

‘Let cyberspace and meatspace join:’
Undergarments unites virtual with real
in an age possessed by identity anxieties

In private again, we gaze through the glass at flesh. Screen glass, mirror glass; our flesh, other flesh. In the digital age, we decide whether these moments belong solely to us present, or to any number of virtual onlookers. As the Internet introduces audiences to our private spaces, so too does *Undergarments*.

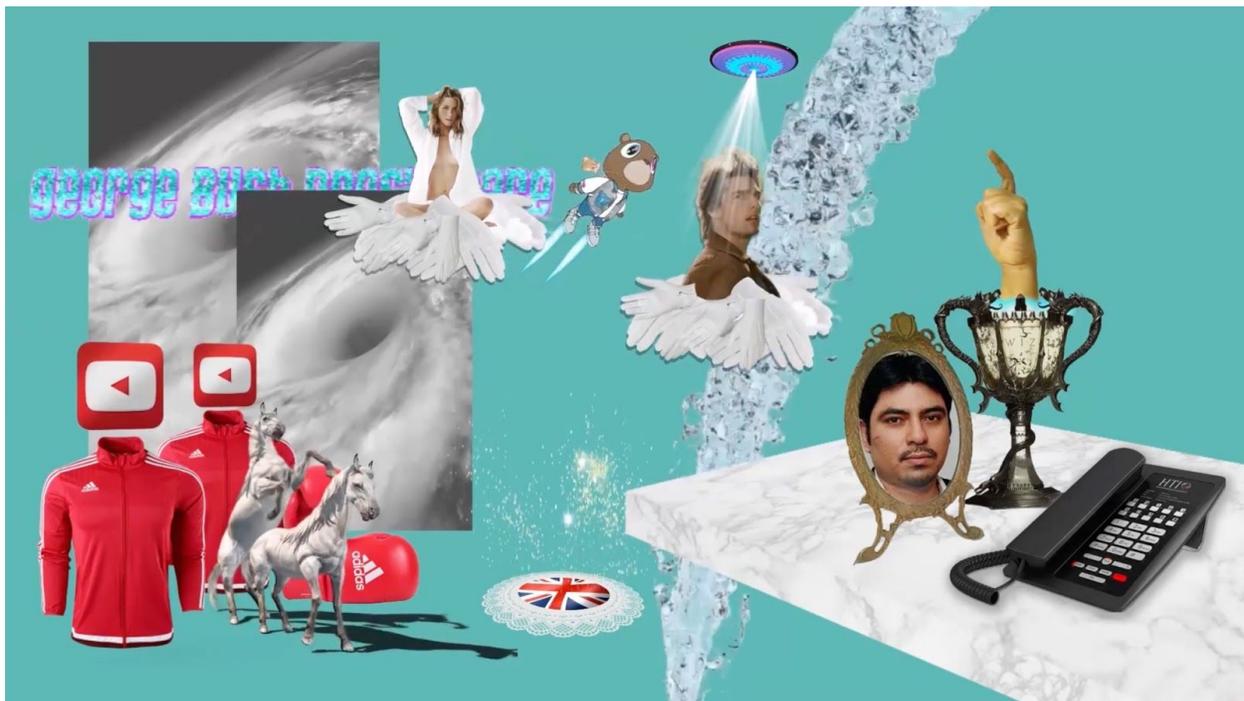
Craig Waddell invites viewers to share the moment at which he makes private public, self-documenting ‘the anxieties of sexual relationships’ as the half-undressed artist photographs himself from his empty bed in *Self Portrait*. Waddell’s diptych, which explores ‘various performed selves and manifestations of sexuality,’ functions in conversation with itself, with one portrait evoking submission while the other performs dominance. Waddell’s presented duality of self begs the question: is one of these more *true* than the other? I would posit that more can be gained by probing the insecurities



Craig Waddell, *Self Portrait*, 2016

from which that question emerges than seeking to resolve it. Accordingly, Waddell's diptych does not resolve, but instead amplifies and immortalises the anxieties of sexual anticipation and identity performance.

Through his performances, Waddell presents sexuality and masculinity as mutable. Sex and gender essentialism have no place in the diptych, except as the inevitable poignant subtext of all queer perspectives. That subtext, which underscores queer stories the same way it underscores queer experiences, is that queerness exists in forbidden territory, reached through not just one transgression, but an intersection of transgressions of social and sometimes legal boundaries.

