

COOL CHANGE CONTEMPORARY

1 - 23 FEBRUARY , 2019

DALTON STEWART

GUY LOUDEN

STEPHEN ARMITSTEAD

DEVON WARD



TEMPORARY PARTITIONS

Encased in these frames is an ode to the body's ability to transform space.

Contracts recognised by “the law” generally arise when an agreement is reached using language (spoken or written). These contracts bind individuals to terms and conditions that if not fulfilled produce discomfort for the losing party.

Bodies are conditioned to follow a set of rules when interacting with forms intended to hold their weight or guide their movement. Structures that exist to house and support propose non-legally binding contracts with their tenants. To step outside the terms and conditions requires a level of performativity from someone. Leaning back on a chair—doing away with two of its legs—allows the body to rock, experiencing movement where there was once stability.

Spaces are conditioned to exist within frameworks designed according to their utilitarianism, written into the by-laws by their form and function. The purpose of a room, often dictated by its relationship to humans, determines the activities that the room may host.

Any panel placed perpendicular to the ground below it can be utilised as a table.^[1] The table does not rely on its legs; its definition holds true if it can provide a resting place for objects. In this way, an overturned bath or a fallen tree can act as a table.

Most tables can double as:

- a dance floor
- a bed
- a platform
- an ironing board.

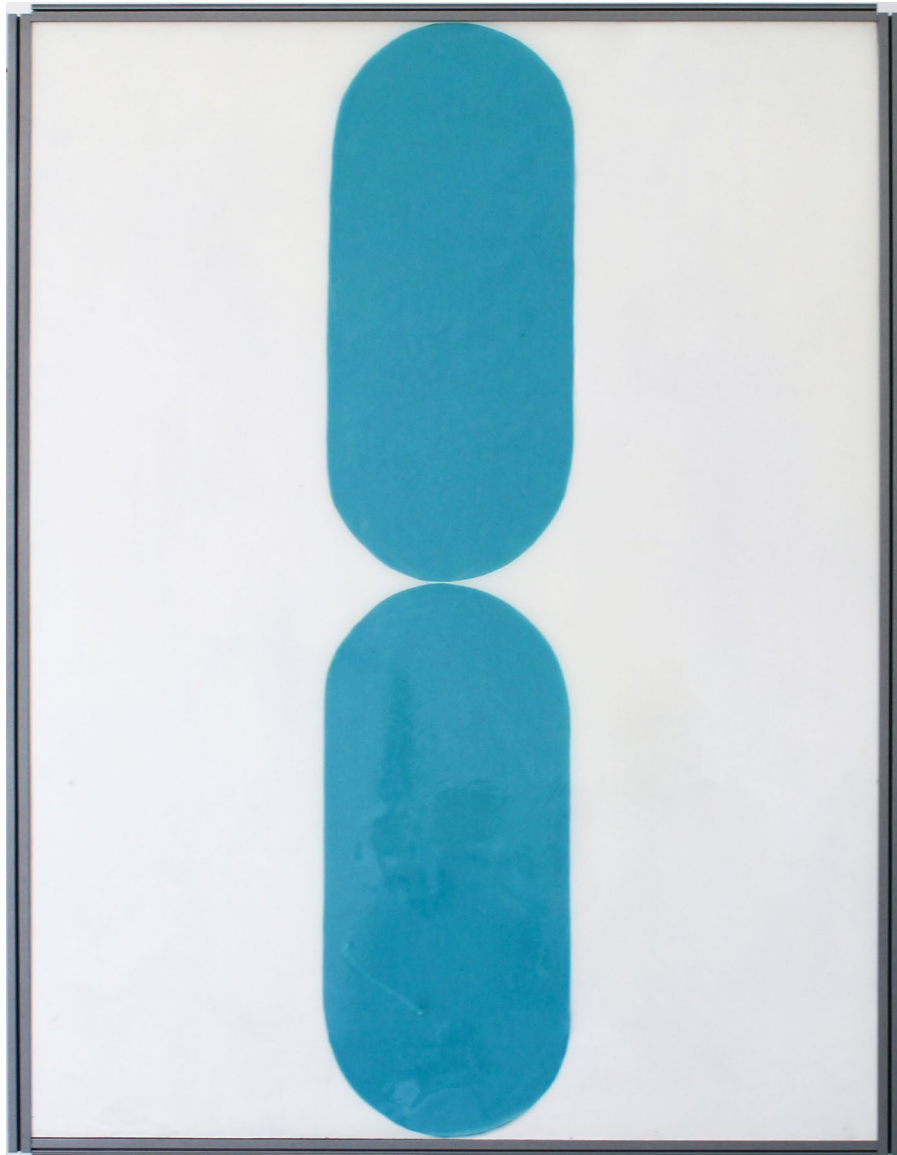
Horizontal planes are required to act as ground for a game of hopscotch. Played by children the world over, lines are drawn or scratched to guide the player's feet as they jump through a series of rectangular shapes. Some courses become permanent features of public spaces, with freshly poured concrete porous enough to absorb the colour in chalk. Stumbled over by several passersby, these lines invite the public to take part in a match. Numbers stamped in the middle of each demarcated space suggest a singular sequence of movements. As these numbers fade, the body can enter into a dance with the game, testing the boundaries of its rulebook.

