DΩMINIC HΛWGOOD

WORDS BY LEENDERT SONNEVELT
ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

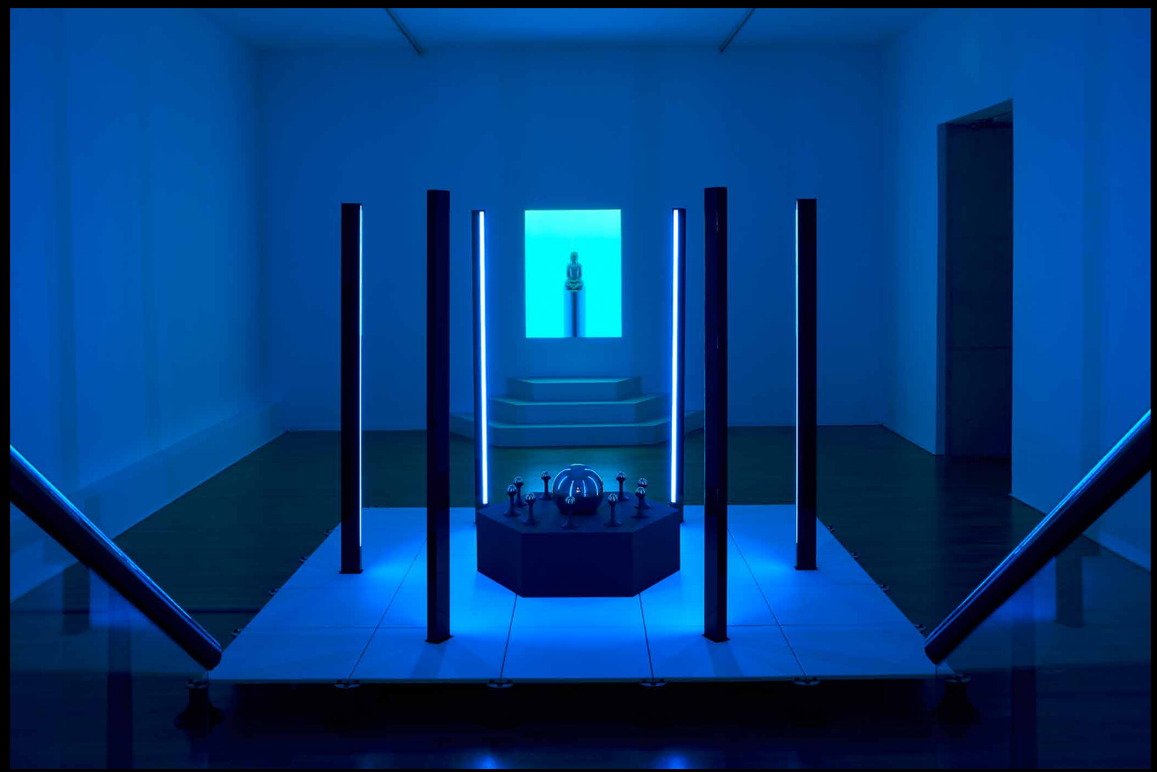
When you find yourself seated in front of a stroboscopic flat-screen, stone-cold sober but (im)patiently waiting for the high to happen, you know you must be at a Dominic Hawgood show. The cross-disciplinary artist, a graduate of the Royal College of Art, started out as a photographer—but today he's much more than that.

