

# MATS HJELM

IT'S A SPRING dusk in Stockholm, daylight is finally back. Yet in the lower level of the non-profit space Galleri Index it's still quite dark. Not because the two video projections by Mats Hjelm *White Flight* require obscurity, rather because the subject of his work is quite unexpected up here in one of the whitest cities of the world. So what's the subject? In 1967 Lars Hjelm, Mats' father, filmed the race riots and Black Power leaders in Detroit. Thirty years later Mats Hjelm created an interwoven work with his father's documentary material and some new footage he shot. The result is a visual structure loaded with mnemonic content, an experience hard to describe but phenomenal to witness. The work is not linear, allowing the viewer's mind to shift from emotional reaction to rational contemplation of given images of a historical dimension. But the most fascinating question that occurred to me watching the magnetic projection — without knowing the story behind its creation — was, is he black? He is in fact white, but rather than making the work weaker and gratuitous, this reveals a compelling ambiguity. Handling collective and private memories with the same respect, Hjelm confuses issues, turning the questions inside out. What is white and what is black? The real trouble is eventually to be "another", the solution in turn being "another," which one is not yet clear, all of the questions being obscure and different. In confronting his father's history with his own private vision, this artist mixes races and generations within their different legacies. Using original speeches by Black Power members and Domingo's voice singing Donizetti's aria *Elisir d'amore* as a sound track to the work, Hjelm subliminally describes the gap between the author and the context.

**Francesco Bonami**

*As accidental viewers in a dark cave created under the summer night by Mats Hjelm, stunned by a blurred historical momentum, Francesco Bonami liked to dream that nobody can really be so very different.*

Stills from "White Flight."