The acknowledgement of an object's ability to perform outside of its function can transform the way that a space is perceived. A hole in the wall has a prescribed role in certain contexts, yet it is also a possibility in various urban spaces. A puncture in an upright panel of wood suggests the opportunity for any space to become a place for pleasure.

Bethany O'Connor



Dalton Stewart, *Scene (China Chalet)*, 2019, Acrylic paint, aluminium, tiles, plastic, screws, cable and resin, in aluminium frame, 90 x 116 x 6cm.



Dalton Stewart, *Truvada (701)*, 2019, Acrylic paint, paper and resin, in aluminium frame, 90 X 116 X 6cm.

Bethany O'Connor is an artist and a writer. Her practice investigates information systems as a way to discern how truth and fiction are constructed. Using text, mathematical language, the voice and diagrammatic drawing she creates speculative propositions for how we might come to better understand the data used to fabricate our past, present and future. She holds a BA with majors in Creative Writing and Art History from the University of Melbourne and is currently completing her BFA at the Victorian College of the Arts.

^[1] Andrea Zittel, "Dynamic Essay About the Panel (version 2.0)" (video), June 24, 2014, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://vimeo.com/99091140>.

Rush is a new body of work by Melbourne-based artist Dalton Stewart, continuing his investigation of urban and spatial structures in relation to the presence of the body. This exhibition evokes notions of community, sexuality, visibility and privacy. The exhibition is inspired by social and sexual exchanges in gay club environments and meeting spaces, particularly within cities such as Sydney, Berlin, and New York. Rush draws on the politics and atmosphere of these public and personal venues, encoding artworks with autobiographic anecdotes.

Through the displacement and alteration of corporeal structures, Stewart incorporates various media in a practice which manifests minimalist and formal work. In translating architectural structures from within these urban settings, he reflects on the fragmented histories of gay cruising and contemporary models of queer spaces.

Born in Johannesburg, Dalton Stewart is a multidisciplinary artist working in Melbourne. Stewart completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2016 and has exhibited at Firstdraft, Kings Gallery, George Paton, Margaret Lawrence Gallery and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

GUY LOUDEN: NETWORK ARCHEOLOGY

GALLERY 2

MEMORIES OF THE NETWORK AGE

In the wastelands of a former city, a precious artefact was recovered. The city's darkened greyfields, a desert of concrete and steel, held an unremarkable tower. Inside, in a corner of a dusty, forgotten room, lay an archeological treasure — an ancient computer server. Here it had waited, alone and unseen, for hundreds of years. It hummed quietly.

The computer server was operational, and miraculously, it remained connected to the remnants of the network. It was part of the vast virtual empire that had once been the fabric of a global civilisation — the Internet.

The computer ran a virtual assistant program. A rudimentary artificial intelligence made to serve Users. While crippled by the ruin of the wider network, it was itself whole and intact. The software was a view into the virtual core of a world now vanished, a gateway to the Network Age.

