



**THE END OF THE AFFAIR:** A still from Just's "Something to Love" demonstrates the crisp visual style and icy gaze the artist brings to his elliptical short films.

# The Look Of Lonely

**The short, ambiguous romantic tragedies of artist Jesper Just**

**MUSEUMS** | Several men sit quietly among the mirrors of a swanky strip club, each soaking in loneliness. They're the only people in the place; no dancers entertain them. And then the youngest starts to sing: "I was all right for a while, I could smile for a while ..."

It's Roy Orbison's classic "Crying," a rare testament of self-pity that doesn't curdle into something cringeworthy. It's perfect for Copenhagen-based artist Jesper Just's 2004 film "No Man Is an Island II." As the first singer's eyes well with tears, the other men, one by one, join the chorale. Eventually all are involved, somehow linked by a song that reflects the private hurt of each back to himself alone.

The young man is played by Johannes Lilleøre. "I've been working with him in 15 short films like this," Just said. The actor's appearances "make a connection between all the films, a whole body of work,

in a way. It maybe becomes a kind of alter ego."

"Something to Love" (2005), the other piece in Just's short program at the Hirshhorn's Black Box video gallery, is similarly beguiling and intense. An older man, crying, pilots a black Volvo through a deserted parking garage. In the back sits Lilleøre. They stop and the driver steps out to open the door for the younger man, who is swept toward an elevator on an unseen dolly, a trick swiped from Jacques Demy's "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" ("I love that film," Just said). The older man races upstairs and finds the younger bloodlessly lip-locked with a beautiful woman. The couple rotates on a platform as a music box plays.

"People in the film world, they have one goal, and that's making feature films," Just said. But he's happy where he is, telling short, powerful tales that are ambiguous and abstract. **GLENN DIXON**

→ *Hirshhorn Museum, 7th Street and Independence Avenue SW; through Dec. 10; 202-633-1000. (L'Enfant Plaza)*