

Seen and Not Seen

LARGE PRINT

Scott Caruth and Alex Hetherington:

Exhibition Guide

An exhibition of new work by two artists, Scott Caruth and Alex Hetherington. Both work primarily with the moving image in this exhibition, reflecting in different ways on what remains unseen, invisible or deliberately hidden from view.

Scott Caruth approached Pipeworks Gay Sauna in Glasgow which permitted him to conduct a series of experiments there using 16mm film on the condition that there would be no cameras involved. Describing the first stage of the process he recalls:

"I exposed 100ft of Kodak colour film directly to changes in light, temperature and precipitation whilst transferring the film reel from one hand to another as I navigated the entire site of the sauna; exposing the film between rooms bathed in red or blue light, underneath the water of the jacuzzi, to the heat of the steam room and throughout cabins devoid of any light at all. The resulting footage of abstract yet perpetually moving colours lends the impression of travelling through something that cannot be fully seen."

Alex Hetherington, working through his own recent material, considers the porous nature of influence and collaboration in his work as well as the unseen outtakes that would normally be excluded from the public viewing process. He wants to focus on the actual process of making, and both his films and the installation of his work draws on a dense series of allusions and artistic references including Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Querelle* (1982), *The Chittendens* (2005) by the American artist Catherine Sullivan and Gregory J. Markopolous's *Himself as Herself* (1967).

Hetherington's film also foregrounds the presence and involvement of the Scottish artist Catherine Street and he points to the

importance of Egyptian writer Haytham El-Wardany's *How to Disappear* (2018), a book grounded in the necessity of making oneself unseen to be a good listener. The mythical figure of Tiresias also haunts the work and becomes linked to the materiality of 16mm film itself, approaching "their mutable gender fluidity as radical states of queerness and transness, embodying different forms of sight and knowing, and premonitions as a form of knowing and making and radical oppositions to authority."

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Scott Caruth and Alex Hetherington

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Extended Guide

In 2016, Caruth approached Pipeworks Gay Sauna in Glasgow which permitted him to conduct a series of experiments there using 16mm film on the condition that there would be no cameras involved.

Caruth remembers that:

I exposed 100ft of Kodak colour film directly to changes in light, temperature and precipitation whilst transferring the film reel from one hand to another as I navigated the entire site of the sauna; exposing the film between rooms bathed in red or blue light, underneath the water of the jacuzzi, to the heat of the steam room and throughout cabins devoid of any light at all. The resulting footage of abstract yet perpetually moving colours lends the impression of travelling through something that cannot be fully seen. 100ft of film translates to 2.5 minutes of footage which forms the visual backbone of the film. The considerations made to lighting within saunas privileges other senses over sight. Vision is compromised, verbal communication is discouraged, and interactions are organised around touch, body language and gesture; collapsing the expectations formed around the visual and verbal codes of the public.

At this stage, I came across Bob (not their real name) through an internet forum for gay men who are visually impaired and began to interview him every single week.

Over the next four years, Caruth developed a regular working

relationship with Bob, meeting him both online and physically, developing an idea for a short documentary film. However, the process of applying for funding began to place constraints and time limits on their working relationship. Scott felt that Bob was under pressure to perform what was needed for the work at the expense of all nuance. Abandoning that quest for funding, the project took a different direction, as Caruth explains:

Bob had mentioned that his eroticism was most fully realised through the voice. His fullest exploration of this was his ritual of inviting men to sing and hold out a single note for as long as they possibly can under his instruction for him to record. I opted to focus on these aspects of our exchange, in which it was me performing for Bob, instead of the other way around.

The film, BOB, combines these voice sessions with the film exposed in the Pipeworks Sauna.

The four prints by Scott Caruth (in Space 1 and 2) are photographs taken in the Savoy Centre ground floor men's bathroom in 2015-16, around the same time as the making of the film (the doors have now been removed as part of a regeneration of the space). Both Pipeworks and the Savoy toilets were well known cruising spots – one officially sanctioned and the other not. The 16mm film and the prints share a level of 'visual noise' (or 'grain') in terms of image resolution that echoes similar themes of visibility and legibility.

In 2016 Bob sent Scott Caruth the following email reflecting on his blindness:

Those of us who are born blind discover, as we grow up, that we can tell a great deal about our environment. Usually, at about seven or eight years old we begin to put this knowledge into practice. When we tell sighted people about this skill they usually misunderstand and often think we possess some remnant of sight. When I was a small child I was guided by my mother, my aunts, and occasionally my dad, who was less

comfortable with the task. Before long I began to notice that I could tell certain things. I could tell when I was passing a car, when there was an open space near me, when I was heading straight for a wall, or when there was a big obstacle like a truck in my path--and I could tell all these things without knowing how.

