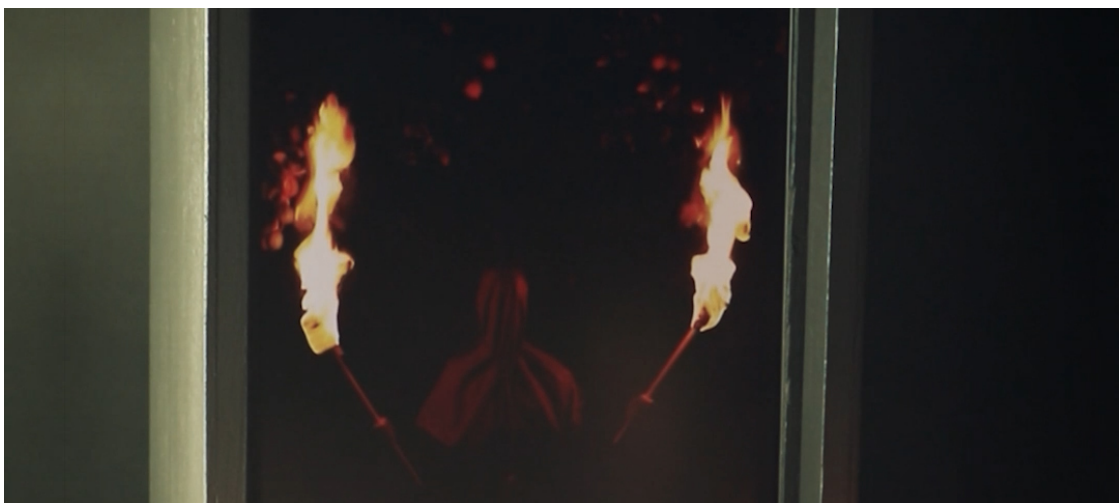


THE WANDERING ROOM

UTOPIAN CRUSH

Gateway



October 13, 2021

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GATEWAY

“Humanity has always been fascinated with what is on the other side and reaching that place.”

—Utopian Crush

An entrancing experience awaits viewers at the Wandering Room, courtesy of the artistic duo, Utopian Crush, whose online exhibition *Gateway* opens up unexpected conceptual and visual parallels into notions of beauty, purpose and the nature of desire. Note, the creative online showcasing of this exhibition was not merely experimental, but necessary due to the current lockdown in place in Melbourne. Originally conceived as a sculptural audio-visual installation, the online version of *Gateway* nevertheless possesses a strange kind of intimacy, allowing an ephemeral sensation to permeate through the screen.

Utopian Crush features two interdisciplinary artists, Frankie Pan and Brad Perkins. Together, they produce provocative audio-visual works that startle as much as they spellbind. *Gateway* consists of four video works 3-5 minutes long; each comes with its own stylistic design and narrative. In these kaleidoscopic films, iconography intersects with anthropology, enticing viewers to reflect on the meaning of rituals and symbols. *Gateway* also features four altars which are

