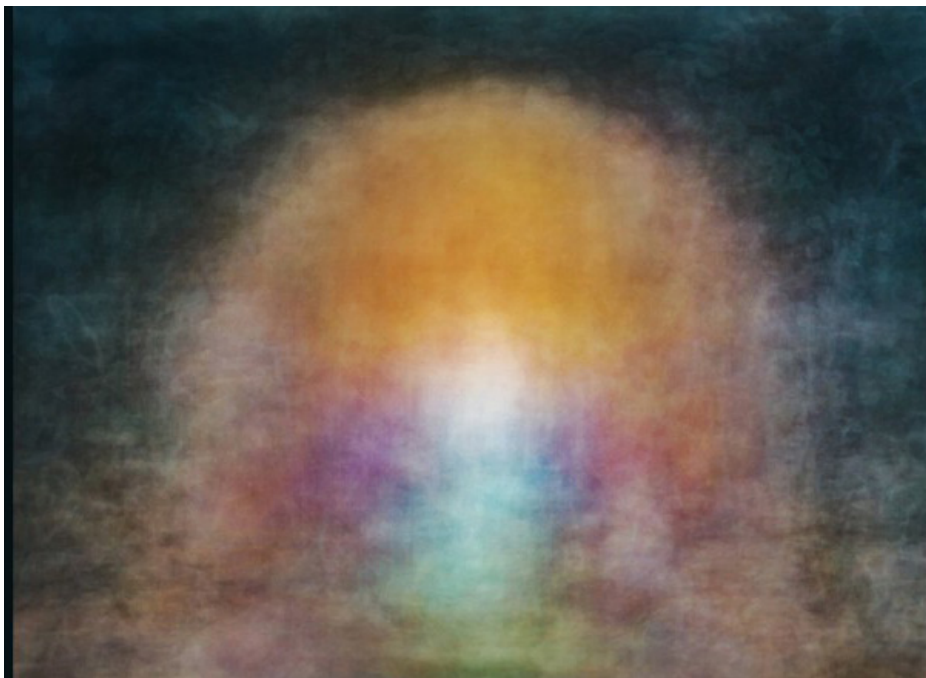




Jason Shulman condenses entire films into single photographs

By Stella Ko, CNN

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Alice in Wonderland (1951)
Artwork by Jason Shulman

Photographer and sculptor Jason Shulman doesn't watch movies like the rest of us. Instead, he hits play and lets his camera take over.

Using ultra-long exposure, the London-based artist can capture an entire movie in just one photograph. For his new series Photographs of Films, on display at London's Cob Gallery until June 4, Shulman has taken 54 full-length films -- from Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange" to Italian classic "Life Is Beautiful" -- and flattened them into eerie single shots.

In his photo of Disney's 1951 film "Alice in Wonderland," you can make out Alice's hair and dress in the ambiguous shapes and patches of bright color. Photographing James Cameron's fast-paced cinematography in "Avatar," resulted in a uniform slab of plain blue. And when Shulman condensed "2001: Space Odyssey" into a single frame, it appeared divided into three, reflecting the film's iconic three-screened council room.

The results are unpredictable. Some of the photographs appear to have little in common with the films they represent. But Shulman wants viewers to see the works in their own way. “People bring their own theme to the party,” he says, “just like reading shapes in a cloud, they see what they want to see.”

CNN spoke to Jason Shulman about long exposure photography and his photographs of films.

CNN: So how exactly do you create these long exposure photographs?

Shulman: I have a very large -- almost pixel-free -- monitor and a camera with filters that dim the light coming in. I then open the camera’s aperture throughout the movie. Long exposure flattens out time. I enjoy the ‘like for like’ translation between my photographs and the films that they show. I use the same optical mechanics as they do in movies -- a camera -- to create my distillation. Every frame that has been originally filmed can be found in my photograph, so there’s a simple kind of technological parity there.

CNN: Why did you begin experimenting with long exposure?

Shulman: A lot of work that I do as a sculptor is kinetic, so I naturally started experimenting with still images and the span of time. I started photographing around six years ago -- I got all the news coverage of the twin towers collapsing from YouTube and shot it in long exposure. The next thing I did was photograph the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics from my bedroom. Then, it was a logical jump to wonder what an entire movie might look like. Initially I thought I would end up with a monochromatic snapshot but I was surprised to see the odd translations of movies that started to appear.

CNN: There are 54 movies featured in the series. How did you go about selecting them?

Shulman: It was a pretty randomized selection process. When I started, I thought I’d be able to second guess what the results would look like, but there’s no way of guessing how they’ll turn out.

CNN: Does being a sculptor influence your photographic style, or vice versa?

Shulman: Quite a lot of my work either involves, or alludes to, movement. In a way, these photographs are a natural extension of my exploration of time and motion. To get the 54 pictures that I ended up with, I had to shoot about 900 movies, and I never knew how they’d turn out. But when it comes to sculpture, I hopefully know what I’m going to get at the end.

CNN: Which film gave you the most unexpected result?

Shulman: There is a movie by Pasolini called “The Gospel According to St. Matthew.” And with that, the weird thing is that you end up with an image of Jesus in the middle of the photograph. I went back and watched the movie, and the reason for this is because Pasolini put all his character’s heads centrally [in the frame]. Whoever’s talking, their head is blocked in. This is the one photograph that is, in a way, most representative of its title.

CNN: You've said photographs of film can shed light on changing technological trends in cinema. Can you elaborate on this?

Shulman: Distinctions between filmmakers are rare. But I did notice that with most of Hitchcock's films, the resulting print showed figurative forms. I think this is because Hitchcock tells his stories by focusing on the actors. Kubrick, on the other hand, uses wider shots that are often framed in a symmetrical way. So in the gestalt, his films leave compositional rather than human stains on the finished print.

CNN: Have you had any feedback from the movies' directors?

Shulman: John Hillcoat was very happy with my photo of his film "The Road." It was the only commissioned work I took, and it turned out remarkably well. It was a miracle because most films don't end up looking particularly interesting. It's also a good example of the fact that he was holding shot for a long time in that film. I just recently sent it over to him in LA.

CNN: What do you want to experiment with next?

Shulman: I want to go back to 3D works and do some sculpture for a bit. It's been couple of years now, and I have a sculpture exhibition coming up in October.