

Mat Collishaw

(Nottingham, Great Britain, 1966)

One of the group of Young British Artists who gained renown after the 1988 exhibition *Freeze*, Matt Collishaw decided to distance himself from the sensationalism of his early work, and to focus on a more ambiguous equilibrium between beauty and disquietude.

Many of his photographic and video works unite an eye educated in the classics of art history with a subtle malaise with Victorian overtones. One of the first series of photographs in this new direction, begun around the mid-1990s, includes numerous shots of lily and amaryllis flowers as symbols of a diseased sexuality: "I was inspired by a 19th century dandy who became this obsessive collector of flowers and locked himself away in his mansion with them. The decadence got to such a point that his flowers became diseased, like his mind was sickening. . . . I thought it was a good image to work on." (J. Lack, *Dazed and Confused*, www.matcollishaw.com).

His photographic approach restages the atmosphere of paintings by Caravaggio, Italian Mannerism, Böcklin, and Francis Bacon, often with the purpose of portraying a childhood affected by evil, dragged into a premature sexuality, both perverted and abused. The work in the CRT Collection, *Children of a Lesser God*, 2007, is a large light box in which the artist's attention shifts from Nordic legends to an ancient Mediterranean myth, but sliding into that sense of the grotesque and the malignant that pervades all his work: "I constructed a quasi-mythological scene, resembling the story of Romulus and Remus, using modern props to re-enact an ancient fable. Two babies lie on an abandoned sofa with a pair of wild dogs lolling beside them. The shredded carcasses and the ferocity of the nearest dog give the impression that the babies' lives are in peril. Yet one baby is suckling the teat of the furthest dog and sucking at the nipples of wild dogs who nurture and protect them but who seem quite at odds with generally established views of parenting." (Matt Collishaw commenting on the work *Children of a Lesser God*, 2007). (EV)