



Hold

Eloise Calandre Tamsin Green Scott Morrison David Mutch Heidi Yardley

Curated by Simone Hine

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Screen Space

10th September – 2nd October 2010

Hold brings together five contemporary artists whose works draw upon the interrelated histories of art and cinema and in so doing generate a tension between stillness and motion. For many of these artists the relationship between stillness and motion is not their primary concern. However, a focus on cinema has drawn each of the artists, in different ways, to generate this tension because stillness and motion have historically defined art and cinema respectively.



Hold (2010) Exhibition Detail (Scott Morrison (2009) *oceanechoes*; Tamsin Green (2010) *Untitled* and Heidi Yardley (2009) *Everything I Cannot See*).



Heidi Yardley (2010) *Night Rider #1*, *Night Rider #2* and *Night Rider #3*, Oil on Board.

Heidi Yardley's painting *Everything I Cannot See* (2009) depicts a woman's arm resting across a floral bedspread. Her palm faces upward, but is not completely exposed. There is vulnerability in this image that is marked by ominous undertones that seem to emanate from the deep shadow cast by the woman's unseen body. Rendered in the fleshy realism of Yardley's practice, *Everything I Cannot See* evokes a deathly stillness, while at the same time beckons the viewer to breathe life into the narratives evoked by the image.

Anne Hollander has argued that certain pre-cinematic paintings, namely those of the Northern tradition, evoke the randomness and partiality of human vision which generate narratives beyond what is visually contained within the frame¹. It is this desire to move beyond the frame that painting initiated and cinema continued. Yardley's paintings have a clear cinematic aesthetic. Lighting, framing, palette and subject all suggest 1970s cinema, but it is the framing of these images that so clearly suggest cinematic narratives. The paintings depict small unexplained fragments that appear to be part of a wider scene that we, as audience, are not privy to. The desire to move beyond the frame is created by the deliberate truncation of scenes which invites the viewer to speculate about what lies beyond this fragment. This speculation draws the image outward and beyond the frame. This idea is cleverly alluded to by Yardley herself through the title *Everything I Cannot See*.

Yardley often displays her paintings in clusters or sequences, and in so doing forges narrative connections between the individual fragments presented in each painting. The *Night Rider* (2009) series is presented here as a sequence of three images, an unzipped leather jacket revealing the bare chest of man whose face we cannot see, a television in the corner of what

is presumably a hotel room, and a woman's stockinged feet poised as she appears to be descending off a couch. A similar lighting and colour pallet creates a continuity across the paintings, making them appear as though they are individual moments taken from a larger scene. Yardley takes the historical connection between painterly and cinematic aesthetics and amplifies it by creating connections across the individual paintings.

Hollander's argument understands certain paintings to be part of a pre-cinematic history that is not determined by technological innovation, but is marked by discreet shifts in the logic of image making. The shifts between different logics, shared by art and cinema, inform each of the works in this exhibition in different ways. The works utilise medium specific traditions in art and cinema, creating tensions in the dichotomy of stillness and motion. Still images suggest movement beyond themselves, namely through narrative, and moving images suggest stasis in the absence of narrative.

David Mutch's single photographic image *Untitled #10* from *The Tourist* series (2009 -2010) depicts a carefully framed landscape marked by deep shadows and a washed-out colour palette. The landscape provides a background on which a single figure walks along a desolate unsealed road. Just as Yardley's work suggests narratives beyond the frame, this image speaks of the road travelled and the road yet to be travelled. This presumed narrative, evoked here in a photograph with a 16:9 cinematic ratio and carefully constructed aesthetic, suggests a cinematic freeze frame.



Hold (2010) Exhibition Detail (Eloise Calandre (2010) *Cradle* and David Mutch (2009-10) *Untitled #10*).



David Mutch (2009-10) *Untitled #10* from the series *The Tourist*, Photograph.

Untitled #10 oscillates between photography and cinema, and in so doing reproduces the tension between stillness and motion at the heart of the moving image. The still photogram, which comprises all moving images, is erased by the projector's motion when viewed at twenty-four frames a second. Furthermore, the materiality of the image is erased in cinema as the sequence of stills is projected in motion.

A photograph that appears cinematic provides a return to the hidden photogram and therefore reminds us of the hidden stillness and materiality of the moving image. *Untitled #10* does not disguise its materiality, instead the texture of the paper and the intensity of the ink creates a surface that one is drawn towards. Furthermore the picture is framed by a white boarder typical of photographic prints, rather than the black border of darkened cinemas which conceals the physicality of the image in favour of the elusiveness of light.

