

## *A Description.*

"**Becoming Animals**" (2022) has three parts: 23 prints of rubbish bins plastered on the walls at eye height, a video of a mop and bucket cleaning a dark dingy floor projected across the rear wall and several drawings of varying sizes, done in combinations of biro and highlighter with detritus either stuck to them or pinned to the wall next to them.

### Photos / Video / Drawing

The photo prints, "**Urban Legends**" (2022) Figure 1, show repeating rubbish bins. Within the photos, the bins are on the ground, and the camera points down at them. They open up wide for the camera lens, their contents gaze up as the lens peers down - They stare back at you, when placed at eye height, their mouths agape, each a singular cyclops exposed. The bins contain tea bags, noodle wrappings, used condoms, empty wrappers, lube sachets, small plastic bags - remnants of consumption. The consuming of others, of desire. The consuming of food, tea, drugs, sustenance, and intoxication. Consumption leaves traces, and those traces aren't just ephemeral existences of potentiality. They have to be cleaned and picked up by somebody. The somebody is the artist here.

The bins look up.  
The mop looks down.

The video, "**Allegory/Ruin**" (2018) Figure 2, is projected across the rear wall, neatly filling it from the floor up. It contains a single shot of a mop and its red bucket, cleaning a floor illuminated by a harsh flash, with the cleaner and documenter out of frame. The lens points down the barrel of the mop, taking up most of the frame, with an occasional glimpse of the cleaner/documenter/artists shoes peeking into view. The mop finds its way into corners and crevices of a blackened and seemingly sprawling floor. It moves in strokes, drawing zig zags in overlapping lines, sometimes it circles, spins, grinds. It's sopping fingers tilting over the concrete floor.

The flash is like a spotlight, searching for filth. Garish and alarming, lighting corners of the room that are not meant to be lit.

The water in the bucket starts clean and ends slate grey The floor starts dirty and ends clean, reflective, and glistening. As the floor is expunged of its filth, laboured over, and made clean, the water that started clear absorbs the muck, becomes soiled, becomes filth. They both move from cleanliness to filth, and back again. Both becoming simultaneously.

There is house music is heard at a distance. Faintly lurking in the peripheries, the party sound of a good time haunting the edges of the one who is at work.

Clean to filth / Filth to clean.

The drawings can be broken into 3 further parts.

The first, **“Killing me Softly”** (2022) Figure 3, is a 1m by 1½m drawing, scrawled across sheets of A4, taped together - A canvas and surface combined together, constructed out of pieces of paper from another purpose. The drawing depicts a figure, in a spotted dress too short to cover their gangling cock and tumescent legs, straddling a tank. Their cock points down as the barrel of the tank points out. Both directions, down and out. In the figures gnarled hands is a phone with images of a dismembered corpse, to which the expression is glee. The man straddling the tank that marches forward as his cock points down is gleeful at the sight of dismemberment. He is beaming. The marks are made with combinations of Biro pens, highlighter, taped detritus like popsicles sticks, teabags and a spork, and sweeping swirls of what looks like effluvia - Swirls that look like blood mixed with spit, or moreso, the blood that comes out of one's ass when you've torn the inside of your intestinal lining.

Green grey with puce red overtones.

An internal colour

The second, is a series of 5 smaller drawings, untitled, each on brown paper bags Figure 4. Like scenes, actions in sequence, moments, they contain threats of violence, hints of structure, subjects of power. Biro pen again, the paper bags ones that you would get a takeaway pie or maybe some chips in.

The last, is collections of rubbish, things left behind Figure 5. 4 Plastic sleeves filled with the actual rubbish transported from the floors, detritus here saved, and a crumpled pride flag plastered to the floor. These materials brought into the room, not just documented, taken from the rubbish pile of the cruise club and the pride festival. Materials that remain after the higher ideals of each.

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*Where?*

Where do these remnants, detritus, documents, images, come from?

They come from the artist.