Bob 1948-2022

Around the same time Pipeworks gave permission for Scott to film in their space:

Hey Scott,

Thanks for coming along today and meeting with myself. I have already spoken to my boss and he has made the following proposal that you enter the sauna while it is closed and wonder around. If this is not doable then the other option would be to go with what we discussed while the venue is open, they are just concerned how other customers would react, but I made them aware that it would only be spools with a bit of film exposing it to the light, and there would be no actual cameras or lenses involved.

The other thing is that we would need your proposal in writing in order to safe guard the company, customers, and yourself. Upon receiving this proposal, it would be forwarded to senior management/owners and they may wish to put conditions on it, such as no cameras that could capture anything that identifies our venue or customers etc. So in your proposal please stress that this process only captures light.

Best,
Pipeworks Glasgow

While exploring the possibilities of audio description for the film, Caruth received the following text from one company who tackled

the task. They approached the work as one complete experience rather than attempting a frame-by-frame description. For Caruth, the text they finally submitted highlighted the layers of translation that every individual brings to a work, how each individual sees it differently:

Audio description: Text of “100ft of Vision3 500t (7219) 16mm film exposed without a camera directly to changes in light, temperature and precipitation throughout Pipeworks Gay Sauna, Glasgow, October 2016.” Markings flicker on a pale blue screen. The blue fades into green then back to a cold blue. A flash of deep purple, then blue again and more, varying shades of green. Shadows and shapes precede a shift into warmer oranges, yellow and then deep red. Then a flash of lime green before black and then the warmth of more shades of orange. Then cold again with lilac fading to green and then through a spectrum of purples. Out of darkness into a deep red which fades into multiple shades of green before returning to the same deep red. Into multiple shades of blue and purple, and then back into pale green and orange and deep red once again. Black into greys before emerging into shades of green, fading into muddy brown colours, then out into blues before more greens, a flash of black and deep red. Another range of blues, more greens and again the red. Fading back into the greens and then more blues before back to more greens; olive and lime. Black which flickers back into the warmth of red then a watery orange. Pale lilac for several seconds before then fading back into black.

24929 Pipeworks Glasgow Text BITC AD script- May 2022

Alex Hetherington

In speaking of his works in *Seen and Not Seen*, Alex Hetherington draws on a series of references to other filmmakers. For instance, he touches on the writing of the European filmmaker Rosa Barba, who in her book *On the Anarchic Organization of Cinematic Spaces*

(2021) points to the materiality of film and its importance in her practice:

I explore film and its capacity to simultaneously be an immaterial medium that carries information and a physical material with sculptural properties. The category of film is expanded and abstracted beyond the literal components of the celluloid strip, the projector through which it passes, and the image projected onto a screen or beyond – where the landscape itself forms the screen. Each component becomes a starting point for artworks that expand the idea of film while exploring its intrinsic attributes.

Barba goes on to talk about her conceptual approach to cinema ‘in an architectural sense and as an instrument’, creating an anarchic space of uncertainty and speculation where she can destabilize the ‘old hierarchy of the components of cinema, by freeing them from their original use and letting them interact in new and unforeseen ways’.

Hetherington also refers to the work of the English filmmaker, Tacita Dean, and the layering of time in films. In an odd echo of Scott Caruth’s *BOB*, Dean talks about an element of blindness in working with film:

Working “blind”, as she calls it, is virtually a mantra for Dean, and one that manifests in diverse ways. First and foremost, she considers film a blind medium, in that one does not get to see the images one has captured until the film comes back from the lab. ... Blindness, too, is involved in Dean’s process of trusting in what she calls “unconscious guiding forces” and the munificence of chance.

An important collaborator for Hetherington in this body of work has been the Edinburgh-based artist, Catherine Street. She played an important role in the creation of the scripts for his films and Hetherington values a certain androgynous quality in her voice which helps to determine the performance of those scripts. That

sense of androgyny informs Hetherington's thinking around the queerness of 16mm filmmaking in general, given its materiality and deviation from the norms of contemporary filmmaking. He relates his filmmaking to the Greek mythological figure of Tiresis, a blind prophet of Apollo who is transformed into a woman by the goddess Hera:

the notion of Tiresias, queerness, trans-ness and premonition, blindness and sight, these complex liminal states and times that Tiresias exists in is something mirrored in 16mm and its properties, materiality, and technologies, multiple temporalities as Tacita Dean puts it; it is that kind of movement of references and thought that is in action here. I think too of 16mm film production methods rooted in the queer imagination. So obvious references like *Querelle* (1982), and Catherine Sullivan especially *The Chittendens* (2005) but also Gregory Markopolous's *Himself as Herself* (1967), an exploration of androgyny loosely based on Balzac's *Séraphîta* (1834) and Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903), and I would definitely highlight Haytham El Wardany's book, *How to Disappear* (2018), as a template in approaching the cut of the films.