The virtual assistant dates from a period of great change, a time when the Industrial Age was giving way to the Age of the Network. At this time, the world's emerging powers were a handful of businesses combining technology, information, and finance. Their activities were increasingly speculative and virtual, and their wealth concentrated in few hands. In these years, technology was an unfettered force for societal transformation.

The virtual assistant is an evocative relic of the age. Simple AI like this, with coded biases and blunt programmatic "solutions", proved far more dangerous than the real thinking machines that had long haunted the imagination. In pursuing narrow preprogramed objectives, they produced unintended social effects. Gradually they rendered most

human labour inefficient, and robotised the conditions of what remained. They made deserts of cities like these.

Such thinking computers came to dominate economics. In the booming financial sector, trading algorithms accelerated and abstracted markets. They operated beyond the capacities of human comprehension. Capital had finally become automated and autonomous. The technology acted in the immediate interests of its masters, sometimes recklessly and always enigmatically.

This virtual assistant was once a tiny node in the unimaginably vast Internet. Network technology radically accelerated globalisation, and this changed patterns of geopolitical power. International war became a limited, routine, and largely indeterminate activity. Global financial and informational conflict, on the other hand, expanded.

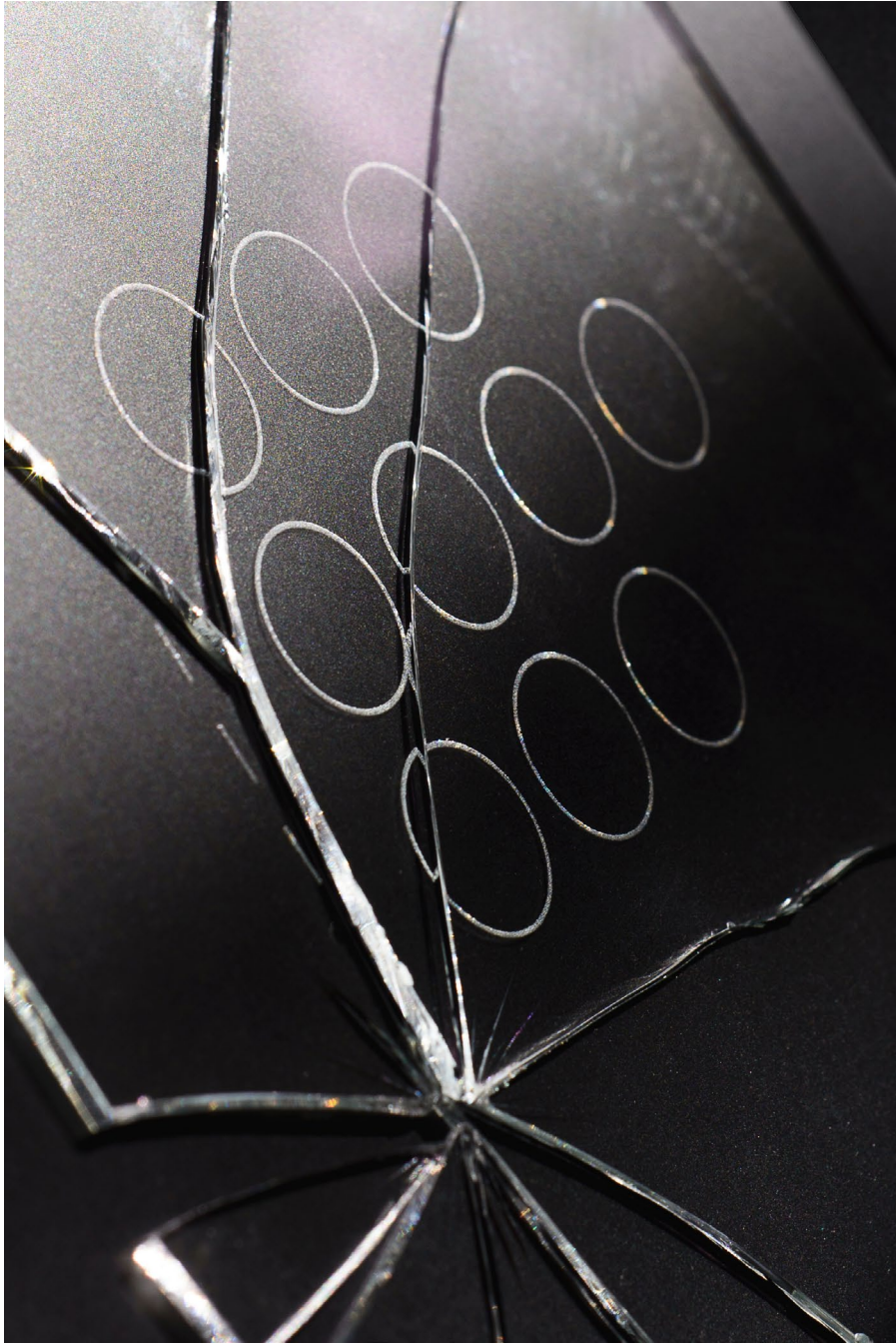
But leaders were in truth less concerned with a national agenda than with the accumulation of personal or familial wealth. Amongst the general population nationalisms and nativism reappeared, but those in power cared little for such regressive distinctions. For them money and culture was postnational.

