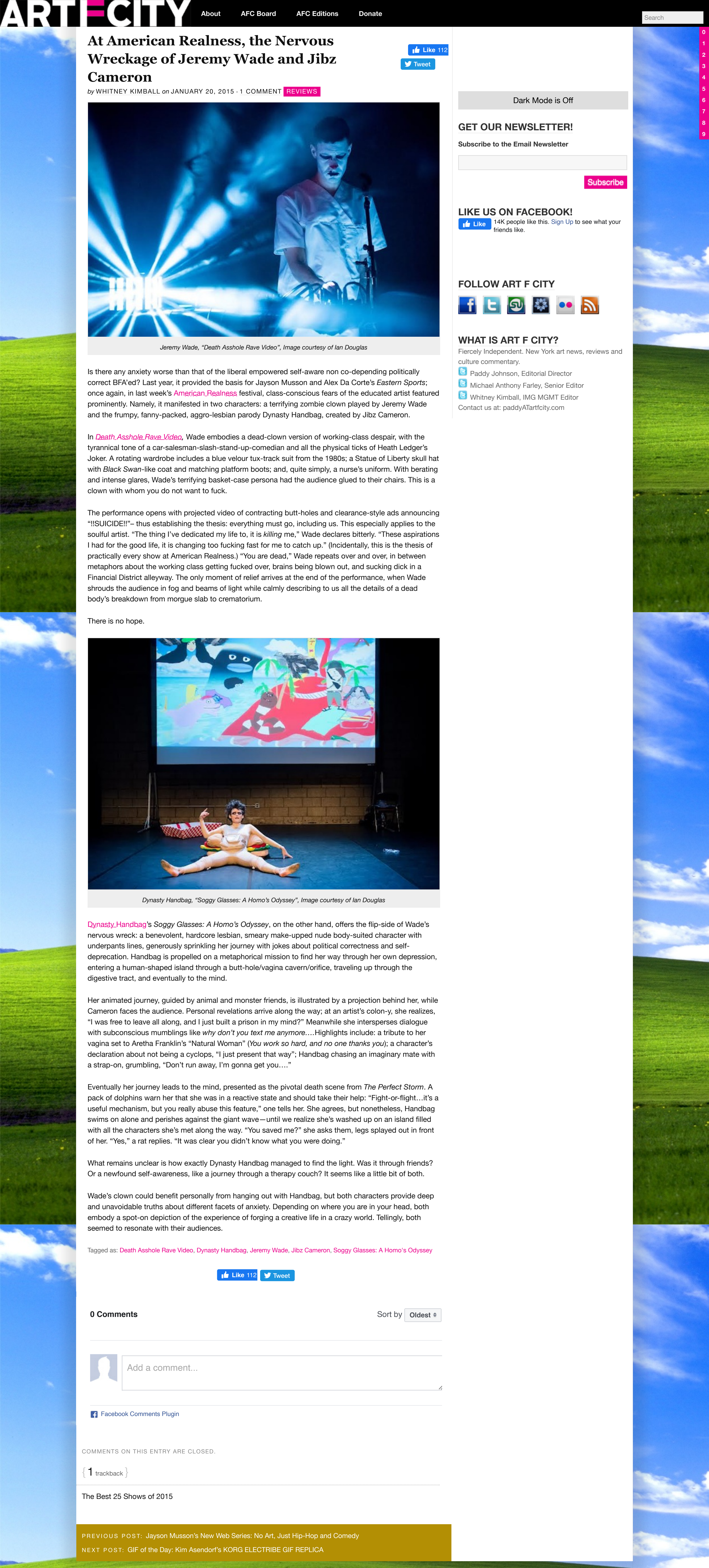




At American Realness, the Nervous Wreckage of Jeremy Wade and Jibz Cameron

by WHITNEY KIMBALL on JANUARY 20, 2015 · 1 COMMENT REVIEWS



Jeremy Wade, "Death Asshole Rave Video", Image courtesy of Ian Douglas

Is there any anxiety worse than that of the liberal empowered self-aware non co-depending politically correct BFA'ed? Last year, it provided the basis for Jayson Musson and Alex Da Corte's *Eastern Sports*; once again, in last week's *American Realness* festival, class-conscious fears of the educated artist featured prominently. Namely, it manifested in two characters: a terrifying zombie clown played by Jeremy Wade and the frumpy, fanny-packed, aggro-lesbian parody Dynasty Handbag, created by Jibz Cameron.