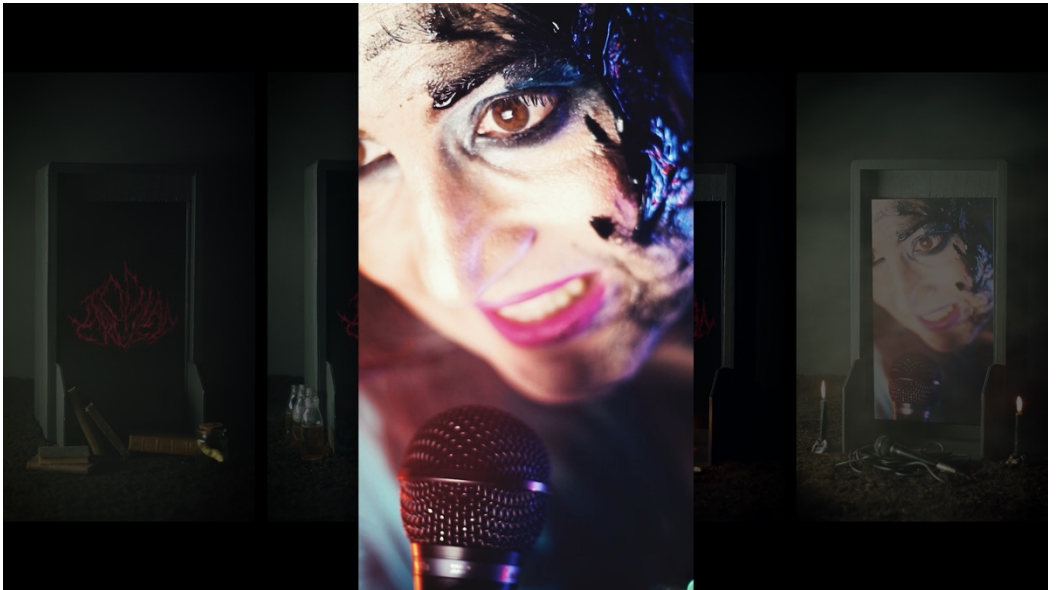
traditionally used for religious offerings and ritualistic practices. However, in the exhibition, Utopian Crush uses the altar subversively – each altar is adorned with different offerings and home to one video work. This unorthodox take on conventional ritualistic traditions creates an alternative visual and audio experience.

Fascinated by the human body and its relation to nature, life, death and desire, *Gateway* is an attempt to enquire into the unknown. The concept of the human body, both the physical body we inhabit and our collective body consciousness, is a central theme that the artists consistently return to. The video works are hauntingly populated by images of the human body, both explicit and implicit, functioning as primary reflections of our relationship to the world, the environment and ourselves. If there is one predominant motivation that has unflinchingly galvanised and characterised humans throughout the ages, it is the desire to conquer nature. That is why, when it comes to representing humans, it's impossible to separate the artificial from the natural.

Traversing through stages of human suffering and enlightenment, the video works share an unabashed directness and inquisitive sensibility that explore the subtle yet complex relationships that our physical bodies form with our environment, and how social expectations shape our appearance. Choreographed in



Utopian Crush, *Live Sessions IX*



Utopian Crush, Gateway [film still]

an hypnotic tempo, with frequent repetitions and variations of the same scene, these highly aestheticised films pull viewers in, lulling them into a meditative state of heightened perception. What at first appears as a chaotic melange of visuals is in fact a carefully composed *mise-en-scène* that is a serious attempt to provoke and reflect. Immersing the viewers in an over-saturated universe of intellectually exuberant and absurd fantasies, *Gateway* explores themes of alienation and transcendence. The ensuing disorientating effect imbues the work with a dystopian, vigil-like ambience, thus blurring the line between reality and consciousness.

Additionally, in the evocative sound design, a dialogue is established between a multi-channel moving image work and ambient sounds. *Gateway* examines the multitude of human desires and different stages of human suffering and enlightenment. The stunning visuals and soundscapes combine to create a luminous dreamscape that is evermore sublime and visceral. The other-worldliness in the images and objects also produce a critical sense of mystery, in which stories and situations are ungraspable, despite a rich array of signs and inscriptions. Motivated by the answer to the simple yet momentous question: what is on the other side? In both subject and material, *Gateway* offers a potent examination of the human ego and reflection on our spiritual quests.

Immersive in delivery and expansive in scope, *Gateway* opens a window into society's subconscious to reveal our deepest desires, darkest fantasies, consuming fears and gnawing disgust, highlighting the societal powers that suppress or amplify them. A critical take on our contemporary society at its core, Utopian Crush's work goes one step further by bringing such feelings to the surface, encouraging us to consider the power of vulnerability and empathy to move forward rather than drowning in our desires. This exhibition shows the artists' desire to look beyond the abyss and seek alignment in the divine.

—ZiXin Chen

This exhibition has been proudly supported by Moreland City Council through the 2020 Flourish: Arts Recovery Grant Program.



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The Wandering Room acknowledges the traditional owners and sovereign custodians of the land on which we operate, the peoples of the Wurundjeri.

We extend our respect to their Ancestors and all First Peoples and Elders past, present and future.