Technology was simultaneously transforming the lives of the average person. Tech, like the virtual assistant, was omnipresent and always-on. It made complete technosurveillance possible, and this finally abolished privacy. Without it, the space for dissent vanished and the political imagination withered away. Most people could no longer conceive of opposition to the emerging system, let alone organise it.

Yet depopulation had helped ease the Resource Crisis, and those that survived were perhaps better off than ever before. Physical evidence suggests few were starving, living in poverty, or forced into dangerous work. Education was likely near universal. But employment continued to be scarce and unstable, and even where available it was immaterial.



Guy Loudon, *Sleek Memory (Reconstruction)*, 2019, laser etching on shattered UV glass, titanium.



Guy Loudon, *Sleek Memory (Reconstruction)*, 2019, laser etching on shattered UV glass, titanium.

It was a golden age of popular culture. Archeologists could spend their lives decoding it and barely scratch the surface. A comprehensive system of global niche culture emerged. Media of all varieties proliferated, serving infinitely differentiated markets. A virtual assistant supported individual users to navigate, curate, and connect to this mass of media. In this way, one consumer's icons became unrecognisable to another. For an increasingly immobile general populace, these niche cultures were the main arena of action.

In wider culture, a sort of global parochialism reigned. The massive proliferation of information, in combination with a splintering of perspective, had created a situation in which truth was radically contingent, and doubt was universal. Conspiracy and egoism thrived. Everything was up for debate, but nothing was ever resolved. Politics, such as it was, became the domain of progressive mysticisms and derivative fascisms. Rationalism survived in the language of technology but vanished from the field of knowledge.

The Network Age had taken its essential shape. Capitalism melted into a new system of automated finance overseen by global corporate plutocracies. They were led by the CEOs and CFOs of the small group of enmeshed aristocratic family businesses. These were serviced by distinct castes of Makers, Managers, and Creatives. The remaining population were Users, the serf-consumer class. Where the democratic or nationalist practices of the old order lingered, they had become largely decorative and implausible. This computer server and its virtual assistant provide an insight into this emerging world, a chance to interact with the past in the mode of its present.

Guy Loudon

In the future, the internet is a distant memory. Network Archeology stages a post-net, post-apocalyptic scene in which only an isolated node of the network survives. It wraps a custom virtual assistant AI in black-boxed server hardware. This virtual assistant — in the mould of the neural networks of Siri or Alexa — acts as an interactive relic of our near-future. The viewer becomes speculative archeologist of a contracting, collapsing network civilisation.

Guy Loudon is an artist and curator based in Sydney. From 2014 to 2016, Loudon was a director of Moana Project Space. In 2015, he co-founded and managed Success, a largescale art space in Fremantle. He has curated exhibitions for the Perth International Arts Festival, Moana, and Success.

