

May 5, 2014

# Isaac Julien Presents 'Playtime' at Berlin's Gallery Weekend

By SUSAN STONE



"Eclipse (Playtime)" by Isaac Julien  
*Photo By Courtesy*

**PLAY ART:** A select and somewhat sleepy crowd of Berlin art lovers turned out on Saturday morning for a playdate with artist Isaac Julien. The British filmmaker and photographer was in town to present a taste of his newest work "Playtime" during the city's three-day Gallery Weekend. The artist gave a candid and animated talk about the project, which had its world premiere in January at London's Victoria Miro Gallery in its full seven-screen installation; a limited two-screen version was presented in December at New York's Metro Pictures. In Berlin, Julien allowed the piece to run on one screen as a preview.

Intended as a meditation on Jacques Tati's 1967 film of the same name, "Playtime" pulls inspiration from the global financial crash in 2008. Julien said he was led by a series of personal stories from lives impacted by the financial crisis, including his own. Dramatized in the film are the experiences of friends and colleagues, including a German friend who lost his dream house in Iceland, and a domestic worker who wants to escape from an abusive job in a Dubai high rise.

Julien said many of his works are concerned with the search for a better life, reflected in his own family's immigration from the Caribbean to England. "One of the main things I came to as a conclusion is that people are usually in search of capital — this is why people make these immense journeys and transitions in their lives," he explained.

Still another part of "Playtime" deals with commodification and the art world, and includes both auctioneer Simon de Pury, playing himself, and actor-multitasker James Franco portraying a smarmy art dealer. "He's very good in it," confided Julien, "a much better actor I think perhaps than an artist," a comment which garnered

laughs from the crowd. The two aren't exactly strangers — they co-curated an exhibition along with Glenn Scott Wright at Victoria Miro Gallery, and it was there where Franco's scenes for "Playtime" were shot.

Saturday's event was presented by Herford, Germany-based Sammlung Wemhöner, a private collection exhibiting a selection of about ten percent of its holdings, including some by Isaac Julien, in a temporary show in Berlin. Other works displayed include pieces from Marina Abramovic, Helmut Newton and Tony Cragg.

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