

May – Jun

2017

## Projection Series #6 A Little Faith



Projection Series #6:  
*A Little Faith*  
May – June 2017  
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Curated by Mark Williams  
Essay by Mark Williams  
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Cover: Karin Hofko  
Self-titled, 2011, film still, digital video.

Len Lye Centre Cinema  
Photo: Patrick Reynolds

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre's state-of-the-art 62 seat cinema encourages audiences to experience the films of Len Lye and the wider world of local and international cinema.

The cinema welcomes you to see historical experimental film, contemporary artists' moving image and regular film festival programming. At the heart of the Len Lye Centre's cinema programme sees the return of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *Projection Series*, our regular film programme surveying the landscape of historical and contemporary fine art filmmaking.

# A Little Faith

Curated by Mark Williams

Curated by Mark Williams/CIRCUIT Artist  
Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand  
Commissioned by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

In 1988 American preacher Jimmy Swaggart was suspended from his Assembly of God ministry after a rendezvous with prostitute Debra Murphree in a New Orleans Travel Inn.<sup>1</sup> The irony of Swaggart's fall from grace was multiple; having previously condemned fellow church minister and televangelist Marvin Gorman as an adulterer, Swaggart himself was exposed for cheating on his wife. And, having built an audience of millions as a pioneer of televangelism, Swaggart's career was destroyed with just one single image shot from a telephoto lens.

Peter Wareing's *Bassus Continuus* (2015) draws on footage of Swaggart's subsequent televised public confession. Alongside, Wareing juxtaposes an interview with artist Jeff Koons. Where Swaggart proffers operatic contrition, Koons projects an aura of calm business-like assurance as he outlines his vision for "total artistic liberation in the mainstream". Wareing contrasts these two pieces of Reagan-era footage with riot footage, a pulp detective drama and a 1968 film of French film-makers Straub and Huillet on the set of *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. Pausing between takes, Straub instructs the actor to refrain from any hint of expression in his delivery. Says Straub - "I had the impression that you were wanting to give us the impression..."

*Bassus Continuus* is a nightmare essay on the late 20th century capitalism and the power of the lens. Constructed over three screens, it nods formally to the religious triptych. But what exactly makes Wareing's piece a work for our times?

In a May 2016 review of a Jeff Koons survey show at London's Newport Street Gallery, writer Jonathan Jones drew a withering line between the artist and contemporary politics;

*"Koons' ambitions are crass and he has achieved them all – he has turned his art into business and, boy, has he made it big in that business. He is the Donald Trump of art... But any attempt to see Koons as a moralist, social commentator, or anything other than a brilliant businessman vanishes in this progressively more dispiriting encounter with his monstrous travesties... (He is) A genius made in hell."*<sup>2</sup>

A genius made in hell.

Donald Trump's ascension to office has unfolded as a public rejection of election season jargon and platitudes. Closer to home, Murray Hewitt's *Waitakere Business Club, Trusts Stadium, Henderson*. January 26 (2014) recasts political rhetoric not as 'plain-speaking' but as pseudo-poetry. "What are we? Mind? Economy? Weather?" Hewitt's work is a classic example of détournement, a French term meaning "rerouting, hijacking", defined elsewhere as "turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself"<sup>3</sup>. The result is dada-esque nonsense, but does it really make any less sense than the promise of trickle down prosperity?

Not unlike a chat room confession delivered to an audience of one, Karin Hofko's *Self-titled* (2011) offers a vivid devotional - "I love you... I'm crazy about you... I'm crazy about your passion!" Pausing inbetween takes, Hofko makes it abundantly clear this is a construction, consulting off-camera in her native German with a colleague, who critiques her delivery. "Yeah that was quite alright...that bit about the universe...it's a bit pathetic...try to be a bit more natural... more international".

It is not always so easy to spot the discrepancy between image and intention. Jordana Bragg's *wherever our river ran (i ran to, i ran too)* (2016) evokes that most vulnerable of states; childhood. In a series of abrupt cuts of memory, action and location, the artist delivers spoken word recollections of adolescent trauma. Standing and kneeling in a suburban backyard, the artist shivers, trembles and shakes, a compulsive horror at odds with the supposedly safe space of 'home'. Like Hewitt, Bragg reworks the past to undermine its power; a resistance through re-enactment, this time with the camera as witness.

Amongst the landscape of public and private compacts, there are of course other avenues in which to place faith and trust; namely the spiritual, the felt, the intuitive.

Sonya Lacey's *Infinitesimals* (2016) begins in a foundry where we watch the cast and cool of a 60 point metal letter-type. In the 1950s, this font was proposed for signage on British motorways, due to its readability at high speed.<sup>4</sup> Later, her camera follows laboratory preparations of homeopathic remedies, whose effectiveness is said to be gleaned from the Law of Similars (treating like with like) the Law of Infinitesimals (maximum dilution) and the Law of Succussion (vigorous shaking or tapping to potentise the solution).<sup>5</sup> The cast letter and the homeopathic remedy are both forged in

metal, yet despite this basis in the physical, the effectiveness of both is described as a 'latent' presence.