Since 2017, he has exhibited his own artwork, notably at Bus Projects (VIC), Firstdraft (NSW), and Polizia (WA). Loudon holds an MA in Art History from the University of Manchester (2013) and a BA from the University of Western Australia (2011). *Network Archeology* is his first solo exhibition.

The artist would like to thank Cool Change, Dan McCabe, and Samantha Leung.

STEPHEN ARMITSTEAD **REMNANTS: FALSE IMPRESSIONS OF** **TIME & SPACE**

GALLERY 3

STEPHEN ARMITSTEAD IN CONVERSATION WITH COOL CHANGE

Thinking about the fact that you are both initially referencing locations and architectures, but then also re-referencing them again and again, what is it about site-specific work, or responding to a space that is particularly potent or brings you back again and again, given that these are projects you are repeating?

I've been interested in site work and installation work since the beginning of my practice, so that goes back to the early nineties, 93/94 when I finished my undergrad in Sydney. So I was trained as a photographer, and originally a painter/drawer. And when I finished, I was making photographs that weren't photographs, they were basically objects. But they were still thought of as being photographs, because there is something about the notion of exposure, the correct amount of time that imbues this piece of paper and then makes this illusion of an idea or of a space, or of a something. But in many ways the interesting illusion with photography or the photographic process is you think of it as a two-dimensional process, but it's not it's an object, it's a fully four-dimensional object, tracking time it has all these qualities to it. But it has this mystique and can be mis-perceived as something that is only surface-based. So I've always got intrigued by the notion of going deeper than the surface, and making things that are more than a surface. So that's

where my interest in installation comes from, because if you're going to make a piece of work, and you're going to put it in a space, and we know it's a piece of art because it's in that space, I believe, for my work I have to really take on all aspects of what happens to that work in that space.

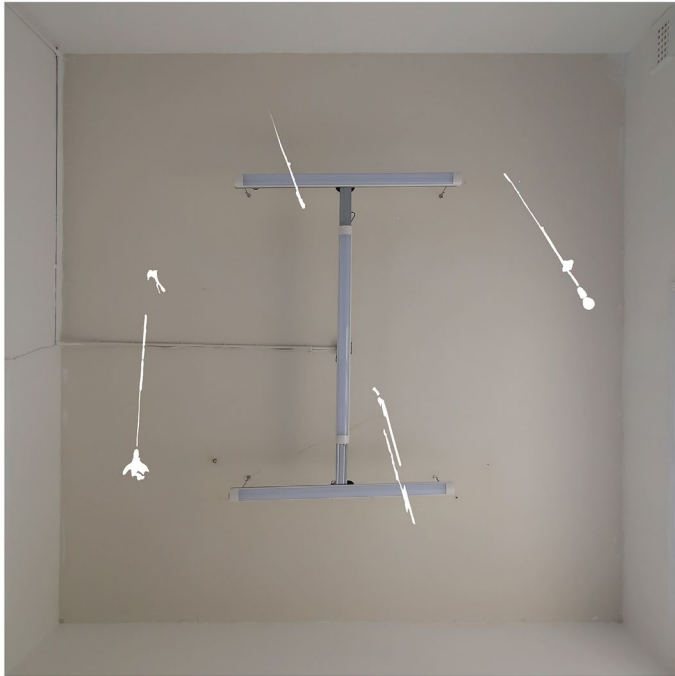
With the connection to architecture, you know in some ways that's specific, but it's also incidental. It's part of the whole process, of accepting that I'm in a space, being aware of how that space is different to what I've seen before, and how I might want to make connections to things other than that space. It's interesting because I think there is a strong sense of creating connections between things in my work now. Whether or not it's connections to previous works, connections to elements within an existing building, existing space, connections between objects that sit within the space. And I think when I'm doing that, when I do it well, I think that's what I'm trying to communicate to the audience, that they can bring what they bring to the work, but then they can also see how the works are interacting with one another or how they might be connecting to other things. And that's the way of opening up perceptions back to the sorts of aesthetics that I'm interested in.