They come from the Basement Specialist Adult Store and Cruise Club, just off of Karangahape Road, Tamaki, where the artist has worked for the 5 years.

1.

The 'Cruise Club' - A remnant, a detritus, a document, and an image. The 'Cruise Club', or the 'Bathhouse' is a perceived space of homosocial and sexual engagement. In historiography and academia, the space is often rendered an ideal revolutionary space, described (and cherished) as a "sort of Whitmanesque democracy" and an embodiment of "a desire to know and trust other men in a type of brotherhood far removed from the male bondage of rank, hierarchy, and competition that characterise much of the outside world" (Altmann, 79-80). Often described as sites that "Appear to be the ideal site for physical relationships" (Aragon, 66), as "Safety zones for cultivating democracy

and camaraderie” (Berube, 191) existing for “purposes that were sexual as well and social and political” (Berube, 187).

The bathhouse, the cruise club, is a place in which to explode your desire, realise your inherent revolutionary potential and, to be within your community, the ‘community of ecstatic sexuality’ (Gluck, 9).

Desire to trust. Desire to know.  
Appear/Appearance/Appeared.  
IDEAL/IDEALISM  
Democracy  
Removal.

2.

These are descriptions of the past at a distance that we have a nostalgia for. Nostalgia depends on distance, Nostalgia haunts us. We as gay people come to understand ourselves often in a nostalgia to the perception of eroticism of the past. All the flash and show none of the misgivings and complexities - Dianne Chisholm describes that “Nostalgia is haunted by phantasmagoria of the urban marketplace” (244). These descriptions and investigations are concerned with their locale, America, with the gay Meccas of San Francisco and New York. Yet even there, over the sea, the ‘Era of the bathhouse has ended’ (244). It is over. Finished.

3.

When the cruise club is “cast from a liberal, idealising perspective... the sight of real, salient, material contradictions” are lost, and overlooked in “favour of a myth of lost utopia” (Chisholm, 245).

(Contradictions – struggles, combatants, opposing forces that form in dependence to each other)

At this point in time, the perception of the cruise club and bathhouse doesn’t even exist in commodity fetishism, but in the fetishism of the corpse-like remainders left after the commodity was consumed.

4.

In New Zealand, there is no site that is easily analogous to the ideals presented of the American Bathhouse, no ideal space of ‘democratic gay relation’. In New Zealand, we have a longer history of the public toilet, of the ‘Bog Queen’, as the space or location for same-sex encounters, being ‘traced back to at least the mid-nineteenth century’ (Cooper, Law, Malthus & Wood, 2000). Cottaging, as it was called. There in the public cottage, the gay man, with his own language (\*) finds anonymity. Cottage is domestic, internal, isolated, quaint. The gay man retreats into his cottage on the edge of town, his small domestic world and prospects do not warrant a house, an abode, a home. He only has world for a cottage.

And the public toilets of old were architecturally made to appear cottage-like, “an architectural design that resembled 2 miniature country cottages” (Ings, 3)

That which must be kept behind closed doors (abode).  
Personal/Internal/Private  
Bleeding into  
Impersonal/External/Anonymous/Public

5.

As gay people in NZ, we come to understand ourselves by the histories of those far away from us, from larger cultural forces that dominate the way in which we are able to perceive ourselves. So, we conjecture ourselves, at a distance, from a world that is already dead and haunted by nostalgia. Developing in the ashes and have bones around us still. The bathhouse/club/mecca may have been razed to the ground, but places like Basement Specialist Adult Store and Cruise Club, are still here. Remnants remain, remains and corpses. The bathhouse of now is the haunting of a corpse.

6.

