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John Gerrard: Exercise.

Mathew Abbott

Exercise

The cloud at the center of exercise:

What you call body, we call arabesque.

Situate from satellite

Finite sets on separate ground,

“The dissolution,

The unbinding it prohibits.”

When we get to the chopper

To rehearse a field maneuver,

We see we are not

Wired for

Formation freefall.

At speed a human is cryptic.

Stress entrains

Scales of silica

As the pan gets

Nowhere, exactly.

Once in the light

Already in the stricture:

Two lines of figures

Dance about strategy

55

John Gerrard: Exercise.

Baden Pailthorpe

John Gerrard is very particular about the terminology used to describe his work. They are not video or films works, but rather systems that reference locations, dates and events. The movement in the images is coded and generated from a simulator engine that ‘runs’ the work. They never loop, even if there is repetition, they are *iterative*. The subjects and material in the work are described as portraits, even down to tiny plants and shrubs that never appear in detail, but are painstakingly reconstructed from reference photographs.

For *Exercise (Djibouti)*, Gerrard used a found image from a military archive that depicted US troops in a beautifully formal, almost theatrical composition in the desert of Djibouti, where the US has a major special forces and drone base. Using this photograph and satellite imagery, he travelled to Djibouti and searched for the exact location where this training exercise took place. Once there, he documented the site in immense detail to later reconstruct the entire scene in three dimensions. This is combined with accurate weather patterns, seasonal and other climactic information for the area to create the ‘event-portrait system’.

The subjects in the work are based off detailed 3D scanning and motion capture (mocap) sessions of three British Olympic athletes. These athletes were asked to run in a figure of eight until they were exhausted, a total time of approximately 4 hours. This information was then used to program the 3D models of the athletes in the final work. Rather than copying the characters, they are *instanced*, another term from 3D modelling that Gerrard insists upon.

So in a sense, the ‘real’ in the work exists as a trace only, a kind of digital haunting. Yet it is almost *realer* than the original reference in that the experience of the original event was always mediated. This portrait system is more detailed and intense than the original, whatever that is. In any case, Gerrard’s work forces a shifting in the conceptualising of the real and of the moving image.

John Gerrard, *Exercise (Djibouti)*
Screen Space, Melbourne
Curated by Baden Pailthorpe
14 March - 26 April 2014
opening 13 March, 6-8pm



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John Gerrard

Exercise (Djibouti), 2012

Simulation. Digital still.

Image courtesy of the artist,
Modern Art Oxford, Thomas
Dane Gallery, London and
Simon Preston Gallery, New York.