The oscillation between cinema and photography is also an oscillation between motion and stillness. *Untitled #10*, as with Mutch's other photographic works, heightens the way still photographs temporally unfold as the viewer casts their eyes across the image, unable to focus on everything at once². This is the inevitable affect of any still image; however the careful arrangement of the visual elements make conscious the otherwise subconscious process of seeing each detail of an image in sequence. When approaching this work, the eye functions in a manner analogous with a camera zooming-in on details

not possible to see from afar. What at first appears like a double-page fashion photograph is transformed on closer inspection when it becomes obvious that the central figure is wearing a disposable raincoat. When I look at this photograph the raincoat becomes a type of manufactured *punctum*³. Instead of suggesting a world beyond the frame, it suggests film narratives in general, but more specifically the recent post apocalyptic film *The Road* (2009) where the two main characters walk along desolate roads across similarly washed-out landscapes⁴. *Untitled #10* generates meaning through the interplay of what we know about cinema, but do not know about this image.

In opposition to Yardley's paintings and Mutch's photograph, which are still but suggest movement through narrative, Scott Morrison's video *oceanechoes* (2009) is constantly in motion and yet resists narrative. In *oceanechoes* movement, like sound, is based in rhythm as opposed to a progression of narrative. The video creates an experience of the field; the touch of the wind, the brushing of grass against skin, the familiar earthy smell of the field. This work evokes senses linked to lived experience. This is not to suggest that the work is hostile to narrative, but in isolation it does not overtly suggest narrative. Jeremy Gilbert-Roth has spoken of a *visual remainder* as that in the visual which falls outside of language, resisting description and analysis⁵. It is this visual component that is often secondary to narrative in visual culture, which Morrison makes central to this work.

As the camera moves through the field, blades of grass flicker across the screen and the pace of the video changes depending on the length of the edits, which overlap and meld together. In moments of fast editing the blades of grass appear to be fixed yet moving, in a manner reminiscent of Stan Brakhage's projected collages attached directly to tape or film stock⁶ - a link to the materiality of the image that can only be inferred in the digital context. Likewise, these moments of hyper-activity evoke the very beginning of cinema where the "flicker effect", caused by the visibility of the space between each photogram, was a constant reminder of the still image at cinema's base. A similar flickering occurs in *oceanechoes* as the edits become so close together that the video appears to be comprised of a series of photographic stills. At the same time the slow movement of the camera, of which the edits are actually comprised, acts as a cross current to the pace created by the fast edits. In these moments the image appears to be moving rapidly, yet simultaneously evokes stillness. *oceanechoes* creates the still/motion effect of both Brakhage's collages and the "flicker effect", yet it is achieved through editing, rather than literally revealing the still image at cinema's base.



Scott Morrison (2009) *oceanechoes*, Video Still.

Despite the movement of the camera, its subject and editing, the constant focus on the grass at a continuous focal depth creates an overarching stasis within the otherwise moving video. *oceanechoes* expands the frame of the still image in order to include movement, yet the fixed gaze resists progression beyond the rhythms of the edits and soundtrack. So, when the video swings from the frenetic to the pensive, it seems as though these different facets are expanded elements of the same image and the video appears once again to be simultaneously moving and stationary.

Positioned somewhere between Yardley's and Mutch's still scenes and Morrison's moving image, Eloise Calandre's video *Cradle* (2010) evolves incrementally, yet maintains a fixed frame upon its stationary subject. For a large part of the loop the video appears to be a still image depicting out of focus lights against the night. As the video slowly comes into focus, an ambiguous scene is revealed. The camera appears to be at an angle on what is possibly a forest floor. There is moss in the foreground and lights in the distance - small indicators of a larger scenario. Both the camera and the subject of the camera's gaze are stationary, yet the work slowly evolves as the shot moves in and out of focus. The changes in the image are solely caused by the camera's artefact. The work evolves due to the effect of the mechanical movement of the camera's lens. This movement is specific to optical devices and is not possible to reproduce outside of this context. Although the change is produced through the movement of the camera lens, there is something



Eloise Calandre (2010) *Cradle*, Video Still.

specifically visual about this kinetic change. The effect is not only perceived visually, but it reproduces an effect of the human eye.