I suppose the connections you're trying to make are not so much narrative as possibly more material-based?

Yeah, that's probably a fair thing. There isn't a narrative, but in an interesting kind of way, the meaning might connect to an experience, or it might connect to a likeness. There must have been times when you are in a space that's not an art space and yet you see uncanny likenesses to actions or activities or placement of



Stephen Armitstead, *False remnants*, 2018, bisque fired porcelain.



Stephen Armitstead, *Gallery Three* (detail), 2018, digital print & remnants, 50 x 70cm

objects or even rituals that you do at home, that have connections back to practice art spaces, and I don't know that that's a narrative.

But you know in a weird kind of way life is a narrative. And those are the kinds of things that I'm interested in. Sometimes I think my work has connections to my domestic life. There are connections to how I might go about building something, or how I might go about cleaning something, how I might go about making something or organising something or placing something, choosing something, that sort of domestic life. In the gallery space, and that notion of exhibiting - even if it isn't in a gallery space, but that notion of exhibiting, and what it brings with it - it's a way or ordering some of those domesticities of myself. In the past I thought I had to understand it from an intellectual perspective. But now I feel like it's just what I do, it is my aesthetic.

Stay tuned to hear more of this conversation with Stephen as part of the upcoming Cool Change podcast series.

Stephen Armitstead explores the memory of site and the notion of imbedded presence with a series of new works for *Remnants: false impressions of time & space*. Utilising photography, video, installation and ceramics Armitstead responds to architectural features of the Cool Change Contemporary gallery space as well as sites of the the artist's past exhibitions. The internal window of Cool Change's Gallery 3 is reflected in Armitstead's latest iteration of his false series, an installation of temporary building materials and a bed of compressed flour. Also presented are a number of ceramic sculptural impressions created from previous installations from the series at galleries including Heathcote, FeltSpace and Old Customs House.

Continuing an art practice for over 20 years, Stephen Armitstead works with experimental installation, video, photo-media, architecture, objects, interactive elements, and sound. Armitstead's work concentrates on playful interrogation of process and unconventional use of materials. He creates elaborate setups that are moments extracted for observation, contemplation and to various levels, understanding.

Based in Western Australia, Stephen Armitstead is originally from New South Wales and studied at COFA, UNSW. Armitstead's work has been a finalist in the Mid West Art Prize (2018, 2015) and for the Joondalup Invitational Art Award (2010, 2012). He has collaborated on site-specific temporary artworks for the City of Fremantle (2013) and for the City of Subiaco (2011).

DEVON WARD: THE TEMPERING

PROJECT SPACE

THE TEMPERING

At the top of the stairs, through a long corridor, around the corner, you will find a room with an artefact. It is a body of sorts, composed of a whip wielded by an arm affixed to a palanquin. Vessels extend from the palanquin, each containing a rarefied mixture of heat, water, earth and the Old Friends—the ones we now call bacteria. When the Old Friends flex, an electric shiver causes the arm to writhe and flail, whip in hand.

*This artefact is not from the here-and-now; rather, it was drawn from the future. At some distant moment, individuals will carry it through the landscape with a mixture of reverence and fear—like the armour-clad guards who once carried, aloft in palanquins, emperors who never set foot upon the earth. In time, the unwieldy elements of this artefact will mould us to their whims. But if you look around, you can see that it has already begun, *The Tempering*.*

THE TEMPERING: OLD FRIENDS, PRESSING CONVERSATIONS.

A whip snaps, directed by mud, the air quivers, yet nobody receives the lashing. Instead the whip flails about in the air before coming to rest, then starting up again, whipping the air around it, over and over, caroling emptiness. It is an automated sequence, an allegorical speculation symbolically embedded within a nexus of power in an era of environmental angst. The structure from which the whip fires is a palanquin – human-powered transport traditionally used across the world to carry royalty and nobility in comfort over long distances. This palanquin, however, is supporting not royalty but the base materials of earth, water and microbes as part of Microbial Fuel Cells (MFCs). The cells are held aloft, upon the palanquin, as though they are royal subjects. In their embodiment they seem ancient, yet in their technological encasing they appear as though teleported from a future time and dimension. MFCs make use of the primordial matter of mud containing microorganisms as biocatalysts to “convert chemical energy to electrical energy.”^[1] Essentially this is a ‘living battery’ made from water, mud and anaerobic bacteria to create low voltages with not much, but certainly enough strength to drive a whip.