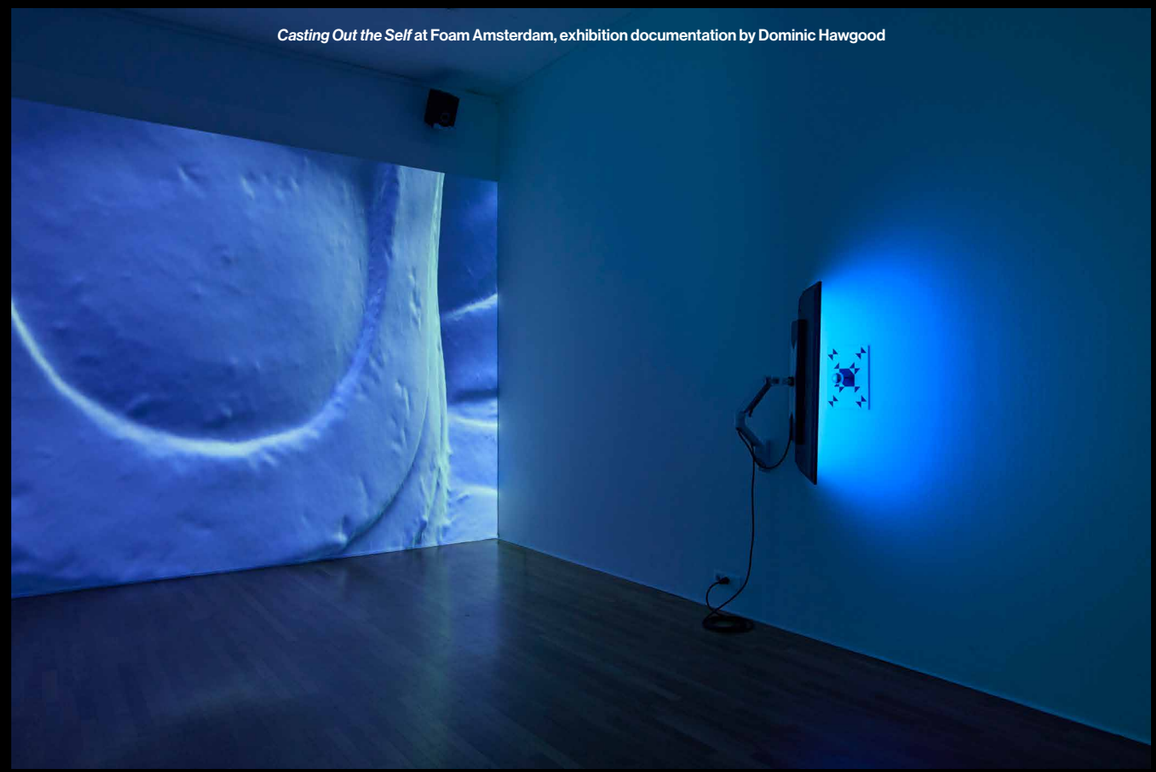
Hawgood's practice is best described as *forward*. And although that's a label used far too often, it fully and truly applies here. Not because the artist draws from his experiences with psychedelics for insight and inspiration—we all know art has been there before—but because he employs an entrancing mix of photography, light, sculpture, CG, design and animation to "investigate psychological space", to "reflect on the real world within the virtual", and, may we add, on the infinite possibilities of the in-between...

Most recently, Hawgood brought his realm to Foam Amsterdam with *Casting Out the Self*: an immersive exhibit and all-round spiritual sensation inspired by the digital aesthetics of a DMT trip. Like his previous work, which among other things explored the transcendental states lived and performed by evangelical Christians, Hawgood's most recent show offered hallucinogenic possibilities through a meticulous mix of spatial design featuring ceremonial installations and computer-generated images and animations. As one, these elements cause a constant questioning of dimension and perception.

What is real?
What is virtual?
What is fact?
What is fiction?
What is personal?
What is universal?
What is representation?
And what is imagination?

With his creative process rooted in contemporary technologies and a desire to virtually achieve what hasn't been achieved before, Hawgood opens up a twilight zone of new frontiers. And so we wondered, while our sober sight slowly turned into a geometric spectacle, is this the future of art (and the art of the future)?





Casting Out the Self at Foam Amsterdam, exhibition documentation by Dominic Hawgood

You've previously mentioned the important influence of Charles Howard Hinton on you and your work. When did you first get to know this mathematician and writer? And—especially for those unfamiliar with Hinton—what's the most important thing he taught that resonates with you?

When I started research for my recent project back in 2016, I was thinking about ways to represent different dimensions. The visualization of such things becomes limited by our own experience of reality, and I became interested in concepts that could facilitate an understanding of a fourth dimension. A good example of this might be a lecture by Henry Segerman, *3D Shadows: Casting Light on the Fourth Dimension*, where analysis of projected 2D shadows from a single light source using 3D geometry give insights into higher dimensions. The DMT experience often includes a reference to a fourth dimension, and at the very start of the 20th century Hinton published a book about the tesseract called *The Fourth Dimension.* In *Moral Authority, Men of Science, and the Victorian Novel*, Anne DeWitt describes how "Hinton argues that gaining an intuitive perception of higher space required that we rid ourselves of the ideas of right and left, up and down, that inheres in our position as observers in a three-dimensional world. Hinton calls the process 'casting out the self', equates it with the process of sympathizing with another person, and implies the two processes are mutually reinforcing." This idea of casting out resonated with me, and it became the title for my project.

