



**ESCAPE ARTIST
PABLO HUGHES**

**HEATHCOTE MUSEUM & GALLERY
18 APRIL TO 24 MAY 2015**

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Escape Artist is an auto-biographical, travel self-portrait that documents a form of escape to new lands. Shot in rural Spain, these images both highlight and counteract against our obsession with perfection. The decaying urban environments subvert notions of the 'new', suggesting alternative options and existences - an experience of 'otherness' that is equally valuable. While their meanings are diverse, they all refer to the fundamental nature of humanity, the beauty in the afterlife through the inevitability of decay, thus accepting our fate and mortality. My images attempt to portray the reality of life that exists outside the 'perfect bubble' and expose the beauty of imperfection.

Alluding to particular scenes from a fictitious film, the ten images exhibited in the main gallery space stimulate the active involvement of the viewer in each scene or frame, thus honour Heathcote's past lives. In *Ways of Seeing*, author John Berger states that "the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled." Following this, every spectator will have their own individual and intrinsically personal visual interpretation of the image, forging a relationship between the object and the viewer, that might lead to new and diverse escape experiences.

In *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, Charlotte Cotton writes "Through photography, quotidian matter is given a visual charge and imaginative possibility beyond its everyday function. The iconography for this strand of photography includes...edges or corners of things, abandoned spaces, rubbish and decay, and fugitive or ephemeral forms, such as condensation and light." This is the photographic imagery that pervades *Escape Artist*. The forgotten and frayed edges of the action, the simplicity of the commonplace, the unintentionally overlooked; these are the subjects that capture my attention.

Through the use of comedy, parody, mystery and repetition I aim to alert and question the role played by mainstream cinema including its subject matter, its 're-creations', its promises and its role as an escape mechanism.

One of the greatest escape artists and illusionists of all times was Houdini. In the exhibition I am exposing the idea of illusion and expectation as an act of trickery: in this case displaying a film in what is in fact a photography exhibition in a space removed from the traditional cinematic experience. If however we dissect a film into frames, a new relationship emerges.

Many of the images have been replicated and posted in conspicuous locations on the streets of Perth alongside actual film and promotional posters infiltrating a world of illusion, escape and make believe. While acting as promotional posters, this act of infiltration also starts to questions what is real and what is imagined. I am interested in exploring the many literal and hidden meanings behind the layering of images, text and context and their 'random' audiences.

Heathcote Museum & Gallery is best known as a past mental health facility. It is this connection with a place and its history that interests me. I have wanted to explore the idea of escapism as more than merely breaking free but is also about looking inward, avoiding normality and routine. To see the role of the escape artist as someone that personifies freedom and pushes the limits.

The *Escape Artist* is the film that is no longer playing, it has set itself free.

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Pablo Hughes is a photographer, artist, art installer and buyer/set dresser for feature films.

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