In *Death Asshole Rave Video*, Wade embodies a dead-clown version of working-class despair, with the tyrannical tone of a car-salesman-slash-stand-up-comedian and all the physical ticks of Heath Ledger's Joker. A rotating wardrobe includes a blue velour tux-track suit from the 1980s; a Statue of Liberty skull hat with *Black Swan*-like coat and matching platform boots; and, quite simply, a nurse's uniform. With berating and intense glares, Wade's terrifying basket-case persona had the audience glued to their chairs. This is a clown with whom you do not want to fuck.

The performance opens with projected video of contracting butt-holes and clearance-style ads announcing "!!SUICIDE!!"—thus establishing the thesis: everything must go, including us. This especially applies to the soulful artist. "The thing I've dedicated my life to, it is *killing* me," Wade declares bitterly. "These aspirations I had for the good life, it is changing too fucking fast for me to catch up." (Incidentally, this is the thesis of practically every show at American Realness.) "You are dead," Wade repeats over and over, in between metaphors about the working class getting fucked over, brains being blown out, and sucking dick in a Financial District alleyway. The only moment of relief arrives at the end of the performance, when Wade shrouds the audience in fog and beams of light while calmly describing to us all the details of a dead body's breakdown from morgue slab to crematorium.

There is no hope.



Dynasty Handbag, "Soggy Glasses: A Homo's Odyssey", Image courtesy of Ian Douglas

Dynasty Handbag's Soggy Glasses: A Homo's Odyssey, on the other hand, offers the flip-side of Wade's nervous wreck: a benevolent, hardcore lesbian, smeary make-upped nude body-suited character with underpants lines, generously sprinkling her journey with jokes about political correctness and self-deprecation. Handbag is propelled on a metaphorical mission to find her way through her own depression, entering a human-shaped island through a butt-hole/vagina cavern/orifice, traveling up through the digestive tract, and eventually to the mind.

Her animated journey, guided by animal and monster friends, is illustrated by a projection behind her, while Cameron faces the audience. Personal revelations arrive along the way; at an artist's colon-y, she realizes, "I was free to leave all along, and I just built a prison in my mind?" Meanwhile she intersperses dialogue with subconscious mumblings like *why don't you text me anymore*....Highlights include: a tribute to her vagina set to Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman" (*You work so hard, and no one thanks you*); a character's declaration about not being a cyclops, "I just present that way"; Handbag chasing an imaginary mate with a strap-on, grumbling, "Don't run away, I'm gonna get you...."

Eventually her journey leads to the mind, presented as the pivotal death scene from *The Perfect Storm*. A pack of dolphins warn her that she was in a reactive state and should take their help: "Fight-or-flight...it's a useful mechanism, but you really abuse this feature," one tells her. She agrees, but nonetheless, Handbag swims on alone and perishes against the giant wave—until we realize she's washed up on an island filled with all the characters she's met along the way. "You saved me?" she asks them, legs splayed out in front of her. "Yes," a rat replies. "It was clear you didn't know what you were doing."

What remains unclear is how exactly Dynasty Handbag managed to find the light. Was it through friends? Or a newfound self-awareness, like a journey through a therapy couch? It seems like a little bit of both.

Wade's clown could benefit personally from hanging out with Handbag, but both characters provide deep and unavoidable truths about different facets of anxiety. Depending on where you are in your head, both embody a spot-on depiction of the experience of forging a creative life in a crazy world. Tellingly, both seemed to resonate with their audiences.

Tagged as: *Death Asshole Rave Video*, *Dynasty Handbag*, *Jeremy Wade*, *Jibz Cameron*, *Soggy Glasses: A Homo's Odyssey*

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