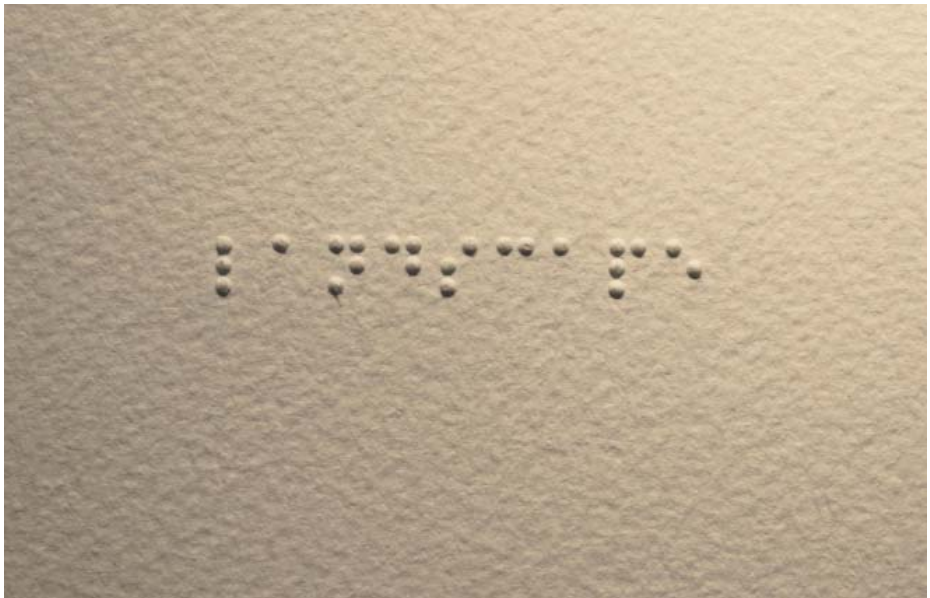
Such a clear focus on the artefacts of the camera is reminiscent of structuralist films, yet as the video evolves it is clear that this is not simply a structuralist experiment into the limits of the medium, because the forest at night is such an evocative setting. In the absence of narrative cues to direct meaning, many possibilities arise. But as I look at this image the camera aligns itself with the human eye in a strangely static cinema vérité style. As the camera lies tilted on the ground, stationary and unable to move, the “in and out” of focus suggests an “in and out” of consciousness. Here, in this fabricated version of events, the abstract and representational become modes of consciousness. The human eye and the camera both have the ability to blur vision; therefore the camera’s inability to focus becomes the person behind the camera’s inability to focus. In these moments narratives spiral out from this half-watched, half-imagined, scene and moments of stillness once again become sites of narrative development.

Each of the works in this exhibition, in the absence of defined narratives, presents the viewer with an image on which to project beyond. Whether the work suggests a cinematic trope or lived experience, it is in moments of stasis that the desire to move beyond the frame becomes evident. We, as audience, are not left to our own devices free to imagine any

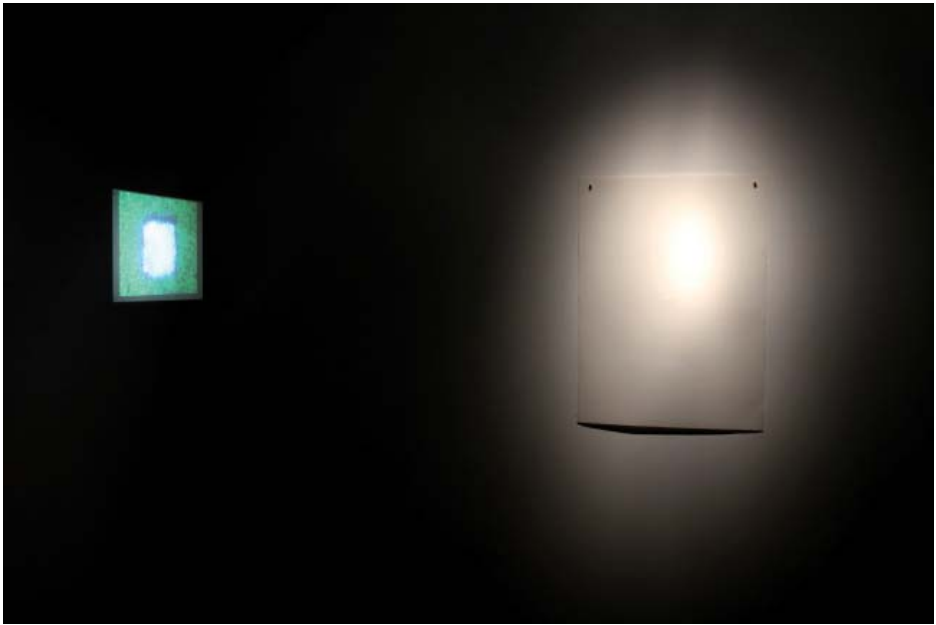
narrative we care to, instead each of the works purposely lead us towards predefined narratives or experiences, but give us the freedom to embellish. Tamsin Green's *Untitled* (2010) is a conceptual exploration of this process, as she asks us to imagine a landscape that is constantly deferred through language and modes of representation.

