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Ruth Cummins
Bad Cushion

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Bus Projects acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.

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The artist is sitting in the linen cupboard

Bethany O'Connor

Currently the towel is your passport to the gym

The practice of art and the practice of exercise are locked together in the ring of language. Practice's duty is to develop muscle memory. Through repetition the hand comes to know an implement better over time. Practice makes perfect for people that have time to practice. Towards the future, the towel proposes a solution for those too time poor to sign up to fitness subsidiaries.

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Perhaps a towel's function is to act as companion

Various surfaces require the friendship of a towel: timber floors, the back seat of a car, furniture on the move, wet bodies. The towel performs a dual function: absorption, protection. Spaces that exist in the public sphere require towels to act as protection, wrapping around bodies or cushioning glass furniture in metal trailers. Domestic spaces allow the towel to rush over surfaces more quickly; it is liberated. A bath towel sits within the folds of skin on the stomach as if saying 'I love living here'. Its malleability allows it to shape-shift from the outside, in and back again. Here we understand the towel as body cover.

Tomorrow we understand the towel as body double

The opening's desire for human touch suspends the artist in the exhibition space. The gallery that writes the artist's attendance into their exhibition contract is committing time theft. 'The economy of art is deeply immersed in [the] economy of presence'¹. No longer do we trust the art object to exist in solitary confinement, there is more money to be made in the personality, the catalogue, the Q&A, the clothing, the fridge magnet. If the artwork fails to execute itself to plan, these secondary elements are marketable, preventing the system from collapsing in upon itself. Flexibility, transportability and a careful understanding of the body's structure make the towel a prime candidate for relieving the pressure of presence from the human body.

A table for a chair

Currently objects are coopted into the gift economy as tools, secondary to the exchange. Rideshares, free internet code, leftover rosemary sat in a bucket on the footpath all require objects to participate as utensils in the trade. Gains from collective forms of capitalism are usually monetary; by sharing resources money is saved. What is offered by the towel is time. Its promotion to body double requires it to perform the body's various regulatory tasks. Towels supersede bodies: presented as offerings for a time-poor society of artists. Their pliant materiality allows them to adapt their form into that of a spine and limbs. When sewn together and stuffed, they even begin to take on fat and bulge. The towel takes its post as stand in for human presence and the body is free to take part in other activities. Art's existence is saved by the sacrifice of the towel.

Marker making

Neo-capitalism has reimagined the working day to coincide with common military time, or the 24-hour day, requiring bodies to be everywhere at once. You are somewhere as you read this inside your head or maybe in your mouth and so your body is already split in two. A foundation can only have so many cracks before it crumbles. A bulge or curve in the horizontal or vertical plane may indicate the foundation has shifted and is at risk of dismemberment. Take time to inspect for smoothness.

Sustainability strategies implemented by large corporations place air travel at the top of their kill list with physical presence in international affairs referred to in the past tense only. In an aim to reduce carbon omissions bodies are replaced by pixels on a monitor facing outwards, unaware of the movement taking place off screen. A towel is the artist's answer to this change in business.

For too long memorials have stood as siblings for events orchestrated by humans. Now is the time to consider memorializing the present. Just as bronze allows for the circumvention of any conversation about the militarization of history, an encounter with a towel folded and bunched in just the right way becomes a signifier for the human body.

**You will never have more time than you do right
now**

Contemporary art has an obsession with following everything through to the very end. The towel does not obey this rule. Hanging in the neutrality between body and towel rack it appears to lay dormant. Waiting for a call to action.

¹Hito Steyerl, "The Terror of Total Dasein," in *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*, (London, New York: Verso, 2017), page 23.

Ruth Cummins is a Melbourne based artist. Working within the framework of textiles, painting and sculpture Ruth hybridizes objects of utility, sentimentality and the decorative. Ruth recently graduated her Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) at VCA, 2017 and Diploma of Visual Art at Riverina Institute of TAFE, 2013. Recent group shows include *VCA Graduate Exhibition*, Victorian College of the Arts 2017; *Material Matters*, VCA Artspace 2017 and *What to put in Pockets*, George Paton Gallery 2016.

Bethany O'Connor is a writer and artist. Her practice investigates information systems as a way to discern how truth and fiction are constructed. Bethany uses mathematical language, text and diagrammatic drawing to create speculative propositions for how we might come to better understand the data used to fabricate our past and future. She holds a BA with majors in Creative Writing and Art History from the University of Melbourne and is currently completing her BFA at the Victorian College of the Arts.

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Bus Projects,
25-31 Rokeby Street,
Collingwood,
VIC 3066 Australia.
busprojects.org.au/

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