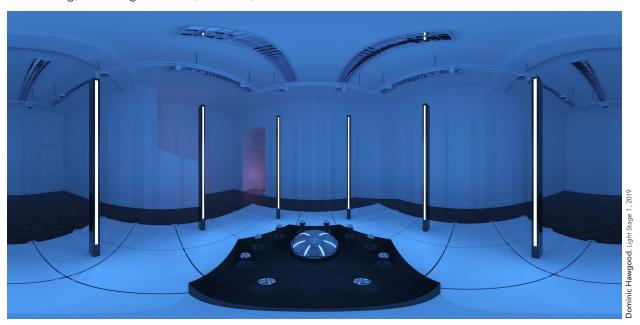# Dominic Hawgood: *Casting Out the Self v3.1*

Exhibition 10th January - 1st February 2020
TJ Boulting, 59 Riding House St, Fitzrovia, London W1W 7EG

Dominic Hawgood, *Light Stage 1*, 2019

TJ Boulting presents an exhibition of recent works by Dominic Hawgood from Casting Out the Self, a shape-shifting project, dispersed across a number of platforms, reflecting the rapidly evolving landscape of digital imaging. The ritualistic and digital collide, in a site-specific installation that brings together the world of psychedelics with the mechanics of visual computing.

When it comes right down to it, do you know how a digital image works? Could you explain to a child how an image captured from the world can be digitally heightened or altered? Or how a computer-generated image is produced? Of course, you do not need to know. For all its advantages, the digital age has alienated us from the inner workings of everyday machines, devices and processes. Constructed digital images have come to look ordinary to us now, "the new normal." While most of us have played around with Instagram filters or Photoshop effects, a tiny minority understands the technology that underpins them. Research scientists in technology graphics labs are the high priests of our new visual reality. The keepers of the mysteries. The rest of us just sit back and let the images wash over us.

Ritual, reality, performance and staging have been constant in Dominic Hawgood's art practice for the better part of a decade. His work has explored hypnosis, glossolalia (speaking-in-tongues), exorcism, shamanism and hallucinogenic drug trips. In every case, he has devised a mode of image making not merely to record an altered state, but to produce a visual analogue for it. Whether the objects and actions are genuine, staged, or somewhere in between, the work has an intensity that invites viewers themselves into altered states. Since 2014, the artist has focused not merely on images, but on environments; sculptural installations that envelop the audience with light and sound. As Hawgood's work has moved into 3 dimensions and moving image he has delved deeper into the digital realm, playing with the potential of realistic imagery untethered from the constraints of real-world physics or optics, and opening up an investigation of the means of digital image production. The resulting work focuses less on depicted content than on the experience of the viewer.

Casting Out the Self has been his most ambitious project to date, evolving like software though several different iterations, and oscillating between real and virtual forms. The ostensible subject matter is the paraphenalia found on the altars of urban shamans. These are the rattles, beads, pipes and idols used by those journeying in search of alternate worlds, with or without the assistance of mind-altering substances such as Ayahuasca or DMT. Key to the project is its equal reliance on imagery from the science of digital imaging and CGI such as 3D scanning rigs, or the chrome and black balls used to record the full

spectrum of light for high dynamic range images (HDRI). The props of Ayahuasca and of the scientific imaging test are united in that they are both the apparatus for a ritual transformation: from this world to the shamanic world, from the analogue to the digital, from the real to the virtual.

Version 1.0 of *Casting Out the Self* exists only on the web. Viewers can watch an animation of a rotating Buddha, or zoom in and out of high-resolution still-life images featuring feathers, a bottle, a bone. The uncanny visual properties of the images are rooted in their making: rather than hiding behind a slick, pre-programmed surface texture, the CGI Buddha is skinned with a tri poly mesh surface that is both believable and bizarre. Black and white still lifes are rendered strange. Layers of the light have been separated so that highlights remain and scattering is removed. Like those on a shamanic or psychedelic trip, viewers see more than they would expect in these specular, spectral images.

The next version of the project, v2.0, took the form of an installation at Brighton Digital Festival and the British Science Festival in autumn 2017. The work came back to the gallery in both a real and virtual sense: installed in the exhibition, the digital animation offered an imagined show located within a detailed 3D render of the galleries at the FOAM museum in Amsterdam. The images and objects in the exhibition had been modelled rather than captured. The mind-bending complexity that had gone into this work was difficult for a viewer to grasp without knowing, for example, that the artist had worked from scratch to build a digital kaleidoscope or a moving lenticular image and then render them in three-dimensional space.

Casting Out the Self, v3.0 was the most embodied physical presentation to date, this time a sequence of room-sized installations in the actual galleries of FOAM in 2019. Works from previous versions of the project finally appeared in physical space. The Buddha from v1.0 appeared as a large projection, the lenticular image similar to the one in v2 could be seen in its actual shimmering glory. A 3D-sculpted foreshortened Buddha in an illuminated niche produced a strange floating effect thanks to carefully positioned LED lights. Rounding out the context for the project, an essay by Mirjam Kooiman, ranged across topics as broad as the mysteries of consciousness, "bullet time" visual effects, and the mechanics of lighting optics in relation to CG imagery. In the context of the museum speculative objects took on an additional weight, the gravitas of the temple rather than the domestic living room or academic lab environment.

V3.1 is a pared-down selection of works from the Foam exhibition to highlight the core of the project. With a publication it offers viewers an additional layer of references from the artist, allowing them to look 'under the hood', so to speak. The light installation in the first room is an array of light pillars, drawing its inspiration from a rudimentary 3D scanning rig. The arrangement of reflective balls within is a reference to an emblematic example in the science of imaging: a collection of computer-generated spheres as used to illustrate an academic paper by imaging guru Paul Debevec. An altar to the source material for digital imaging, the piece hovers between object and experience.

The second room offers viewers a chance to experience first-hand the connection between the digital and the psychedelic. Riffing on Dr David Schwarzmann's research into "Induced Dissociative States" it offers a digital recreation of his experimental apparatus. Flickering at a particular frequency, the screens create mild visual hallucinations, digital phenomena taking the viewer beyond ordinary sensory perception.

text by Lucy Soutter

About the artist

Dominic Hawgood is a multi-disciplinary artist working with both still and moving image, and concentrating on site-specific installations that bring together spacial design, lighting, and sculpture. He has a particular interest in imaging technologies, perception, altered states, VFX pipelines, and research associated with fields such as visual computing.

Since graduating from the Royal College of Art, Hawgood has had solo exhibitions at TJ Boulting, London; Oonagh Young Gallery, Dublin; Digital Festival X British Science Festival, Brighton, and Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam. In 2014 he won the British Journal of Photography International Photography Award for his project *Under the Influence*, and was selected as a Foam Talent for the same body of work. Hawgood lives and works in London.

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