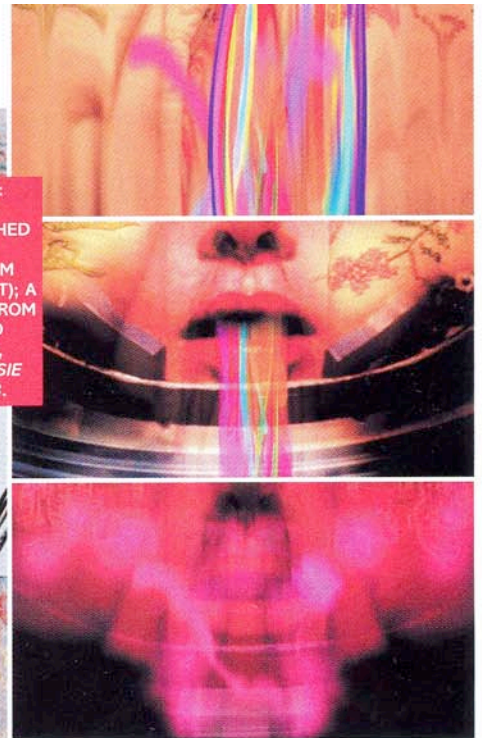


# People are Talking about

Blake: JIM WRIGHT; Sitings Editor, Amy Hall Brown; grooming, Brett Freedman for Celestialagency.com. Art: Courtesy of Jeremy Blake/Feigen Contemporary.



MEDIA BLITZ: THE ARTIST PHOTOGRAPHED IN HIS L.A. STUDIO BY JIM WRIGHT (LEFT); A SEQUENCE FROM BLAKE'S DVD WITH SOUND, *READING OSSIE CLARK*, 2003.



## strange days

Artist Jeremy Blake is drawn to subjects with a certain dark glamour: the Hollywood mob hangout Bungalow 8; San Jose's spooky Winchester Mansion, built over many years in the late nineteenth century by the Winchester Rifle heiress to accommodate the ghosts of all the victims of her family's product. The diaries of the late British fashion designer Ossie Clark are a theme of Blake's show this month at New York's Feigen Contemporary gallery.

The Los Angeles-based Blake describes his work as "moving paintings," filmic meditations rich in saturated colors that progress dreamily through loose narratives. It's a genre-busting technique that uses the latest technology and multiple media to fluid effect, like thoughts ebbing and flowing in the mind. "He's working in a living medium," says the musician Beck, with whom Blake has collaborated on cover art (for his CD *Sea Change*) and concert projections, "one that is still evolving as technology evolves, which allows his work to mutate and unfold in startling ways."

Jeremy Blake mines the pop-culture past for his utterly contemporary work.

For his new show, Blake (fresh from a retrospective at the American Museum of the Moving Image) has produced a series of paintings and *Reading Ossie Clark*, a DVD of collaged artwork, photography,

Super-8 footage, archival images, and a sound track that conjure the designer's inner world. "You don't have to look at Ossie's work too long to realize how great it was," he says. "But I was more interested in his writing and his energy than directly in his fashion." In purely visual terms, Blake was drawn to the pages of Clark's diaries—elaborately colored passages of obsessively recorded events, from the weather to his ablutions to nonsense rhymes and streams of consciousness—which reminded Blake of Franz Kline's use of blown-up telephone doodles as the basis of

## art

abstract paintings.

A handsome 32-year-old who lives in a canalside house in Venice Beach and drives a windblown beach buggy to his nearby studio, Blake is fascinated by British pop culture of the sixties and seventies, in part because he lived through the era as "a true flower child," the son of a hippie mom and a fast-living, Studio 54-frequenting father. As a teenager growing up in the uptight environs of Washington, D.C., he found the honesty and anger of British bands like the Who and the Sex Pistols more authentic than the beefed-up heavy metal and cheesy R&B dominating the American music charts, and saw more depth in British Pop Art than its slicker homegrown counterpart. As an adult, he looks back with wistfulness at the failed utopianism of the time. "There was a belief that good design or good drugs or good clothes would actually lead to a better world, and there was an optimism in that," he says. The truth was somewhat different: Blake's father died of AIDS; Ossie Clark descended into drug abuse and was eventually murdered.

It all translates into lyrical pieces that reflect both exultation and an undertow of complex emotion. Paying fitting tribute to a neo-Pop artist, director Paul Thomas Anderson, who invited Blake to create the abstract color frames that link the scenes of his 2002 movie *Punch-Drunk Love*, describes their collaboration: "The result reminded me of that great sound that happens when you pop open a can of Pepsi. It just smacks and cracks," he says, "and then gently fizzes."

- EVE MACSWEENEY  
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