Green presents the viewer with a piece of paper with the word *landscape* printed in braille. Landscape is itself a visual concept. It is not a word used to describe the memory-laden tactile experience of *oceanechoes*, nor would it describe *Cradle*, with its partial view of the forest from within. Instead 'landscape' is generally understood to be the visual impression of land viewed from afar. The use of braille to signify a primarily visual signified, highlights the disconnection of the signified from the physical presence of the landscape to which it refers. Green leaves us to imagine a landscape, but asks what that landscape might be if there was no visual referent from which to draw - a seemingly impossible proposition to someone with sight.

Next to the word landscape Green has projected a video on a small suspended screen. This video presents an equally codified, but visual, landscape. The video consists of a single looped shot of a patch of grass



Tamsin Green (2010) *Landscape*, Installation Detail.



Tamsin Green (2010) *Landscape*, Video and Paper.

with a rectangular hole dug in the ground to house a piece of glass which is positioned on the same plane as the grass. The glass subtly reflects the sky and in doing so reduces the three dimensional landscape onto a single plane that is then represented two dimensionally on a floating screen.

The camera is fixed and the grass and piece of glass remain stationary throughout the video. The only movement within this image is the reflection of the sky in the glass. Like the prisoners in Plato's Cave⁷, the viewer's only indication of the world beyond the two dimensional plane of the grass and glass before them, is the moving shadows (here in the form of a reflection) of the sky that is physically positioned out of sight behind the viewer's virtual position. This fixed gaze does not present us with the *form* beyond the glass; instead all we have is a series of cues that suggest the idea of a landscape and the viewer is left to imagine what that landscape might be.

Each of the works in this exhibition evokes narratives and experiences beyond what is visibly contained within the frame. *Landscape*, does not so much evoke narratives or experiences of the landscape, but rather it speaks of the process in which each of the other works in the exhibition generates meaning beyond the frame. Positioned in the back corner of the gallery,

the last work to be seen as one walks from the front entrance of the gallery, *Landscape* acts as a reminder that all the stories that we tell are told through language and as such have been partly told before - each narrative is a reflection of other narratives.

Christian Metz has argued that when a still image produces narrative it is said to be cinematic, but this is not because cinema is particularly apt at telling great narratives, but because there is a long history of great cinematic narratives⁸. Here Metz articulates an understanding of cinema that runs throughout this exhibition. Metz wrote this in 1974 just prior to the commercial release of Betamax and VHS. Both of these home video technologies were arguably the beginning of the end for cinema as a cohesive medium viewed in darkened cinemas at twenty-four frames a second. In the current climate of cinema spectatorship, the conventions of cinema are being re-examined and the artists in this exhibition are redefining the way cinema is experienced. They are returning to the history of both art and cinema in order to re-examine the tensions that have been there from the beginning and are manifested in the very physicality of cinema as a medium. As we remain on the cusp of celluloid's obsolescence and the dominance of digital cinema, it seems particularly pertinent that these artists are returning to the classic questions that have informed the long and intertwined histories of art and cinema, and in particular the tension between stillness and motion.

Simone Hine

1 Anne Hollander. Moving Pictures. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.

2 Stephen Shore. The Nature of Photographs. London: Phaidon, 2007. p. 84.

3 Roland Barthes. Camera Lucida. New York: Hill and Wand, 1980.

4 The Road. Dir. John Hillcoat. Dimensions, 2009.

5 Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. "Vision's Resistance to Language". in Beyond Piety. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995. p. 35-43.

6 Examples of Brakhage's collages on film are: Mothlight. Dir. Stan Brakhage, 1963. Criterion, 2003. and The Garden of Earthly Delights. Dir. Stan Brakhage, 1981. Criterion, 2003.

7 Plato. The Republic. Trans. Desmond Lee, 1955. London: Penguin, 1987. p. 255-64.

8 Christian Metz. Film Language: a Semiotics of the Cinema. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974. p. 46-7.

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