

Deakin: Double Exposures

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Pregnant Wit: *ingegno* in Renaissance England

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Deakin: Double Exposures

Look First discussion between **Paul Rousseau** Look First and **James Boaden** Look First with films by

Jonathan Law

WORD COUNT:781



Abstract

The Look First feature represents a different kind of article to its companions in *British Art Studies*; one that is pre-eminently visual and necessarily collaborative, and that is made possible by the digital format of the journal. In this series of short films made by Jonathan Law, the art historian James Boaden, and the curator of The John Deakin Archive, Paul Rousseau, discuss the double-exposure images made by the photographer John Deakin (1912-1972) in the 1950s and 1960s. The films ask you, firstly, to look closely at the images being discussed. Each one begins with a sustained and intense shot of a single image before opening up to a wide-ranging discussion about Deakin, double exposures, and photography.

“Only Those With a Daemon”



Figure 1

“Only Those With a Daemon” , Conversation between Paul Rousseau and James Boaden. Film by Jonathan Law.

In this film, John Deakin’s double-exposure images are discussed in relation to a longer history of revealing the unseen in photography. The film begins with Deakin’s double exposure of Muriel Belcher, the founder of the Colony Room, the infamous private club in London’s Soho district that was regularly frequented by artists and musicians such as Francis Bacon and George Melly. Deakin’s images are here discussed in relation to Victorian spirit photography and to a longer history of the doubled image in twentieth-century photography.

Queer Looks

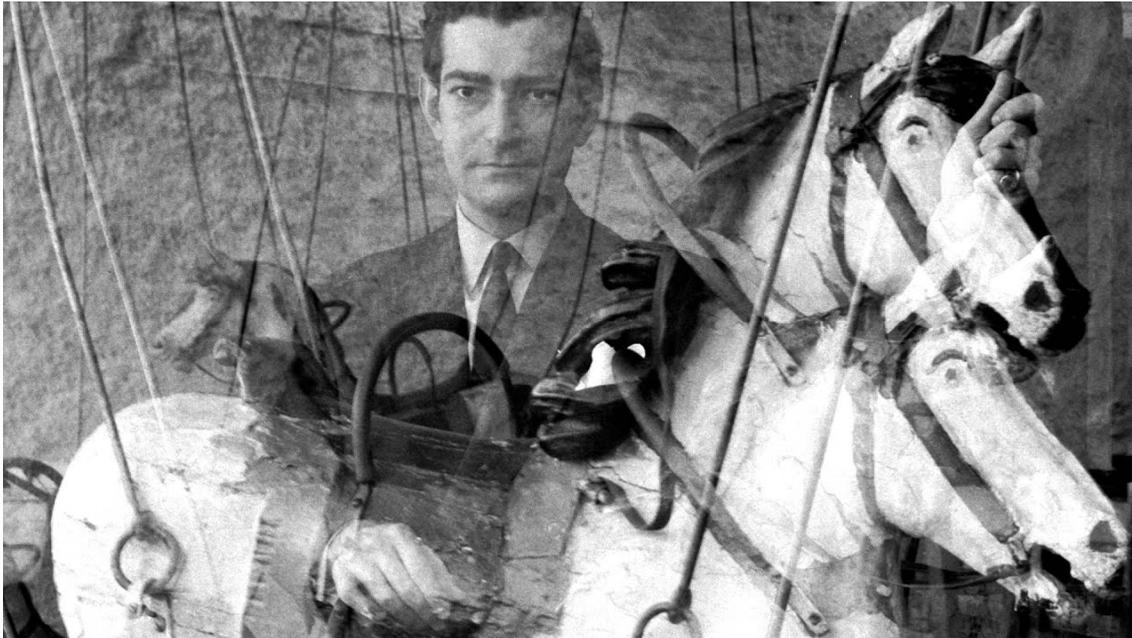


Figure 2

Queer Looks, Conversation between Paul Rousseau and James Boaden. Film by Jonathan Law.

John Deakin started his career as a dresser of shop windows and his images of windows set the scene for this discussion. The film explores Deakin's double exposures in relation to the queer cultures of postwar London. Boaden and Rousseau discuss the ways in which the double exposure served as a metaphor for the idea of living a doubled life at a time when homosexuality was illegal. They explore the ambivalent character of such photographs as works that both reveal and conceal, bringing this idea up to the present by discussing the double exposures made by contemporary photographer Daniella Zalzman.

Double Exposures and Modernism



Figure 3

Double Exposures and Modernism, Conversation between Paul Rousseau and James Boaden. Film by Jonathan Law.

This film explores John Deakin's artistic development from the 1930s into the war years, contextualizing his work within a broader framework of 20th century Modernism. Presenting new research from the Tate Gallery Archives that connects Deakin to British photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer, it includes the discovery of an early double exposure that could have been taken by either photographer. Paul Rousseau and James Boaden take account of the surrealist elements of the double exposures, exploring connections to Francis Bacon's **Man in Blue *series*; and Jonathan Law presents Deakin's double exposure portraits alongside a rich seam of others by artists including Degas, Duchamp and Picasso, positioning the time-based multiple planes within these photographs alongside the generation of cubism.

