

Eldon and Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize 2021

RE: Nomination and a written description of Brad Necyk and Gary James Joynes' *Joshua Tree*, from the online exhibition *Dyscorpia 2.1*

From: aAron Munson

Dear Jury members,

Joshua Tree was the first work from the ongoing collaborative relationship between Brad Necyk and Gary James Joynes. It is a single-channel, minimalist experimental video work that was exhibited in the Edmonton-based online exhibition *Dyscorpia 2.1* in June 2020, curated by Marilene Oliver. I have been fortunate to watch its development throughout 2019 and into 2020 and believe it is an artistic achievement worth consideration for this award as a significant contribution to the Edmonton cultural sphere and the genre of landscape.

Joshua Tree is part of Brad's *And All of Everything* series which he began in late-2018, which Gary became a part of in mid-2019 and they continue to develop new works for. In July 2019, I saw the first 10-minute video work *And All of Everything* in the *Processor* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Alberta, curated by Lindsey Sharman. It was a near-still, silent 3D-rendered animation of a day-night cycle on a seamless loop. In November 2019, it was projected in a public art exhibition at the University of California Irvine's campus. While there showing the work, Brad travelled to Joshua Tree National Park and spent two days recording the landscape which would be the beginning of *Joshua Tree*. Work between Brad and Gary began immediately.

As Brad and Gary created the 25-minute work, I was fortunate to see its development from November 2019 to February 2020 through studio visits and private screenings. In 2019, Brad had recently completed his doctoral work on mental illness and healing that was awarded the Governor General's Gold Medal, and he was turning his research and practice towards telling healing stories about the natural world—the living planet. Brad saw Gary and Brian Webb's dance performance *Liminal* in June 2019 and saw how well his developing video work could weave and knot with Gary's sound and music—both focusing on slow, extended meditations on a theme.

Brad and Gary describe *Joshua Tree* as a single-shot, minimalist experimental video about time, consciousness, and climate change. It is about the experience of time, the movement of time, and the growing sense of being-out-of-time. It is also about a rhythm between waking consciousness and dreaming, where surreal and mystical experiences occur. Further, it is building off of evolving themes of the Anthropocene by directly witnessing landscapes at risk of annihilation, acting as an archive, a memorial. It examines a contribution art could have on shifting and attuning human understanding to something so massive and distributed across time as climate change—that stars no one, that is long in the making, and attritional.

The work is set in the marble room first explored in *And All of Everything* with two new screens playing videos from Joshua Tree National Park. The gold wall begins to slip through the gradients of a sunrise: deep reds to oranges and, then, teal-blue sky. At the left, daylight meets shadow as the day slowly reveals itself and envelopes the space. Joynes creates a single, rich tone that seems to emanate from the line between light and shadow, maybe revealing the inter-being between all the dualities of Being—you cannot know light without dark, happiness without suffering, inside without outside.

A screen leans against the left wall playing a series of meditations on the landscape. Brad describes his handheld cinematography as witnessing—witnessing a landscape, a living planet on the verge of collapse, *the loss of everything in everything everywhere*. He closes one eye and looks through the viewfinder, *looking-with* the camera, allowing it to scan, autofocus, and jitter as it looks across this mystical landscape—to simply Be with, meditate on, the giving essence within the natural world of which we are a part of.

A screen leans to the right looking through a field of cacti, fixed on the bloom of the sun slowly falling behind a shadowed mountain range. The handheld shot hovers on the descending sun, meditating on the cycle of rising and setting across the Earth and Sun’s cosmic dance over the past 4.5 billion years—reflecting all the generations that are past and all the generations yet to be born that witness, be part of, this marvellous cycle.

Gary’s score seamlessly drives the shadow throughout the day. As the sun sets and we descend into dreamtime as a droplet of sand descends from above and crashes with Gary’s noise patterns against the marble floor, creating the sonic reverberation of this imagined marble space. The motion of the sandstorm is driven by a Lorenz Strange Attractor which was discovered in the early 1960s at the beginning of chaos theory and climate modelling. Further, the sand noise in this scene is generated by programming a voltage-controlled “Chance” module that uses algorithms based on John Cage’s chaos theory of random coin-tosses and the I-Ching divination calendar.

As we enter the second day-cycle Gary elevates the sacredness of the landscape with beautiful vocal harmonies that weave into the synthetic tonal score he has been developing throughout the first half of the piece. The shadow slowly moves, attuning you to the time-world of the work and as the second day closes we get a moment of reflection as both screens focus on the sun as Gary’s score swells upwards, and then, as all days go, we slip into another dream.

Gary’s score quiets, the room falls further and further into the darkness of night, then, a flash flood falls from above then ascends back up, defying gravity—the flux of falling and ascending all at once. Gary’s score fills the room with Cagian synthetic water, built up again from modulated noise patterns, as an anti-climax—in the world of climate change, these are

stories that star no one, are long in the making, and attritional: it is here and well underway, nothing to wait for.

Poet Allen Ginsberg described art as the process of giving subjective truths objective reality. Martin Heidegger believed art creates a world, a free region to experience truth, which he described as the unconcealment of Being. And this is the strength of *Joshua Tree*, it attunes you to scales outside of our everyday experience, whether in space, time, or spirit. It is a world, a heightened experience that renders the ordinary as extra-ordinary, the everyday as sacred. It takes something as complicated and large as climate change, our place as the generation witnessing an apocalypse, and creates a world, a primordial space full of marble, gold, and mysticism—a sustained mediation on Being and what it is to be a witness, a witness watching a revelation that can only be known through its unfolding, the unfolding this work heightens.

Before the COVID-19 lockdown, *Joshua Tree* was part of Necyk's solo exhibition at Alberta Printmakers in Calgary and Necyk's online solo exhibition with ARTsPLACE in Nova Scotia. While 2020 was largely a year of pausing, *Joshua Tree* found quite a bit of success at international film festivals, screening in Canada, the USA, France, the UK, and Chile, picking up award nominations in several festivals, including Best Experimental Film at the Oregon Short Film Festival, winning Best Art Video at the South Film and Arts Academy Festival in Chile, and being a semi-finalist at the New York Animation Film Awards and the Dumbo Film Festival.

Joshua Tree will open the live dance performance *Labyrinth*, a collaboration between Brad, Gary, and the Brian Webb Dance Company. Sections of *Kingdom of Illumination* and *Avatar's Dream* will be part of the performance as well. They have been collaborating on this Canada Council-funded performance since 2019, running workshops together this spring, aiming for a late-2021 premiere.

In April, *Joshua Tree* will screen with its sequel *Avatar's Dream* (30-minutes) in-person at the Art Gallery of St. Albert as a large-scale single-channel video, 2-channel audio installation—minimalist installation focused on a meditative experience on Being and Time.

Joshua Tree was the beginning of a sustained collaborative relationship between Brad and Gary that is producing several series of landscape works: *Joshua Tree*, *Avatar's Dream*, *Kingdom of Illumination*, *The End of the World*, and *The Birth of the World*. I hope you are able to see their exhibition of *Joshua Tree* in-person at the Art Gallery of St. Albert.

See the full work at: <https://www.bradnecyk.com/and-all-of-everything>

Sincerely,
aAron Munson