evince Iolas's ability to playfully compress thousands of years of art history in dramatic, idiosyncratic installations, bringing contemporary art together with Byzantine icons, classical sculpture, and antique furniture. This was a stratagem ably absorbed by the collectors John and Dominique de Menil, for whom Iolas was a consultant. Visiting their