

Collaging Anxiety

Jacinta Giles fell into photography, describing her lens-based practice as an 'accidental shift' from working predominantly with collage. Yet upon producing her first photographs with small Polaroids, she employed her familiar skill of collaging to carefully assemble and position them to form larger, more complex, images. The process of collaging is an intimate one; requiring meticulous sorting, arranging, re-arranging, repositioning, and finally taping/gluing/pinning various visual materials together in a cohesive way. The practice is not dissimilar to taking photos; a highly observational process of visual organisation where one ultimately decides on the best way to frame, focus, and highlight subjects in the world.

This parallel is not lost on Giles, who acknowledges the 'collage mindset' in her photographic practice that focuses on the construction of memory and the idea of collective consciousness. The works in *Aberration* see Giles fully embrace her tendencies with collage, manipulating found imagery to mimic the fragmented process of remembrance, particularly in the face of trauma.

This year has been marked by grief and great anxiety, from the climate emergencies of the Australian bushfires, to the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 that continues to dominate news cycles. Obsessively consuming media to keep up in these 'unprecedented times' has become inevitable, and Giles also admits to doing so, so as not to miss out on the latest developments. Through her consumption, she has built an extensive image archive and engaged with this overwhelming resource of digital media to produce works in the way she knows best – through collaging, compiling, sifting, organising, and positioning.

The video works *Aberration* (2020) and *Hands* (2020) are highly processed abstractions sourced from different television broadcasts. They highlight the ways in which our collective experiences are informed by an unfiltered saturation of visual images. They also point to how fear and stress are perhaps exacerbated through the constant streaming of media, and form the memories that come to define the experiences of the unfolding present.

In *Aberration*, a constant, transparent, blue 'X' is stretched across the screen throughout the video, tying the montaged images together. It is a photo of the blue tape on the floors of a supermarket used to facilitate social distancing measures. For Giles, it represents a defining experience of COVID-19; one that is particularly disruptive and eerie.

The four exhibited prints – *Concealed*, *Evidence*, *Spectre*, *Teetering* (all 2020) – are similarly obscure and cold in their abstraction. Enlarged and printed on Phototex, a thin, textured alternative to vinyl, the images nest perfectly onto the surface of the wall space, lying completely flat, with no borders or frames. The seamless presentation of these images further abstracts and complicates them, and indicates the omnipresence of images that permeate our day-to-day.

The last step of the collage process often brings much joy – it's the point when one finally arrives at a confident compilation. In these times of great uncertainty, there must also be comfort in being able to finalise something visually certain. While the works in *Aberration* do not set out to comfort or inspire, they present an honest reflection of a difficult time from an overwhelming personal experience. And in that, Giles extends her 'virtual witnessing' to us, acknowledging that these experiences are never in isolation.

Annette An-Jen Liu, July 2020

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