THE PERFECT KISS (QQ)*

*questioning, queer

MATT MORRIS WITH JAMES LEE BYARS

Bouquets of roses, love notes, commemorative snapshots, and boudoir décor are typically associated with romantic courtship; how might these gestures be read when used to remark on relationships that connect the art world? In this installation of works, Matt Morris interprets these forms literally and abstractly in order to consider how attachments are made between art histories and contemporary praxis, between exhibitions and the museums who host them, and amongst a global network of collectors, curators, couturiers, and other cultural producers complicit in the scripting of stories that characterize how an artist is understood behind their work. Examinations of recent artistic pasts compel the shape of Morris' research driven practice, conjoining conventional modes of object-making (like drawing and photography) with shifting roles of artist-as-curator and scholar.

The dominant canon has long favored works by American artist James Lee Byars (1932–1997) that are heroic, monolithic, and resplendent with bravado. Morris instead depicts an alternative and more softly intimate portrayal. Across several decades,

Byars was committed to posing more questions than resolved answers and to destabilizing ideas of perfection—problems that are placed here into conversation with Morris' own inquiries into queer identity. Subverting easy categorization, Byars' oeuvre includes post-minimalist formal investigations, performance, and a daily ritual of correspondence that merged drawing and flirtatious letter writing. He wrote profusely to curators, collectors, and art world luminaries such as the German artist Joseph Beuys. In many cases these valentine-like texts went unanswered. Morris' selection of Byars works looks closely at the ephemerality, rejection, and absence that permeates the cultural field in which both artists are positioned—tracing where personal histories and social contexts meet.

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