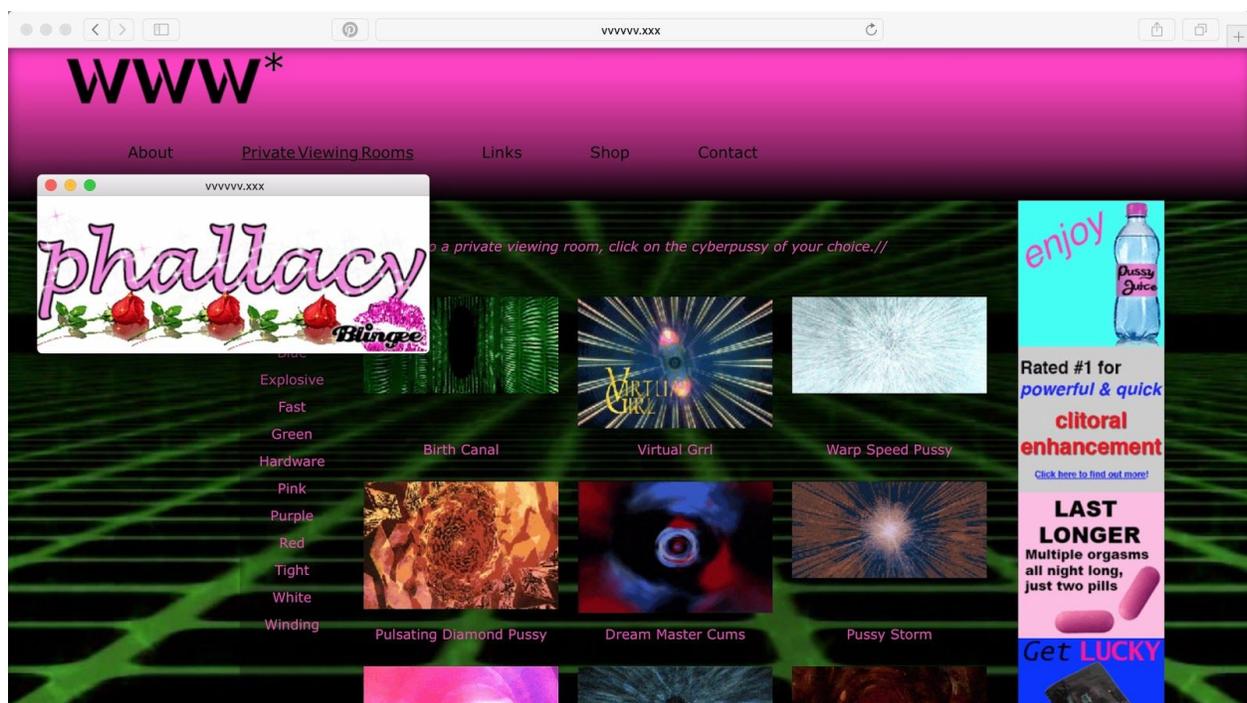


Xanthe Dobbie, *21st Century Greatest Hits Screensaver Pack (2005: Blue Turquoise)*, 2017

Queerness affords its performers uniquely nuanced understandings of identity representation, not only because external structures impose a scrutinous gaze upon queer people that prompts them to self-examine, but also because many of our communities and media are presently only geared to teach heterosexual and cisgendered identities. Queer and divergent-identifying people must frequently experiment through numerous modes of self-presentation and sexuality before finding any that feel right, because queer guidance and educational resources have historically been limited or destroyed. To this end, the Internet remains a uniquely uncensored educational and support medium for queer people. **Xanthe Dobbie's** *21st Century Greatest Hits Screensaver Pack* is a case study on queer self-discovery in the digital

age, celebrating subjectivity as Dobbie collates mass media artefacts to form queer feminist narratives.