In *The Tempering*, “A whip driven by water, mud and bacteria speaks to our increasing awareness that nonhuman and environmental worlds ‘bite back’”^[2] and they have power. A microcellular organism can power a whip. The sun, the wind, the ocean, can power entire cities. Sensing this intimately in proximity and seeing it as a reality is a step towards a different paradigm. In an era in which we are constantly bombarded by the ceaseless novelties of late capitalism, we are all too



Devon Ward, *Microbial Fuel Cell (detail)*, 2019, digital photograph.



Devon Ward, */Reservoir of the Old Friends/*, 2018, digital photograph.

familiar with change and difference within specific parameters. The currency of capitalism is glittering newness. True change, however, cannot occur within the existing system; it is not even about “the overthrowing of the old order, but above all the establishment of a new order.”^[3] The philosopher Timothy Morton would refer to it as a necessary change in global consciousness, towards a mass realisation that we simply cannot go on as we have. We need to be whipped into shape to bring about a different shape of things to come.

The Tempering uses emerging technologies within an ambivalent speculative allegory, where non-human actants are the protagonists majestically elevated upon a palanquin, sheathed within a minimalist design that belies their quotidian character. Ward writes that The Tempering,

“...asks viewers to “stay with the trouble,”—to really feel what is being done to the only home we’ve ever known—and to be emotionally prepared for what lies ahead. By embodying the fears and frustrations surrounding the collapse of contemporary environments, this work attempts to create a psychological percept within the audience that is immediate and primordial.”^[4]

Perhaps the idea of home should extend beyond the boundaries of the familiar structure we inhabit daily. Instead it could be thought of as shared with a myriad of other species - as the entire planet Earth and its various ecosystems and environments yielding to the impact of human existence. Ward calls the microbes within the installation ‘old friends’. This comes from the ‘old friends hypothesis’, which decrees that lack of contact with beneficial bacteria - the ‘old friends’ that

co-evolved with us - is detrimental to human health by being responsible for increasing rates of allergies and immune diseases. In this case it is beneficial for the 'over there 'to be 'right here' and pulsing within our bodies. Moreover, without an expanded concept of home, without embracing our old friends and the wider Earth, we cannot even begin to care, take responsibility and get in amongst the dirt that surrounds us, yet alone reach the realisation that it might in fact be what has the power to not only whip us, but to save us.

Dr. Laetitia Wilson

The Tempering is a robotic installation that attempts to imbue primordial elements – water, earth and bacteria – with a vital psychological force. It explores the agency of nonhuman actors from the environment by using an emerging technology called microbial fuel cells (MFCs) – batteries made from water and mud – to create low voltages that trigger a mechanical arm to crack a whip. Using mud collected from Herdsman Lake as the agent which “controls” the cracking of a whip, and its echo, *The Tempering* questions the passive role typically given to nonhuman elements, especially in the age of the Anthropocene.

Devon Ward is an artist who creates living and digital systems to explore notions of time, place and identity. His work takes the form of installations, sculptures, video, books and sound. Ward has exhibited in Australia, Japan, the UK and US. Ward earned a Master of Biological Arts from SymbioticA at the University of Western Australia in 2014 and a Bachelor of Fine Art from the University of Florida in 2010.

[1] Peter Aelterman et al. “Continuous Electricity Generation at High Voltages and Currents Using Stacked Microbial Fuel Cells” *Environmental Science & Technology* 40 (2006) p.3388

[2] Devon Ward, 2018

[3] Slavoj Zizek, *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight: Power in the Era of Posthumanity*, PenguinBooks, 2018

[4] Devon Ward, 2018

Cool Change Contemporary acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional and rightful custodians of the land on which we operate. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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