

Ian Gouldstone's *Wanton Boys*

Response by David Surman

As we look at the material world our gaze imbues it with life. We instinctively discover a cast of different faces in the undulations of woodgrain or wallpaper. A glimpse often leaves us wondering, 'did I really see that?' as if the senses brushed something of great importance and reluctantly let it go. Our unruly perception is now corralled into numerous frames that contain and train us in the patterns of mediated experience and expectation. Our attention is now greatly managed by numerous digital devices, processes and spaces. Technologies free us to express our individualism to the group, offering a new common space in exchange for our dedication to a platform. Our subjectivity is repositioned, our perception changed.

*As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods,
They kill us for their sport
King Lear Act 4, scene 1, 32–37*

Shakespeare's image of divine cruelty is deliberately evoked in the title of Ian Gouldstone's latest work; are we gods or flies? Dozens of small plaster sculptures assembled from rudimentary cubes, three wide and four tall, stand at irregular intervals throughout the gallery floor, which is painted to a high reflective gloss. It is a large work that engages the entire room. In the darkness, two projectors throw onto these uniform casts a series of animating cross-forms that are serialised yet different, varying in colour, size and number within each discrete unit. They dart and leap about, stuck within the two-dimensional surface of each small sculpture. Scissoring and spinning, they collide; they appear at times to press and push each other into submission while bounding off the edge of the "container". Periods of frenzied activity are followed by small moments of stillness. In the darkness the projected image bounces from the sheer plaster and is reflected in the floor. Shadows and delicate leaks of light catch on the gallery walls. We cannot help but see these hyperactive marks as a kind of life form, such is the strength of our imaginary vitalism.

As we watch the perturbing animated movement of *Wanton Boys* we are compelled to consider the underlying mechanism. These Boys are not pre-recorded video, following a prescribed path, the image is live. They act independently, driven from a programmed system, and this enhances greatly the sense of emergent life at work across these containers of hyperactive colour. We can appreciate the formal and compositional aspect in the prismatic light of the work, as each unit settles into a compositional harmony that then shakes itself into some new shape. Visual pleasure and spectacle counterbalance the idea of these cross-forms as articulations of life constrained and separated, frustrated marks that hurl themselves at the borders of their microworld. This interaction between live animation and sculpture creates a new ambiguous space through which we might reflect on our own constrained social and psychic energies. New forms of life and liveness are dancing in the darkness.

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*Ian Gouldstone, *Wanton Boys*, 2017, software, sculpture*

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