Dobbie's *Screensavers* tell a deliciously relatable coming-of-age story even juicier than the sum of its parts, with each *Screensaver* functioning like a chapter, and all of them connecting to form a full narrative when viewed together. The screensaver is an evocative medium through which to tell such a story, not only because it is a graphic reference to the early '00s—when screensaver packs came on a disc, in a branded box, to be shelved at home or the office and subtly reinforce the message of the screensaver itself as it glowed from the unattended screen—but also because screensavers are video artworks made for transient, disengaged audiences, in the computer user's absence. This mirrors the transience and disengagement with which a protagonist frequently navigates a Hollywood coming-of-age story, passing maturational milestones blithely as they sweat the small stuff. (Dobbie references the iconic Hollywood coming-of-age story that underpins the action of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in her 2001



Faith Holland, VVVVVV, 2017

Fuschia Rose screensaver.) Just like the coming-of-age protagonist, Dobbie's major milestones—sexual discovery, lost innocence, war, and the artist's political awakening—are only visible as allusions; in-jokes; amidst an unassembled puzzle of media consumables.

Katie Torn's digital video artwork *Low Tide* also ostensibly celebrates consumables; her looped animation shows a precarious tower of discarded artefacts, each a memorial to bygone moments of Torn's childhood. Torn's work converses with Dobbie's, prompting us to consider the waste we leave behind as we cycle through different identities. Distorted and dismembered feminine bodies are central to *Low Tide*; Torn describes them as 'desperately trying to adapt to a world that is consumed by image and simulation while it physically decays.' **Faith Holland's** web artwork VVVVVV also reflects a sensitivity to the dangers of digital simulation and body image control, punning on the popular imaging of the web as 'hole' or 'vortex' through her *Cyberpussy Manifesto*. Holland shapes a counter-history of the cultural significance of vaginal imagery, presenting the digital wormhole as a symbol of vaginal power. Windows open unexpectedly as you navigate the site through its links. There is a loss of power here for the user: a moment of arrested consent as Holland places control squarely in the coded folds of the web. Probing the metaphor further, Holland presents the Internet as active and lustful: 'the Internet is always touching herself. It is with pleasure that one site rubs another.'



Hal Timothy Yarran, *He's tru blue*, 2014

Body image insecurities are, of course, universal experiences, as *Undergarments'* balance of variously gendered perspectives and presences reflects. As Holland's cyber pussies open their wailing mouths, **Hal Timothy Yarran's** beer bottle boners hang proudly in their briefs. Yarran's tone is ambiguous in his consideration of Australian heteronormative male rites of passage: from one perspective, situated

among *Undergarments*' other works, *He's tru blu* appears to celebrate masculine intimacy and homoeroticism in a homophobic social landscape, its bottles smiling upwards like the phallic mouths of a baroque fountain. From a different perspective, the bottles stand uniformed and faceless like soldiers in a firing squad, cocked like pistols ready to follow violent orders.

He's tru blu does not offer the only perspective on heteronormative masculine aggression in *Undergarments*. **Carla Adams**' woven portrait responds to her experiences with *Kaiden*, an aggressive user she corresponded with via the dating app Tinder. Adams describes each stitch as 'an act of contemplation and reflection,' comparing dating to weaving as two learning processes where both perseverance and focus are vital to achieve a controlled result—and even then, things can easily take an unexpected direction. The portrait of *Kaiden* converses with such feminist textile works as Tracy Emin's bright and kitschy banners, Zadie Xa's tasselled quilts, and L. J. Roberts' intricate embroidered portraits. Needlework has long been appropriated by feminist artists as a medium that is self-reflexive of its long history as both vital and thankless "women's work" in various cultures. Adams continues this feminist legacy, recording misogynistic microaggressions through each stitch.

Threads of similarity to weaving methodologies can also be found and followed through **ellen.gif** and **Andriana Carney's** curation of *Undergarments*, as concerns and discourses meet, overlap, and intersect. **Damiano Dentice's** enquiries into cyber voyeurism and representational politics in *BRATZROCKANGELZ: cam-gurl confessions & bedrrrrm aesthetics* continue through **Brontë Jones' Park Selfie**; as **Craig Waddell**, **Daniela Medina Poch**, and **Juan Pablo** deepen the discourse on 'meatspace' voyeurism and entry into intimate spaces, **Nicole Ruggerio**, **Faith Holland**, and **Hal Timothy Yarran** inject gendered politics and perspectives to the conversation. Like **Xanthe Dobbie's Screensavers**, *Undergarments* presents a landscape view of its subject matter made up of focused microcosms of information, uniting 'cyberspace and meatspace' into an archive that reflects striking commonalities between onscreen and offscreen experiences.

Bethan Cotterill