How does your artistic approach of casting out the self relate to the words and theories of Hinton on this process?

I wouldn't put too much emphasis on Hinton as an influence on my artistic approach (although I have made animation work around hypercubes), and I wouldn't say my artistic approach necessarily relates. I just felt that to understand the psychedelic experience, there also needed to be casting out of the self... a letting go.

Let's talk DMT. When did you first try the "spirit molecule"? How was the experience? And how have N, N-Dimethyltryptamine sessions consequently shaped your path and perception as a photographer?

A friend decided to look into the process of DMT production and made a small batch. I found the experience fascinating, I had the sensation of being inside a computer, and this digital-ness seems to be a reoccurring theme for me... possibly a consequence of my interest in imaging? I wouldn't identify as a photographer, but psychedelics help me both in professional and personal life to gain balance and insight.

During my very first DMT experience I felt like I was uploaded into my own version of *The Sims*, as if a thick digital layer was draped over the "physical" world. How do you approach this duality in your work and especially in the way you explore new art and photography techniques?

I've been interested in pulling out a kind of spirituality through the use of imaging technologies and digital processes. For me this is about the magic of computational realism and digital process more generally. When you start to look into these areas it opens up new paths and workflows, and that's what I've been focused on for a while now: finding alternative ways to make things.

The press text that came with your Foam exhibition states your work is meant to create the effect of hallucination, yet you've previously said that you don't want to necessarily imitate those effects. Can you elaborate on this?

People bring their own interpretation to what you're trying to do. You're correct; I'm not interested in imitating any experience. *Casting Out the Self* is about the digital-ness of my DMT experience, and this inspired the project where I defined the psychedelic world as being "digital", and our reality "analogue". I then used digital processes to transfer objects from one world to another, and in doing so created a narrative about movement into an otherness.

Your work is often described as "computational photography". On a very practical level, what does that mean?

I use photography in an expansive way, often as a tool and a starting point rather than an output. Within this expanded field of photography, photography is just part of a larger process. I've progressed to become a multidisciplinary artist, and aspects of computational photography interest me a lot. Computational photography refers to digital image capture and processing techniques that use digital computation instead of optical processes. I've been interested in research that spills into VFX, from institutes like USC Institute for Creative Technology, and I like to learn about computational techniques so these emerge within my own workflows.

Being a photographer who plays with/on the border of your discipline, what are your thoughts on the future of photography? Where do you hope and envision things to go in the coming years?

I wouldn't call myself a photographer any more. And I have to say too that I no longer spend much time looking at photography or photographers. I like to see photography as a tool, a tool that can often be used

Casting Out the Self, courtesy of the artist

in workflows pushing the boundaries of realism and the construction of reality such as photogrammetry. When you pair that with sophisticated light capture, you're now far beyond the potential of a single photographic image... but the origin of the realism still has a base in photography. I'm very interested in light fields, and I'm very excited to see how cameras, printing and screen will develop with this application of technology.

Spatial design is an essential part of your most recent show(s). How do you go about curating a space? When are all your senses triggered?

The design of space in my work is laborious, and carefully planned. I build detailed CAD drawings and CG environments, and these let me simulate and test ideas. Sometimes I bring my virtual designs into the real world to test. In the case of the Buddha installation at Foam, I part constructed the light installation as I was able to make alterations and get a feel for how to progress the design generally.

Is there a photography aspect or technique that's (currently) considered impossible or unachievable, which you would love to make happen?

This year I've been working on a new differencing camera rig with a friend of mine. It's a complicated scientific/engineering project where we've designed and fabricated a fully functional prototype. The rig can be used for both stills and moving image and the techniques we're using allow you to see the world in a different way. The moving image technique we've developed simply doesn't exist—and we're making it happen. The first video output will be shown at my upcoming solo show at TJ BOULTING in January 2020.

Is there a spiritual sight you'd still love to capture or channel?

