

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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VENICE

Cameron Jamie

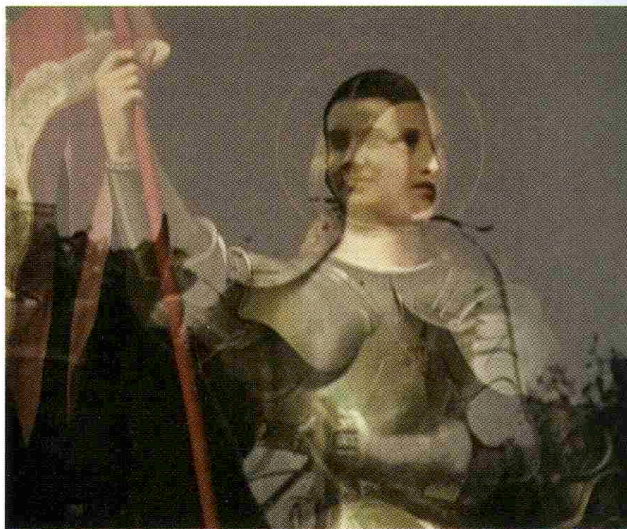
37TH INTERNATIONAL THEATRE
FESTIVAL OF THE VENICE BIENNALE

An American living in France, Cameron Jamie uses music, photography, drawing, film, and video to investigate the quirky, ritualistic activities that are part of contemporary pop culture (wrestling and craftslike mask-making being among his current interests). *JO*, 2004, which was presented at the Teatro Goldoni on September 24, 2005, as part of the International Theatre Festival of the Venice Biennale, is a two-part film accompanied by a live sound track performed by Japanese musician Keiji Haino. The film's first half follows an annual pageant in Orléans, France, where a young woman is picked to incarnate Joan of Arc. Returning to the US for the second part, Jamie documents an annual hot dog-eating contest at Coney Island—the epitome of American lowbrow culture. Seemingly unrelated, the two events crystallize certain fundamental aspects of each country: the deep-seated, almost arrogant national pride of the French and the insatiable consumerism at the heart of American society.

Jamie's footage of the pageant, shot with a handheld camera and then edited to incorporate historical depictions of Saint Joan, gives the segment a behind-the-scenes, almost voyeuristic feel as well as a sense of continuity with the past and an understanding of the ongoing fascination with her mythology. Connotations of purity and sacrifice are embodied by the young Joan-elect, who assumes her duties like a beauty-contest winner—though in armor and on horseback. Jamie captures the seriousness but also the creepiness of the event by zooming in on the winner's proud and often sublimely tranquil expression, then panning the small, slightly disinterested crowd of spectators and dignitaries, among them National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose party uses Joan's martyrdom as a staple of its xenophobic propaganda.

The film's second part contains, with few exceptions, just the sort of people you might expect to find at a hot dog-eating contest: a mix of ordinary, overweight Americans but, surprisingly, also a thin young Japanese man, who is apparently

Cameron Jamie,
JO, 2004, still from a
color and black-and-
white video, 45 min-
utes, sound track
by Keiji Haino.



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(according to periodic shots of the board keeping tally) the contest's winner. The intense, almost methodical way that he munches his franks—with unwavering concentration and minimal facial expressions—belies the grotesquerie of the activity, which becomes increasingly difficult to watch. In a technical twist, it also becomes clear that the action is being shown in reverse, with the wads of bread and meat being pulled out of rather than stuffed into the individual mouths.

Throughout the screening Haino's improvised voice and guitar, starting in the dark as a slow, high-pitched wail even before the film began running, brilliantly followed the film's trajectory, with electric-guitar riffs punctuating the vocals, the voice eventually swelling into an almost primal scream and the instrumentals increasing accordingly in volume and urgency. The rawness of the sound—and its extreme amplification—never distracted from the film's contents but instead seemed to uncannily complement the visuals in an undisrupted flow. About halfway through, Haino's voice and guitar reached a climax of sheer cacophony, then subsequently and incrementally descended again into a woeful, almost dirgelike moan. Jamie's film—his approach not so different from the cool eye of a documentarian—took on greater significance largely because of Haino. An enigmatic, mysteriously spiritual figure in underground music, his physical presence, and especially his intense sound, balanced the more analytical feel of the images and brought the whole experience to life.

—Elizabeth Janus