

Callum McGrath *Responsibilities to Time*

2nd - 17th August, 2019

Responsibilities to Time is a new research-based project by Meanjin (Brisbane) based artist Callum McGrath. Stemming from McGrath's research into public memorials dedicated to queer subjects and communities, this exhibiton presents a selection of LGBTQIA+ memorials arranged into an anonymous family photo-album. Referencing museological presentation, *Responsibilities to Time* works against the grain of linear archival organisation and critiques the structures that support established historiography. In breaking with these normalised practices, this ongoing project forms part of McGrath's endeavours to reconceive time in a way where queer love, loss and desire is prioritised over hetero-dominant modes.

Callum McGrath (b. 1995) is based in Meanjin (Brisbane) and has been featured in various solo and group exhibitions including: Queer Economies, Bus Projects and Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2019); Toro, Milani Gallery CARPARK, Brisbane (2019); POOFTA, Metro Arts, Brisbane (2018); Cross-mending, Outer Space, Brisbane (2018); River Torrens, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2018); Passing, West Space, Melbourne (2017); and HATCHED, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth (2017). Additionally McGrath collaborates with artist Lu Forsberg on Serious Queer Business, an ongoing public program platform that aims to generate conversation, dialogue, and community around queer issues and topics. McGrath obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Visual Art) with First Class Honours at the Queensland University of Technology (2016). In 2019 McGrath was awarded the Freedman Foundation Traveling Scholarship to undertake self-directed research in Germany.

Space 1

Responsibilities to Time (archive 1-10),
2019-ongoing,
colour prints on metallic paper, 297x420mm.

Responsibilities to Time (photo-book),
2019-ongoing,
Photo album, 320x290mm.

Space 2

Cruising Sounds 1, 2019,
audio, 18 minutes.

Responsibilities to Time emerges from artist Callum McGrath's ongoing research into LGBTQI memorials and is informed by the American theorist Ann Cvetkovich's idea of a queer 'archive of feeling'; one that 'frequently resists the coherence of narrative' and is by definition fragmented (1).

The locus of the exhibition is a leather-bound photo album encased in a vitrine, rendering the contents of its pages secret. The object is both inscrutable and incongruous within the gallery environment. Accompanying the album is a series of prints that reveal its contents; images of LGBTQI memorials around the world have replaced the album's original photographs, evident through the remaining inscriptions of names, places and the significant life events of an unknown family.

McGrath sourced the images from the internet, distancing himself from the material. Of the memorials represented in the album, McGrath has only visited two personally; Pink Triangle Park, San Francisco; and the memorial to Dr George Duncan, Adelaide, the subject of McGrath's 2018 Metro Arts exhibition, POOFTA. Some of the images are not technically of memorials but have been included by McGrath as LGBTQI sites of significance and pilgrimage. Garden Prospect Cottage for example - located adjacent to a nuclear power station in Dungeness, Kent - is well known as the beach house of iconic queer playwright and filmmaker Derek Jarman.

Consideration of architectural space and its relationship to the objects within it has become an integral part of McGrath's practice. For his exhibition at Boxcopy, McGrath presents the prints under Perspex on two wall-mounted shelves, referencing archival and museological approaches to display. Unlike a museum however there are no labels or other information to identify the images. As the album's original inscriptions have been left unchanged, there is an additional, deliberate barrier to engagement.

McGrath has selected the images as much for their formal qualities and suitability for the album format as for their subject matter. The existing inscriptions provide an unrelated and disorienting context. The opaque interleaves between the pages of the album act as a veil, obscuring the images underneath. Through his intervention, McGrath disrupts the contents and structure of a conventional family photo album. The theorist Jack Halberstam, another influence on McGrath's research, articulates the need for a distinct queer time and space, noting that it is:

'...not only about compression and annihilation; it is about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing.'(2)

It is perhaps surprising then that McGrath has chosen a traditional family photo album as the organising structure for his project, however the format proves adaptable and even suited to McGrath's idiosyncratic approach. *Responsibilities To Time* is the artist's response to the question of what a queer archive *might* be. McGrath proposes an alternative way of organising and presenting histories; one that draws together traditional and digital methods of information gathering, with a subjective approach that resonates with Cvetkovich's conception of an archive of feelings.

~ Hamish Sawyer

Notes:

1. Edenheim, Sara "Lost and Never Found: The Queer Archive of Feelings and Its Historical Propriety," *differences* 24, no. 3 (December 2013): 37.
2. Halberstam, Jack *In a Queer Time and Place*, 2005; New York, NYU Press, p. 2