

Drew Connor Holland

I Measured All This Grace Against Our Ghost

23 – 30 October 2019

Drew Connor Holland is a Sydney-based artist who focuses on the potential for tactile objects to act as social archives. Exploring the space between analogue and digital, his work superimposes virtual screenshots onto hand-made paper. The paper pulp is brewed from a sentimental and personal archive that includes clothes, penalty notices, political pamphlets, letters, drawings and books.

Through the recycling of objects and images, each work is intentionally rendered as fragile. The digital archives on the surface embody the process behind the material support: virtual minutiae in synthesis with personal detritus. Instead of slick and new the pieces look battered and old - like a crumbling fresco or tapestry. The finished pieces are delicate and force gentle consideration.

'In the deep throes of a crush, I noted all the pointless things I'd collected that would mean nothing to someone who didn't know - a small bag of coins with some popcorn seeds, a cardboard sign for ice cream, an annotated poetry book. Those things build a body for me, a history of intimacy that only I can understand, and that's what Drew does - shredding clothing, family items, old artworks, medical bills, everything and anything, which move beyond being literal things. Their amalgamation into one makes them stand-ins for something much bigger.'

Angus McGrath - 2019

ARTIST STATEMENT

"As a preteen, all the other boys at my school were passionate about sport, which I hated. This difference meant I would generally do my own thing. My parents wouldn't let me play violent video games, so I got really into playing Tony Hawk skateboarding ones. While everyone else was out running around in the sun, I was inside making someone else do it for me - living through an avatar. The distance felt safe for me. Drew has expressed similar sentiments about escapism and freedom while playing video games as a child, and although many are important in Drew's life and practice, what stood out in these works were wrestling games. Wrestling is often perceived as the lowest of low mass entertainment, and these video games function as cheap and virtual approximations to enter the ring yourself. Drew and I have spoken before about how the breadth of popular culture is often much better, exciting and relevant to use when discussing ideas and concepts around art, so this centering and return to WWE in the work feels totally right. Drew's earlier art had much more literal depictions of an avatar figure, like in *red//clouds//thinking about angels and Figure (leave me be)*, but moving through chronologically, the bodies begin to change. They become obscured, like the legs in *fruitful intercourse// severed head (I am responsible for [all] the lives I've saved)* ; or in *deep links, red flags || every footprint: a burial they appear as giant reproductions like billboards*; or even *Portrait (sleep experiment/smile.jpg)* which is a wonky scan of Drew's head inside a WWE video game character maker. These figures are stand-ins for the experience of being in digital space - being a kid playing as Tony Hawk or John Cena, and controlling a body that moves through these weird empty virtual spaces for you.

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Over time though, the bodies collapse any difference between action, figure and landscape. It's all just pixels anyway, so what would it mean if one wrestling avatar fell into another, and rather than colliding and rebounding they melted into one-another? These boundaries between connection, violence, intimacy, and self are gone, and the viewer is left with the fact that these aren't bodies, or even landscapes - they're just pixels, and even then, it's not really pixels, but reprinted pixels transferred with solvent onto paper that just look like bodies. In many ways it's an accumulation of stuff. The lumpy home-made paper and their gargantuan material lists clearly reflect this. The items in the paper almost act as their own text works to accompany the objects, and when reading them, a viewer is driven to try pick out the materials - can you see the love letter? can you make out one of the earlier drawings or sketchbooks? Even if you could see them it wouldn't mean anything anyway because it's all Drew's life and experiences, not yours.

In the deep throes of a crush, I noted all the pointless things I'd collected that would mean nothing to someone who didn't know - a small bag of coins with some popcorn seeds, a cardboard sign for ice cream, an annotated poetry book. Those things build a body for me, a history of intimacy that only I can understand, and that's what Drew does - shredding clothing, family items, old artworks, medical bills, everything and anything, which move beyond being literal things. The same happens with the landscape-body-pixels. Their amalgamation into one makes them stand-ins for something much bigger."

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Holland graduated with an MFA from the National Art School in 2018 and has exhibited nationally: selected spaces include Alaska Projects, Metro Arts, Sister Gallery, Tributary Projects and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art. His works are held in the Maitland Regional Art Gallery collection and in private collections throughout Australia.

Angus McGrath - text about Drew Connor Holland September, 2019