

*Ascension (2013)*

HD Video 30s loop, insulation, wood, monofilament, HDTV

Mike Nixon



*Figure 1: Work installed in the Lobby of UCOL, Whanganui.NZ*

The artist is both the maker, sewing together pieces of insulation to cover the table, and protagonist, embedded digitally in the HDTV.

It is like he is now trapped in a prison of his own making, condemned to repeat the same action endlessly to a monotonous soundtrack. There is no escape.

That prison is a digital one possibly representing the artists growing unease about both the utopian myths being perpetuated by those who benefit from them, and a sense of alienation from this Brave New World, also where the Panopticon is created digitally, those in power use the digital channels to keep under surveillance all its citizens. Who is willing at first walk into the Brave New Shiny World but then realise as they serve themselves in a supermarket, and try and get service in a call center, they have been fooled. Technology promised freedom but instead gave entrapment and surveillance

*Ascension* lies at the crossroads of the physical and virtual, are they separate? What separates the work from the viewer? Emotionally some viewers did have a visceral reaction, but only to the naked male body, turning off the HDTV at the wall.

There are other questions raised by this work, it seems like the figure is both climbing out of and returning to the body, can that be a reference to a soul doing this? What is the soul or are we just a body? Not a soul in a body?

What is the figure thinking and feeling? What does it trigger in the audience? Now, eleven years later as the world now recognizes social media addiction. People, especially the younger generation who have been brought up, some would say indoctrinated by technology, can't go anywhere with a phone to take selfies. They themselves now endlessly repeat it, perhaps hoping to feel some connection in a digital world but often feeling further distanced especially given the phenomenon of a whole group of people on their phones not interacting at all with people around them.

But in this work, the figure is alone, stripped even of clothes like a religious ascetic

Is it only one figure here, the individual on a lonely path fighting to make sense of the changing world by repeating an action?

The concept of individuality was first found in the autobiography of Johann Wolfgang van Goethe (1749-1832)

Ayn Rands *Atlas Shrugged* mythicizes the Individual as heroic, ironically in much the same way as communists mythicizes the collective.

In this artwork the individual pursues alone his dreams.