These ideals, these nostalgias, are not what is seen in ‘Becoming Animals’ - The ideals and academic cherishment’s are the shadows that the works within ‘Becoming Animals’ live behind or, that the works show the base materials that lie underneath the elevated ideals. The base materials contaminate always. The ideal ‘splits off base matter as whatever is disgusting, vile, sub-human’ (Noys, 501)

(Contamination – the bathhouse as a site of HIV transmission, of anxiety)  
(Sub-Human – the other, the animal)

We see bins filled with rubbish, floors with piss, shit and cum on them, drawings of men erotically charged by dismemberment, isolated traces of figures, never ‘democratically relating’ to each other. There is also the one who labours, the one who cleans up the mess. These are the base materials of the cruise club. These are what must be pushed to the side, obscured from view for the ideal. ‘Becoming Animals’ is borne out of that base material, is literally made from the rubbish left in the bins by patrons, it records of the materials Corbett-Sanders labours over, showing representations of the figures who come through cold doors of a corpse, the food scraps, the piss, the shit, the cum,

7.

There is a distance between the ideal and the reality. That distance is a large chasm that is dark, difficult, and grimy. The idealism of what a cruise club is seen to be masks the actual experiences that occur(ed) there, the reality that by being masked is rendered far away.

Becoming Animals shifts perspectives and angles a lens into the darkness between(underneath) idealised perceptions and into the realities that are experienced there.

Ideal: The cruise club as a fantastical wonderland of sexual pleasure en masse, of orgies, of excitement, of a historic queered space that has a locale of unbridled and unlimited potential, populated by the beautiful, egalitarian in the democratic relations between all.

at a distance from

The Real: The cruise club as a grotty series of rooms, populated by very little, as a place for people to do drugs, to linger, to die, to evidence an existence by detritus and effluvia. The one who works there does not partake in the sublime pleasures but is someone who labours in a position of precarity. They collect the rubbish, food wrappings, used condoms, used needles.

To quote the artist "A queer utopias great in theory but who is cleaning up the shit smeared all over the walls and the cum stained tissues?" (Corbett-Sanders)

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*This is a Figurative Show.*

"**Becoming Animals**" (2022) is concerned with the figure.

Each of the aspect that make up its body, are figurative.

This is a figurative show. It documents figures inhabiting a shadowy reality, the gaps between the ideal and the real.

It is a show of figurative shadows.

1.

The formless – Bataille's informe, in art, is to peek behind the façade of the metaphor and grandiose meanings in art, and reveal or examine the most debased elements, the unspeakable, the grotesque, the revolting, the disgusting elements lurking that are inarticulable with thoughts or words but must be felt.

2.

A description - Felix Gonzales Torres' "**Untitled**" (**Portrait of Ross in L.A.**) 1991.

**"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)** Figure 6,7, is an infinitely repeatable, pile of metallic wrapped candy, weighing 175 pounds – the corresponding to the average body weight of an adult male (Hagenmeier, 163). The viewers are invited to take a candy, unwrap it, press it to their lips and consume its innards, discarding the wrapper. As the visitors take candy from the work, the volume and weight vary, decrease, diminish - The pile of candy that is once full, diminishes leaving a burgeoning pile of empty wrappers - debris, like empty corpses, that signal the passing of time and the breadth of loss within the AIDS crisis, as well as creating evidence of the life IN time.

3.

The wrappers are unfurled by fingers, candies pressed into lips, gnashed by teeth, and swallowed by throats of people who are alive. The candy and their wrappers show the evidence of figures in multiple states, at both times. They evidence life, bodies and living flesh, as they evidence death, corpse, and loss.

The condom wrappers, baggies and food waste were also unfurled by fingers, sheathed over penises, contents swallowed by throats, consumed into nostril and stomach linings.

The audience devours the body of Ross, as she and the attendant replenishes the pile, a de-forming, un-forming and re-forming of the object repeats.

The patron in "**Urban Decay**" replenishes, re-forms the matter in the bins, as the cleaner takes away rubbish, de-forms.

4.

Ross dies, his body becoming one of the many unseen lives lost during the AIDS crisis. You as the audience take a piece. You are complicit in the unseen, the pushed aside. You eat from the body you do not see. The candies leverage not just your view, but your action into the process.

We are left with rubbish to mourn. Scraps and corpses to understand ourselves and those we have lost. Mutable, changing, always in process.

