

# TEXTILE + DESIGN LAB

**Case Study Number:** 01/2021

**Project Title:** Human Hand

**Research Team:** Fiona Amundsen with Tim Corballis (Victoria University)

**Project Period:** September 2020 - April 2021

## **Project Description:**

Human Hand is a three-channel video and photographic installation. Comprised of three interrelated films and a series of digitally printed silk banners, this project makes connection between three seemingly disparate sites: the micro-city Arcosanti; Biosphere 2, the world's largest closed experimental ecological system, which tried to replicate earth's biomes so that human life could be supported and maintained in Outer Space; and the Titan II Missile Museum, which houses a former Cold War era thermonuclear intercontinental ballistic missile. The sites are explored via the film's and photograph's speculation on what communal living, nuclear technologies and military capitalism can teach us about humanity and the processes required to care for each other and assume a sacred responsibility for life and living. The films utilise voiceover narratives and interviews that are edited together with archival and present-day footage. A third voice is also present in the form of on-screen text that acts as an internalised listening to the film's different aural and visual voices as they try to make sense of the ideologies that drive world-building and world-destroying impulses.

The silk banners feature photographs from each of the sites in Arizona. In these artworks, visual imagery from the different sites is positioned, to make evident the visual correspondences and contrasts between them. These images show places for human occupation: chairs and dining tables, the flourishing of plants and the textures of glass and metal surfaces.

## **Background:**

Human Hand is part of the larger research project entitled Coming Back to Life that explores relationships between Cold War era military nuclear technologies, military-

capitalism, nuclear environmental destruction and spirituality. In 2019 Fiona Amundsen was granted a Fulbright New Zealand Scholar Award, which enabled her to travel to the USA to conduct research for this project. During her time in the US, she and collaborator Tim Corballis, visited the three historically laden sites in Arizona to meet with people, film and take photographs. In addition to these sites, Fiona was also granted permission to work with the NASA Neil A. Armstrong Flight Research Centre in Edwards California, where she researched United States Cold War era military stealth technology, namely the SR-71 Blackbird. She also met with then 90-year-old Dr Joanna Macey, an anti-nuclear activist, environmental activist, author, scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecologist. Active during the height of the Cold War era nuclear arms race, Macy developed the Nuclear Guardianship movement which explores how to be present to not only that which is invisible, i.e. radiation, but also to the seemingly intractable issue of human-caused nuclear contamination and environmental devastation. The project's title comes from Macy's book *Coming Back to Life* which articulates how feelings of despair and anguish can be used to confront the harsh realities of our deepening global crises, such as climate change, species extinction and the ongoing threat of nuclear disaster.

*Coming Back to Life* has been developed from Fiona Amundsen's visual arts practice that explores how documentary photographic and filmic images can enable a connected, active and caring relationship to the ramifications of painful historical experiences that live on in the present. She is interested in establishing relationships between specific historical events, the social responsibility of witnessing, and the ethics of documentary photographic and filmic practices. She has been collaborating with Tim Corballis since 2004. His writing deals with how political experience can be reflected in the composition of literary text.

### **Process:**

The silk banners were printed at the Textile and Design Lab. Fiona produced a series of images that were taken on a 4" x 5" film camera. The negatives were then scanned, and the resulting large files were colour graded and prepared for printing. Each image, circular in shape and with a black surrounding frame, are reminiscent of a flag or banner. Both Fiona and Tim were really interested in how this shape would function to replicate Cold War era communication of socialist messaging, slogans and ideology. The images were printed on a light silk charmeuse and were installed hanging from the gallery's ceiling in a diagonal line that cut through the exhibition space.

As a result of working with the Textile and Design Lab on the silk printing of photographic images, Fiona is now developing a project for the Wende Museum of the Cold War in Los Angeles. Her project explores relationships between United States Cold War era military stealth technology and socialist flags and banners and will be included in the exhibition 'The Medium is the Message: Flags and Banners' (November 2021 - April 2022).

## **Project Outcomes:**

Solo exhibition at the Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, 6<sup>th</sup> June - 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

## **Value of Textile and Design Lab:**

The Textile and Design Lab is an outstanding and valuable resource that not only attracts students into our postgraduate programmes across the School of Art and Design but is also a resource like no other throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. As a resource, the Textile and Design Lab serves to maintain AUT as a leading university with the technical research facilities it offers. The Textile and Design Lab not only offers access to textile printing technologies, but also functions as a site for research innovation and the sparking of ideas which transpire to diverse research projects. Fiona's own experiences of working with the Textile and Design Lab have been incredibly positive; the guidance and expertise offered have helped to push and develop her research into new directions as is evidenced by the dissemination of her research both nationally and internationally.

## **Publications:**

As above.

## **Images:**



