

Ghost Light **Victoria Wareham**

For Wareham, screens are like ghosts. We can manifest them, they are transparent, ephemeral, and surround us in a passive and unknowing way. We can choose to acknowledge and become aware of them by activating the images that lie dormant behind their glassy surfaces.

Ghost Light is a two-channel, screen-based work that uses digitally altered 16mm film footage to highlight the relationship between touch and the screen-based image. In a world where we summon images using swipe and scroll gestures, this work attempts to communicate back using a series of haunting and seductive images that gently caress and dance across the screen surface.

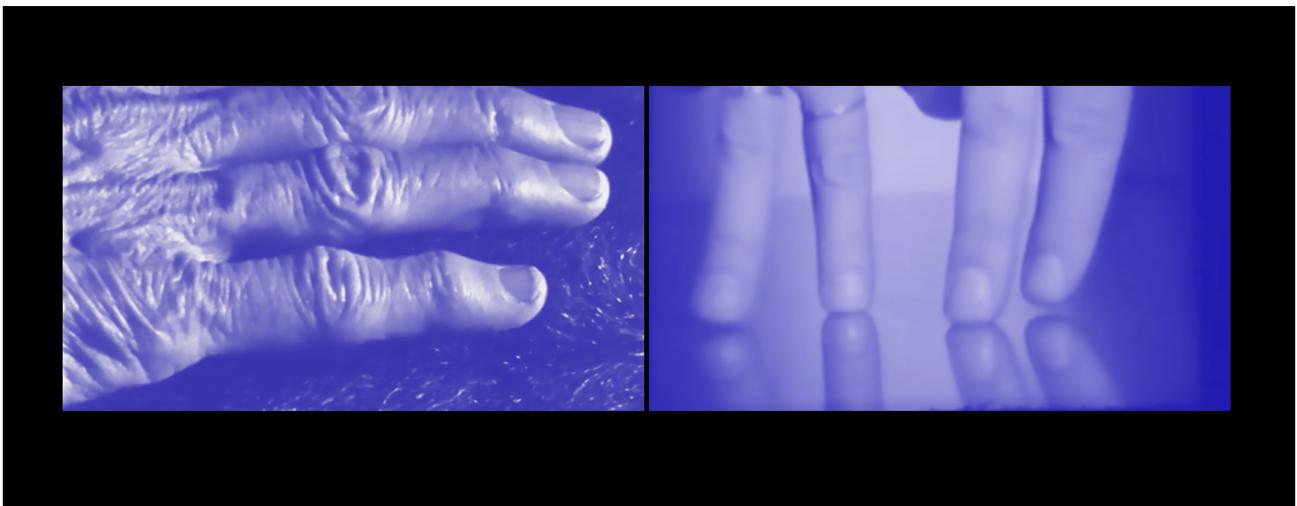


Image: Victoria Wareham, *Ghost Light*, 2019, Two-channel video installation, digitally transferred 16mm film to ProRes video, dimensions variable, 3:33 min. Video Still.

Essay: What's going on in *Ghost Light*?

You can view the work for yourself but it's sometimes hard to know what you're looking at and so you don't see all of it. So, I'll add in some ideas. By my reading, in *Ghost Light*, Wareham, with precision and thoughtfulness, is inviting you to think about how your body is involved in your daily use of digital devices.

Meaning is up to you

Since Marcel Duchamp's urinal work in 1917, anything can be art if the art system says it is. Art is not an exam and what you take from any work is the chord that it strikes for you. So now stop reading and spend time with *Ghost Light*. Check in on my notes when you've had a look.

What do we see?

Let's start with a description. There are two video images, side by side, most of the time showing the same footage but slightly out of sync. It starts with jittering film leader before the hand appears, pulling a blade in a very straight line through something wet like thick paint.

Later, the round cogs of the inside of a film projector appear laced with film, a finger pulling down on the film loop. Two sets of fingers become puppets, walking like unsteady fashionistas across a shiny floor.

And then a black hand pulls across the fibrous surface of a bulky knitted pattern, before it tears strips of paper. There's more, feet that touch for example. You will also notice the way the footage ghosts itself, like wavering early television, slightly out of phase in the second screen.

Themes are starting to emerge – there is the ghosting and the hands move in certain ways, assured in their stroke but quite delicate, caressing the surfaces they move across.

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Let's apply these themes to contemporary lens-based art (broadly, art made using lenses like photography, video, film). Amongst other things, art made this way can imagine and emphasise. The photographer can construct the image, helping you imagine what you can't see for yourself. Secondly, there are things you can potentially see for yourself but overlook – lens-based art can emphasise those things and stop you from overlooking them.