Exchanges with Francis Bacon



Figure 4

Exchanges with Francis Bacon, Conversation between Paul Rousseau and James Boaden. Film by Jonathan Law.

This film investigates the social and artistic exchanges between John Deakin and Francis Bacon, and in particular how elements of Deakin's photographic imagery contributed to Bacon's painting practice.

Repeating the Process



Figure 5

Repeating the Process, Conversation between Paul Rousseau and Peter Hamilton. Film by Jonathan Law.

The final film in this feature explores the mechanical processes involved in producing a double exposure image with a Rolleiflex camera. The photographer Peter Hamilton explains the process with Paul Rousseau.

About John Deakin

John Deakin (1912-1972) was a British photographer, best known for a striking series of portraits he took when working for British *Vogue* magazine in the early 1950s. He moved from being a window dresser to a painter, having a well-regarded exhibition in 1938 at the Mayor Gallery, Cork Street, London. Later, he claimed his skills with a camera were initiated around this time in Paris in the circle of André Ostier, Christian Bérard and Michel de Brunhoff, but he was also close to the photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer in London, and may well have learned something from her experimental portraiture studio practice. During the Second World War he refined his skills in the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) serving in Malta, Egypt, Libya, and as far south as the Gold Coast, now Ghana. Deakin claimed the war changed him from “a painter who passed himself off as a photographer, to a photographer who sometimes painted”.¹

After the war Deakin became a central presence among the hard-drinking bohemian artists, poets, and characters in the bars and clubs around Soho London. This put him among many of the key cultural figures of the period, including the poet Dylan Thomas, the painter Lucian Freud, and especially Francis Bacon. He worked for *Tatler* and *Picture Post* and used his Paris connections to win a contract at British *Vogue*.

The John Deakin Archive holds over four thousand negatives and hundreds of vintage prints rescued from under Deakin’s bed by Bruce Bernard. Nearly four hundred are photographs of Paris, of which around one hundred are portraits including Christian Bérard, Jean-Paul Sartre,

and Picasso, with around another 100 vintage prints of street scenes, beggars, and surreal visions of circuses and shop windows."

About the authors

James Boaden is a Lecturer in History of Art at the [<https://www.york.ac.uk/history-of-art/staff/boaden/>](University of York). His research focuses on American art from the mid-twentieth century, and looks in particular at the crossover between experimental film culture and the art world during that period.

Jonathan Law is a filmmaker, researcher and lecturer who works with the Centre on a freelance basis. As Research Fellow and Filmmaker, Jonathan is responsible for developing and producing collaborative research-led film content for the Paul Mellon Centre's research publications and for special public screenings. Some of his recent work includes *The Famous Women Dinner Service: In Conversation With Contemporary Art* (2019, 17min), *The Atmospheric of Leighton House* (2018, 6min) and short films for the award-winning digital publication *The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition: A Chronicle, 1769–2018* (2018, various duration).

Amongst other current projects Jonathan is currently developing a film, with Rosie Ram and Mark Hallett, on the collage of Nigel Henderson, for display as part of the Tate Britain display *Vital Fragments: Nigel Henderson and the Art of Collage* (opening December 2019). Jonathan regularly contributes peer-reviewed film content to [<http://britishartstudies.ac.uk>](British Art Studies), the PMC's award-winning, open-access online research journal.

Jonathan has produced films for institutions including the Yale Center for British Art (on the work of artists George Shaw and Nicola Hicks), Tate (on Barbara Hepworth), and the Heong Gallery at Cambridge University (on British modernist painting). His films have been screened at Tate Liverpool, the Esker Foundation in Calgary, the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein in Vaduz and at the Culture Capital Exchange Inside/Out festival in London.

Jonathan was recently Teaching Fellow in Film Studies at Queen Mary, University of London, and has also taught Essay Filmmaking (The Derek Jarman Lab, Birkbeck College), Media and Film Production (University of West London), History and Philosophy of Photography (University of Kent), and Art History, Criticism and Communication (Central Saint Martins). Jonathan also delivered lectures and exhibition tours for ten years at the Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Jonathan's scholarly research has been particularly focused on cinema and multisensory culture. He holds a PhD in History and Philosophy of Art from the University of Kent, a PGCHE from the University of Kent, an MRes in Humanities and Cultural Studies from the London Consortium (University of London) and a BA in Fine Art from the University of Wolverhampton.

Paul Rousseau has been working with the James Moores Collection as archivist and researcher for 8 years, handling storage and preservation as well digitization and cataloguing. Lately he has been concentrating on the photography collection, particularly the life, career and milieu of John Deakin and his relationship with Francis Bacon.

Footnotes

1. Robin Muir, *Under the Influence: John Deakin, Photography and the Lure of Soho* (London: Art/Books, 2014), 23.

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