In the end, there is always another, more radical alternative to the many systems courting our attention; to simply ignore them all and drop out. Now in their forties, Dida and Erana have lived on the streets in Manurewa since they were ten years old. Each day they make their way to a park bench in the local shopping precinct where they sit and watch passers-by, the changing weather and the surrounding activity of commercial life. In *Eye / Aye* (2014) film-maker Martin Rumsby sets up his camera in a nearby office building, affecting the perspective of surveillance, waiting for his subjects to arrive. "At some point in their lives" says Rumsby, "most people choose energy and application to define their character..." but, he concludes, "There is no point in struggling, waiting is enough, since everything returns to the street".<sup>6</sup>

What does it mean not to participate? What constitutes presence and absence? If the homeopathic method in Lacey's *Infinitesimals* cannot be proved by science, is it an illusion? And if Dida and Erana refuse to be 'visible' in the capitalist system, does that mean that they too do not exist?

As the world counts the costs of electing Donald Trump and Brexit, September 2017 looms as the date for the next New Zealand election. What wild cards might step forward to offer themselves as worthy champions of our collective wealth? What individuals might suppose to offer a miracle cure for a housing crisis, filthy waterways and a growing gap between rich and poor?

Laden with possibility, Steve Carr's *Table Cloth Pull* (2007) shows the artist standing next to a fully laden table of glasses and cutlery. Like Boris Johnson contemplating Brexit, like all who play to the gallery and enjoy the thrilling potential of power, Carr knows we are watching, and maybe even willing him to plunge into the unknown. Will he succeed? Will he fail? Does it matter? This September, will you Vote Carr?



Jordana Bragg  
*wherever our river ran*  
(*i ran to, i ran too*)  
2016

1. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy\\_Swaggart#Television](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Swaggart#Television)
2. Jeff Koons: Now review - Damien Hirst's joyless paean to Donald Trump of art  
The Guardian - [www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/may/19/jeff-koons-now-review-damien-hirst-donald-trump](http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/may/19/jeff-koons-now-review-damien-hirst-donald-trump)
3. 2017, D tournement, Wikipedia
4. 2010, Type design by David Kindersley, The Cardozo Kindersley Workshop
5. Cunnane, A 2016, 'The Berlin Wall is a remedy' for Sonya Lacey - *Infinitesimals* at \_the engine room

Next page: Sonya Lacey  
*Infinitesimals* 2016,  
film still. Courtesy of the  
artist and Robert Heald Gallery





*Table Cloth Pull* 2007  
Steve Carr

1.30 min., digital video, sound

In *Tablecloth Pull* Carr presents himself as magician, building anticipation towards the classic trick in which a tablecloth is wrenched from under a place setting, the intended effect being that the plates and glasses remain perfectly in place.



*Self-Titled* 2011  
Karin Hofko

7.25 min., digital video, sound

"I love you... I'm crazy about you... I'm crazy about your passion!" In a series of takes direct to camera Hofko attempts to deliver a heartfelt monologue of devotion to the viewer, pausing from time to time weigh up the effectiveness of her delivery.



*Bassus Continuus* 2016  
Peter Wareing

15.00 min., digital video, sound

Drawing on footage of artist Jeff Koons, preacher Jimmy Swaggart, and making-of footage from 1968 French film *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, *Bassus Continuus* examines the construction of character in 20th century broadcast media. While Koons and Swaggart play to the gallery with a mixture of confidence and contrition, the directors of *Anna Magdalena Bach* exhort their actors to deliver less emotion and feeling.



*Waitakere Business Club, Trusts Stadium, Henderson: January 26*

2012 2014

**Murray Hewitt**

7.25 min., digital video, sound

“What are we? Mind, Economy, Weather?” Using a transcription of a 2012 speech by Prime Minister John Key the artist re-works common political phrases into pseudo-poetry.

*Infinitesimals* 2016

**Sonya Lacey**

7.00 min., digital video, sound

In a foundry a series of letters are cast in lead type. Later, in a homeopaths laboratory, samples are taken from the surface of the letters, which are then converted into remedies designed to treat the symptoms of lead poisoning, including slowness of ‘perception’, ‘movement’ and thought.

*wherever our river ran (i ran to, i ran too)* 2016

**Jordana Bragg**

3.00 min., digital video, sound

In a series of abrupt cuts of memory, action and location, the artist delivers spoken word recollections of adolescence, reflecting on trauma in the suburbs and home.

*Eye I Aye* 2014

**Martin Rumsby**

15.00 min., digital video, sound

“At some point in their lives, most people choose energy and application...”. Now in their forties, Dida and Erana have lived on the streets in Manurewa since they were ten years old. Rumsby’s camera waits for Dida and Erena to take up their daily place of residence on a public bench in the Manurewa shopping precinct. Rumsby pauses midway to consider the making of his film as an act of labour.