"In its continuously morphing sizes, colours, weight and candy-count, the pile of candy ultimately lacks definite shape and uniform representation... (Miao, 2)

5.

The body I no longer get to hold with my hands, press into my arms, breathe deeply in.

The body I can only keep with me, now without form, if I eat it.

If I eat him.

Kept here, not pushed aside, not forgotten, not rendered into a disease-ridden threat, a mosquito, a beast.

I must not think that.

I will do that.

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*What Happens When Things are Cast Aside?*

"**Becoming Animals**" angles a view into that which is pushed aside.

"**Untitled (Portrait of Ross)**" remembers and holds present that which is pushed aside.

In pushing aside, the corpse and violence, we too push aside labour and make labour unseen. There are labours pushed aside when queer spaces and histories are idealised and disconnected from their present realities.

Casting aside and distancing.

Teresa Margolles with her work **"What Else Could We Talk About" (2009)** directs the viewer to look at that labour and the corpse.

**"What Else Could We Talk About?"** Is also formless figurative work, portraiture.

The title is explicit, without being directive. It articulates both the weighted presence of murder and violence and its state in liminality, of being pushed aside.

Both weight and weightlessness together.

1.

**"What Else Could We Talk About" (2009)** is an installation of nine pieces within the Mexican Pavilion, Venice. Nine parts to make a whole. Collections of material traces and remnants: Shattered glass, fabrics impregnated with blood and earth, stains, mud, sounds, fragments. (Perez, n.d., Espino 2012)

Assembled from crime scenes across Mexico. Traces of violence. Here transported from their locales, from their distant sites where bio and necropolitics are playing out, re-transported into the same void they are pushed away from.

Here I will speak of 2 of the 9 parts.

2.

**"Cleaning"** (2009) Figure 8.

Daily, at 4pm exactly, Mexican volunteers mopped the floors of the palazzo. The water that was used contained rags that absorbed blood, sweat and mud from different crime sites across Mexico. Every day, these materials are smeared all over the floor of the palace in Venice, attempting to clean the floor, but marking it instead. An act of cleaning that is never complete, that cannot ever be complete. As the floor becomes filthier, the remnants of corpses are transferred, the labour articulated as a constant unavoidable - it takes labour to try to forget and labour to try to remember.

As the floor is 'cleaned', laboured over, it is made filthier.

The body and the violence's against it, are articulated through the detritus left posthumously. Here, the detritus is effluvia, soaked up into fabric; water transformed into bubbles, rags impregnated with remnants wiping and coating the floors, lingering in the air - the stench fists its way through the nostrils into the brain.

3.

**“Flag”** (2009) Figure 9.

A flag, at surface, is a signal post for identity, for a proclamation of borders and delineates those defined within its parameters and their separation from those outside of it. We use flags to categorise, to delineate, to define and to identify.

Margoles’s flag takes blood and brandishes it to see. Consisting of a single piece of fabric, initially used as the cloth to wrap a cadaver and transport from the crime scene. The material used to shroud the cadaver, absorbing its run-offs, collecting it’s traces and indenting within it the weight and drag of a heavy corpse. Margolles takes the ground fabric, and hangs it afloat the pavilion, a new Mexican flag to see. A process of moving the dead from the floor, up to the sky. No longer is the blood trampled on and pounded into the soil, into oblivion. It is moved up into view of the eye, angles the forgotten into view.

4.

You have no choice but to see the blood now in front of you, you cannot look away. You have no choice but to smell the liquid effluvia, working its way into your nose. These materials infiltrate your bodily space, the corpse’s remnants have tendrils that cling to you. Even though the the process and proliferation of these cadavers that the systems of narco-violence engender are not ‘present’, are pushed aside, they remain.

You have no choice – what else could you talk about?

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*What of feeling?*

An aspect I do not want to forget, that I would like to keep relevant, herein talking about **“Becoming Animals”** and discussing it in relation to **“Untitled (Portrait of Ross)”** and **“What Else Could We Talk About”**, is what these shows make one FEEL.

