



JOHN A DOUGLAS
BODY FLUID – THE SEVEN CYCLES

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John A Douglas transforms and ritualises the act of his daily dialysis treatment to produce a reflection on the cyborgian/augmented body, mortality, and the implications of life-support technology.

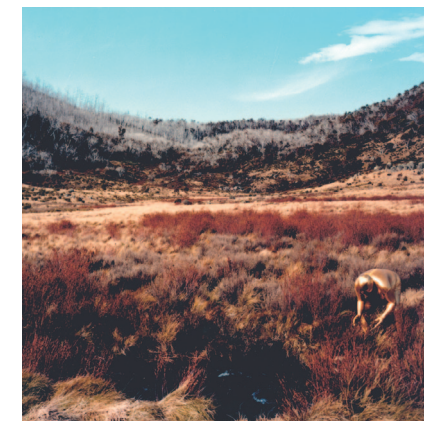
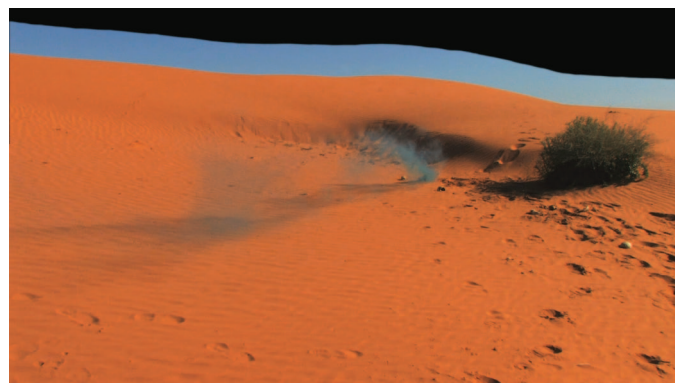
The Seven Cycles serves as an extension of a previous body of live performance work, Body Fluid II. The 10-hour performance installation featured the artist carrying out the process of dialysis while completely enclosed within a golden body suit, left blind and staggering. Elements of 1970s endurance art and the abject are present as we are directly confronted with corporeal functions of waste and cleansing in the form of an extended meditation.

Moving from the realm of live performance to video artwork, the body and the ritual experience a transformation. Removed from the physical realm, Douglas' ritual is no longer ephemeral in nature. The ritual has been recorded, recontextualised and immortalised as a video artwork on loop, echoing the artist's daily repetition. During the performances a dialysis machine was visibly present, however within this exhibition the machine is noticeably absent. Instead, the body undergoes a preservative process using an entirely different machine, a camera.

Douglas' video works are undeniably filmic, employing a mise-en-scene characteristic of cinema. Bazin suggests that the acts of photography and filmmaking are akin to the ancient Egyptian act of mummification "the religion of ancient Egypt, aimed against death, saw survival as depending on the continued existence of the corporeal body. To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time." Under this definition, the process of dialysis shares the same goal of mummification, preserving the corporeal body from the effects of time. Douglas' golden man even bears a resemblance to a mummified body, blinded and covered from head to toe. The figure also bears resemblance to another 'preserved' organism, the cyborg. In Douglas' golden man we see a true cyborg, a being that symbiotically blends the biological and the artificial. We see echoes of fictional cyborgs, like the mechanised Maria from Fritz Lang's Metropolis (1927). But unlike the utopian, superhuman cyborgs traditionally seen in film, Douglas' golden man declasses the image of the cyborgian or augmented body. This robotic, 'enhanced' body appears against barren, waterless landscapes – trudging, struggling and collapsing, though persevering regardless. The body is not depicted as rigid and metallic, but instead is shown to be fleshy, liquid, and corporeal. Through this debasement of the cyborg body, we begin to question the implications of life-supporting/preservative technology—the body is preserved, but at what cost?

It is only when the condition is ritualised in Levitation that this cyborgian body transcends the boundaries of the human form. Douglas' golden man lies on an altar of sorts. Dialysis tube on exhibition, it is as if through this process of cleansing and replenishment, the body is granted the power of levitation. When the procedure is ritualised, the artist's daily act of repetition is transformed instead into a transcendent meditation.

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Ryan P. O'Donnell



Cover: Body Fluid – Saline Ascent, 2012, C-type photograph, 100cm x 100cm, Edition of 5, (Detail)
Opposite left: Body Fluid – Crash Landing, 2012, HD 1920 x 1080p Video, 6 minutes
Opposite right: Saline Ascent, 2012, HD 1920 x 1080p Video, 6 minutes 15 seconds, Edition of 3
Top left: Body Fluid – The Offering, 2011, C-Type photograph, 100cm x 100cm, Edition of 5
Top middle: Body Fluid – Replenish, 2012, C-Type photograph, 100cm x 100cm, Edition of 5
Top right: Body Fluid – Ascent, 2012, C-type photograph, 100cm x 100cm, Edition of 5
Bottom: Body Fluid – Levitation, 2012, C-Type photograph, 120cm x 60cm, Edition of 5

Cameras: John A Douglas, Kristian Haggblom, Lena Obergfell, Melanie Ryan, Alejandro Rolandi.
Video editing and Sound Design: John A Douglas
Sound samples: Thomas Kner, Daikan, Mille Plateaux, 2002. Stephan Mathieu: Wurmloch Variationen, Ritornell, 2000. Debra Petrovitch: strange Land Vol 1, 2010. Soviet Soyuz space mission radio broadcasts.
Movement and performance coach: Sue Healley.
Rigger; Alejandro Rolandi
Lighting and Chroma Key Studio Technician: Mark Mitchell
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