

## COMMISSIONED TEXT BY GEORGE VASEY

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The local library is reclaimed by the waves. Spar becomes a rocky outpost. Plaice and pollock nestle in the bookshelves while cod swim among the tinned sardines. Britain has its first climate refugees. The small Welsh village of Fairbourne is being lost to the sea. The population of around 1,200 people are being “managed” out of their homes and forced to retreat from the advancing Irish sea. It should, by latest estimates, be under water in around 40 years. Deep ecological time collides with human time. Melting glaciers release air into the atmosphere that was last breathed by the dinosaurs. A tin of discarded Spam is found at the bottom of the ocean 5 miles down. Human debris circulates in outer space. The Amazon rain forest burns as I write this text.

For his new body of work, presented at Bloc Projects, Alex Farrar has made sandbags by filling loungewear with sand. Formed to suggest drooping headless figures, they are supported by domestic furniture that the artist has picked up on the streets and skips around his home. The cheap chairs, tables and shelving units — redolent of student accommodation and rental properties — become a perfunctory scaffolding. Farrar has flooded the gallery, and the sculptures stand in shallow water. Domestic imagery collides with the iconography of emergency. Who are these pyjama clad characters and what tragedy has befallen them? The installation takes on the hallucinatory air of a horrific nightmare. The unidentified bodies become proxies, but who do they represent? Looking at these sculptures I start to think about substandard rental housing and homelessness; about people priced out of safe housing and pushed onto the street. I think about the production of victimhood by the media, about the circulation of images; of faceless bodies piled up in war zones and disaster areas. I think about subjects treated like objects, cut from their context and life stories and devoid of agency. The domestic, so often assumed to be a space of intimacy and safety, is exposed and becomes threatened and uncertain.

Farrar's work has often been tempered by an anxiety. Take his Sweat Paintings, 2019, which incorporate swathes of silicone that are poured onto patterned cotton to mimic sweat patches. Colour field abstraction is merged with something fretful. Behavioural Residues, 2015-ongoing, similarly attests to a nervous disposition. The series of works encompass enlarged lead casts of pared finger nails that have been turned on their side and painted in bright hues to create cartoon smiles. Sweat and finger nails connect the inner space of the body to the outer world. We trim, spray, and scrub our bodies with a range of products to contain them and stop them falling apart. These works elide an economic formalism with a certain excessiveness. In Farrar's practice, containment — of objects and subjects — is often tempered by a sense of disfluency and aberration.

Rising sea levels and sweat both attest to differing forms of stress. Farrar puts the topic of bodily and ecological duress into conversation with an aesthetic paucity. Traumatic testimony is similarly marked by disarticulation. Think of the looped soundbites offered by shocked residents after a mass shooting, the stutter of shell-shocked soldiers and the anguished tears of someone after a catastrophic event. Trauma evades translation into images and words. Flooding, sweating and crying. Contained water soothes, unconstrained water terrifies. Similarly, healthy bodies tend to stick together while sick bodies dissolve inside and out — snot, shit, and piss leak out of, and erupt from of the body. Thresholds are made vulnerable.

The visual regime of crisis is pervaded by an oscillation between emotive catastrophic imagery and an evidential data. Numbers and narratives each make different appeals to us and call us to action in

different ways. According to the World Health Organisation there will be an additional 250,000 deaths globally each year due to malnutrition and disease as a consequence of climate change. The effects of this ecological violence — like any form of aggression — is felt more keenly by poorer and precarious communities. Certain bodies bear the brunt more than other bodies. When I look at Farrar's new work I think about how artists have furnished our imagination with imagery that help us to make sense of the world. Pictures and stories can help us to translate indignation into something more constructive. Farrar puts an iconography of crisis into an aesthetics of the everyday and places the emergency at your front door. He asks us to imagine the end of the world. It happens when you're drinking tea, with your pyjamas on, feet up and watching TV.

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