What do these artworks, make me feel?

I feel from my position as a gay man.

1. I feel the contents documented in each bin of **“Becoming Animals”** because I have felt them on my skin, inside me, I have consumed and been consumed and left remnants just like those in the bins.

Evidence of our existences is often found through that which we leave behind. It is never a direct portrayal and lens that we become a subject of our world or experience, but through the leavings along the edges of view, that we come into existence.



People who live and experiences along the edges,  
or borders, of most others.

2. I have learned of myself at a distance, the people and cultures that are visible to me are ones far away. I feel a great sense of loss towards the generations before me, who I will never meet, will never learn from, will never know. My journey through life is characterised by loss. As I age, I have friends and mentors who don't. **"Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)"**, even if just in photo, wells weight up into my chest. It brings into my mind the weight and absence of my friends who I have lost to suicide, to dependence and simply just lost. And it brings forth the desire, maybe even want, to eat their bodies alive and keep them safe within me, keep them alive and dead, in perpetuity. To not want their presence to go.

I learn to understand myself, who I am, through the  
dead of the past, the rubbish they leave behind,  
perceptions of their ideals, and sex.

3. It feel a need, at this point in the history of queer liberation, for interrogation. For critique and deeper engagement with not just the highs of queer culture, but of it's lows. What is unseen, what is our capacity for evil, what is kept low to the ground, who labours in the muck to uphold us. **"What Else Could We Talk About"** is a strong interrogation, one we could and should be looking to help in our interrogations. It confronts the things that are pushed aside to uphold systems and structure, cycles that become self-perpetuating and murderous.

We push a magnanimous amount aside. We avoid  
looking into caverns, behind the curtains that we  
veil ourselves in. We neglect material realities,  
labours, and histories in our idealisms.

4. Lee Jensen, a friend, once said this to me in an email conversation: "And yet, and yet...in a world of protease inhibitors the social/sexual landscape has changed. I'm not meaning to rip the poetry out this [My writing we were discussing], but it's completely clear to me from the porn I watch, that bareback is no longer a gimmick, an edgy violation and violence enacted on – I'll use it – the faggot's body".

There is violence we perpetrate on each other  
regularly as gay men, that gets pushed aside  
under the 'spiritual freedoms', 'sexual  
liberations', 'pride' that we must BE. The sexual  
world we are borne into is convoluted and murky  
and is darkening difficult to navigate. This is only  
expounding.

Where is the Bog Queen now?



Figure 1. "Urban Legend" (2022). Via <http://playstationartistrun.space/becoming-animals-daniel-john-corbett-sanders-070722-300722>



Figure 2. "Allegory/Ruin" (2018). Via <https://www.circuit.org.nz/work/allegoryruin>



Figure 3. "Killing Me Softly" (2022). Via <http://playstationartistrun.space/becoming-animals-daniel-john-corbett-sanders-070722-300722>





Figure 5. Untitled (2022). Via <http://playstationartistrun.space/becoming-animals-daniel-john-corbett-sanders-070722-300722>



Figure 4. Untitled (2022). Via <http://playstationartistrun.space/becoming-animals-daniel-john-corbett-sanders-070722-300722>



Figure 6. "Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), 1991. Installed in Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Luhring Augustine Hetzler Gallery, Los Angeles. 19 Oct. – 16 Nov. 1991. Image courtesy of Luhring Augustine Hetzler Gallery. Via <https://www.felixgonzalez-torresfoundation>



Figure 7. "Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), 1991. Installed in *Objects of Wonder: from Pedestal to Interaction*. ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark. 12 Oct. 2019 – 1 Mar. 2020. Cur. Pernille Taagard Dinesen. Photographer: Lise Balsby. Image courtesy o





Figure 8. "Cleaning" (2008). Via <https://bimaldevenecia.mx/en/biennale-arte/2009/>





Figure 9. "Flag" (2008). Via <https://binaldevenecia.mx/en/biennale-arte/2009>

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