From my description, it is emerging that *Ghost Light* emphasises the twin gestures of contemporary life, the swipe and the scroll. Using your device, your caress is alert to the delicacy of the glass and electronics. And, as you use your device, there's ghosting going on. You are a partially-absent presence – you are there sitting or standing gazing into your device, your attention inside the pool of the screen, buying your loo paper, talking to your mum, checking out the activity of the internet. Your fingers are swiping and scrolling, making this happen but you don't notice them. Inside *Ghost Light*, instead of fingers we forget all about, we find fingers that walk, fingers that are the centre of attention, fingers we empathise with.

Black Lives Matter

Is that a black hand in there? Right now, when every white privilege recipient (I'm one) must examine their thoughtlessness, my attention is drawn there. What is the meaning of that black hand? Should I read it as a swiping hand or a black hand or a black swiping hand? After George Floyd's death, I have irrefutable evidence that in global cultures right now, skin colour categorises people and shapes experience.

The thoughtlessness of white privilege documented in the original 1988 list by Peggy McIntosh included bandaids but overlooked a similar one in photography. The mid tone skin tone of a Kodak grey card is Caucasian skin tone. And automatic light metering? Has that changed over time? But is the analysis of the black hand important to *Ghost Light* or is this just unavoidable since Floyd's death on 25 May? Right now, we have to ask.

Remember your body!

Viewing *Ghost Light*, I am outside the screen. Wareham describes the screen as a layer that links we viewers to the objects that get filmed and to the image, the recorded thing – in *Ghost Light* that is the analogue film of the hands and body parts. This talks to expanded cinema, a practice that comes from the 1970s that mixes film and performance. It draws attention to the situation of cinema – rather than disappearing into the narrative or the content, expanded cinema says look at the mechanics (the projector or data player, the film strip or the data file), look at the situation you are in, look where you are, look at yourself and the others here with you.

Peering into *Ghost Light*, there's not just hands in there, but also feet, stretching out the analogy from just the swiping hands to the whole of the numb absent body made into a ghost of its own while we attend, wholeheartedly to the digital pool inside the screen. Instead, says Wareham, remember the body! As you swipe, as you caress, as you scroll, you are still human, your responses built from your sense data gathered from the data points of your body, filtered through the layer of perception and emotion.

Let's talk about experimental film

Can we read *Ghost Light* in the experimental film tradition? An aspect of this tradition is they propel you into a different logic, you enter a different head space where narrative rules like cause and effect don't apply. Fingers can have agency and march across the shiny floor.

Secondly, there is a strand of experimental film that focuses on materials like the film strip and Wareham uses this too. She draws our attention to the analogue film – remember the cogs of the projector and the jittering leader. She uses analogue as a stand-in for embodied. That the image originated in analogue matters for this work – it once again says remember the body! The flat homogenous surface of the screen, the forgotten horizon, so flat and homogenous we rarely see it, is not, this time, activated by us. The choreographies of swipe, scroll and touch going on inside talk back to that forgotten horizon.

Louise Curham, July 2020

Louise Curham works as an artist, archivist and teacher with a special focus on ephemeral practices in moving image and art. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra and an archives teacher at Charles Sturt University.

Victoria Wareham | About

Based in Brisbane, Wareham has exhibited video installations in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia. Working with the moving image in physical space, her practice addresses theoretical concerns relating to the ontological stability of the screen as defined by its relationship to the viewer and the digital image.

After completing her undergraduate degree in 2008, Wareham has undertaken postgraduate study at the University of the Arts, London and has held residency placements at the Banff Centre for Art and Creativity, Canada; The Centre for Drawing, London; Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne; and The Lock-Up Cultural Centre, Newcastle. In 2019, she was longlisted for the Aesthetica Art Prize and is currently undertaking PhD research candidature at the Queensland College of Art.

List of Artworks

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| 8 | Victoria Wareham, <i>Ghost Light</i> , 2019, two-channel video installation, digitally transferred 16mm film to ProRes video, dimensions variable, 3:33 mins. | 1/5 | \$2,745 |
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Artist in Conversation

6:30pm, Thursday, 13 August, 2020

Online via the PhotoAccess Facebook page

Join PhotoAccess for a live streamed artist-in-conversation event with Victoria Wareham and fellow exhibiting artists Chris Bowes and Jacinta Giles. Discussing their current exhibitions, Wareham, Bowes and Giles will reflect on how their practices have changed in the time of COVID-19, the possibilities of art for negotiating the pandemic and the role of video in contemporary photomedia.

An interactive conversation with live Q & A via Facebook comments.

More Online

Visit www.gallery.photoaccess.org.au to learn more about *Ghost Light*. Read a conversation between Victoria Wareham and Jacinta Giles about their practice, and hear Wareham introduce her work.