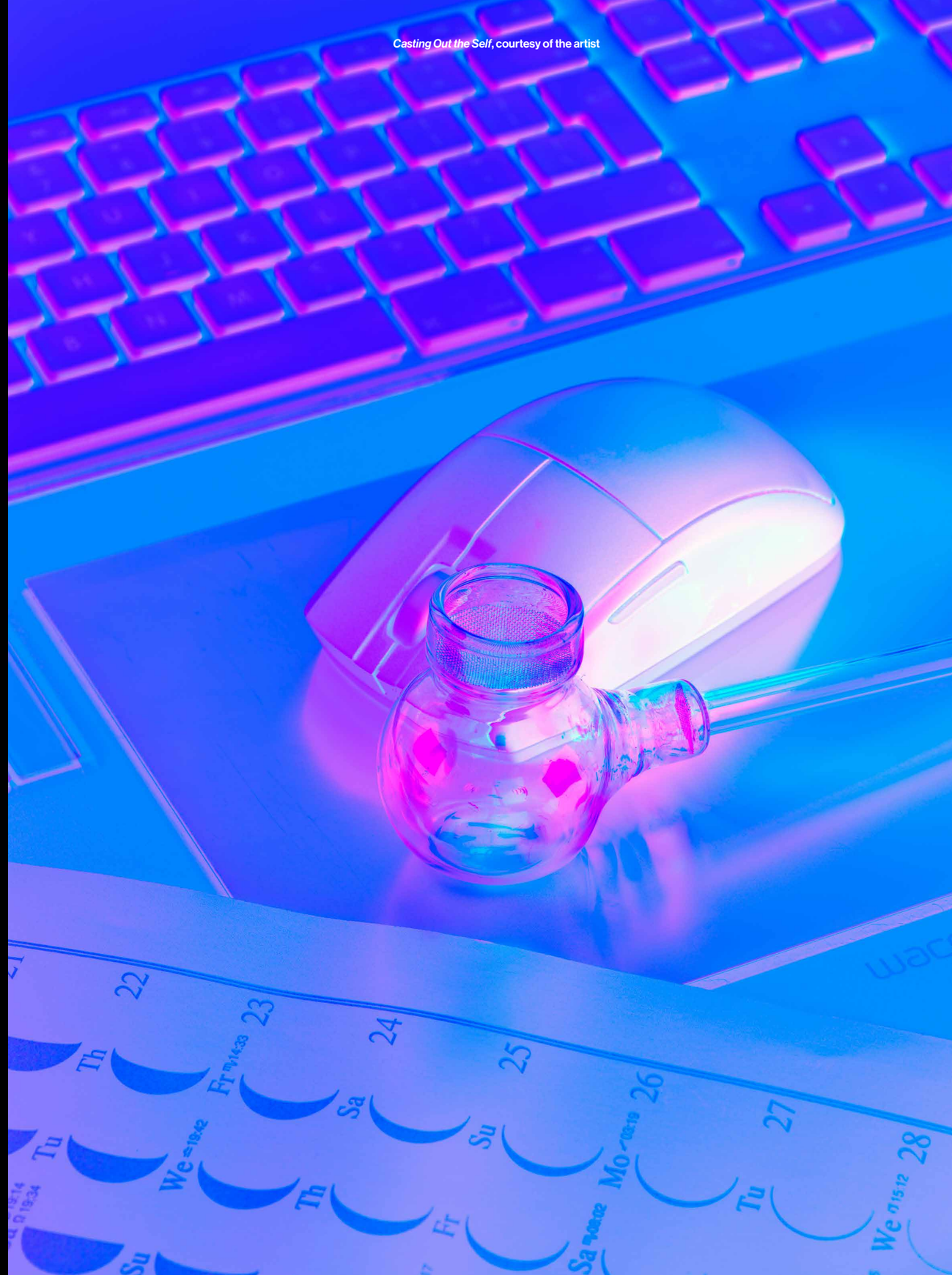
I would love to go to Roden Crater when that's finished. Just to experience, no capturing... being present only.

What is the ultimate Dominic dream?

Stability.

Dominic Hawgood's solo show (supported by Arts Council England) opens at TJ BOULTING, London, in January 2020.

dominichawgood.com



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