Artist Talk: Crash Sequence

G. William Webb & Jocko Weyland

Parapet Real Humans

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Amy Granat: Hello. Thank you all so much for coming to the reopening of Parapet Real Humans. It is so exciting to have things back to normal and see familiar faces. I want to introduce Lena Cramer who is working in the gallery and also would like to introduce G. William Webb and Jocko Weyland who travelled to talk about this new work that Gary has just finished. I'm going to hand it over to Lena to read the bios and we'll be ready to talk.

Lena: Hi Everyone. Thank you all for coming out. I'm going to read a bit about our artists and then hand it over to them. G. William Webb lives and works in New York. He is best known for his minimal, considered material and spiritually centered sculptures. He works in ceramics, metal, and film photography. He received his MFA from New York University and has held exhibitions with Room East in New York, Galerie Rodolphe Janssen in Brussels, and many more. Recent projects include a conceptual woodworking workshop at VCU in Doha, Qatar and a two person show at Melanie, a gallery inside a cubicle at the 9/11 museum offices, as well as a pig roast dinner at La Kaje Brooklyn. His work was included in the exhibition “Dust: Plates of the present” at the Centre Pompidou Paris and entered their permanent collection.

Jocko Weyland is the author of The Answer is Never: A Skateboarder' History of the World, The Powder, Danny's Lot, and Geomancy, and the short story collection Eating Glass, published in 2015 by 1980 Editions. He started the serial publication Elk in 2003 that spawned Elk books and the eponymous Elk Gallery, which presented 16 exhibits at non-traditional spaces in New York, Los Angeles, and Beijing between 2006 and 2011. In New York from 1991 to 2006 Weyland worked as an archivist for the Burns Archive, the Sygma Photo Agency, and The Associated Press Photo Library, and later lived in Beijing for two years, teaching English and writing the bimonthly column "Raw China" for Vice Magazine. More recently, he has spent winters as a lift operator at the Diamond Peak ski area in Nevada, and was the chief curator at MOCA Tucson from 2013 to 2017. Over the last decade and a half, he has interviewed various artists for publications such as Cabinet and Apartamento, including Dan Graham, Kiki Smith, Edward Colver, Vito Acconci, Lita Albuquerque, and Olivier Mosset.

G. William Webb: Thanks Lena. Thanks, Amy. Thank you all for coming out. This is awesome.

Jocko Weyland: Yes, I second that and it's great to be here with you, Gary. There's going to be a fairly short preamble to this conversation, which is a quote from Donald Rumsfeld who died on Tuesday. He was the Defense Secretary under George W. Bush, the second Bush, and is often thought of as the architect of the second Iraq War. He was known for some nonsensical and also quite interesting quotes so I'm going to read one that became somewhat notorious. "As we know, there are known knowns. There are the things we know. We also know that there are known unknowns. That is to say, we know that there are some things we do not know, but there are also unknown unknowns. The ones we don't know that we don't know." This comes from an entirely different context than Gary's work, but I believe it will lead into a discussion about the show and

Gary's work in general. Briefly, on a lighter note, there's an accompanying printout of a story I wrote called "Human-Shaped Hole," which was published in *Apartamento* a few years ago, an account of an incident in my life when I was about 19 and ran through a sliding plate glass door. And there's a lot that led up to that, including a lot of risk taking that we're going to talk about and some really unsafe actions on the parts of the partygoers, including burning all kinds of inflammable, toxic materials and drinking hard alcohol and spitting it into the fire to make fire explode. It's miraculous that nobody caught fire. And while that was all going on a friend of mine picked me up and ran through this open sliding glass door and threw me in a pool. And as I was underwater, I was like, I need to go back in there and get Greg and throw him in the water. And I ran back, but in the two seconds I was underwater his girlfriend had shut the sliding glass door. So I ran directly through the sliding glass door, which did in fact make the human-shaped hole in the glass. And there was a lot of blood and I was taken to the hospital, obviously, and I was lying there with all these cuts and the nurse was like, "What happened?" And I answered, "Well, I thought the door was open because it had been open. I just assumed it was open." She reminded me of Nurse Ratched from One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. She looked at me and said, "You know what happens when you assume, right?" And I'm lying there, covered in blood, and didn't know what she was talking about. I had no idea. And she said, "Well, you make an ass out of you and me." That was the first time I'd ever heard the expression and I learned my lesson, and that has been an entryway to this talk. Which is, there are, yes, unknowns, knowns, mystery. There's also security and risk in life. And that's where we're going to begin. And maybe we can start with the car crash work.

GWW: Oh, yeah. I can just speak to that in a moment. I know Jocko from his time curating at MOCA Tucson. He had invited me to do a residency for two weeks at the museum where he was, which was an incredible experience. So in thinking of Jocko for the show and this talk, it was really like a cumulative sort of friendship and conversations through email and meeting up casually when we are in the same city. So when we invited Jocko to do the talk, the work was, to be honest, still progressing. Having an established conversation already, I felt it was important to not be too forthcoming with exactly what the work was. But I did say, just to give him something to go on, that show is about the crash and wanted Jocko to be able to interpret that in any way he could, which was sharing the broken glass story, so that's where we are.

JW: Yeah. So we talked and it was worked out that I could be here. It was really fortuitous. And what is it? You know, the parameters of the show. I said, basically, what's your elevator pitch? And he replied that it's about the crash. I thought that was the best answer because, it says a lot and it's incredibly evocative without being specific in any way, which goes back to Donald Rumsfeld and how much do you need to know about the artist or the background or the biography of the artist and just a sort of a sense of mystery. It was like the crash can be the economic crash, the car crash, the crash scene. We have crashes in our life all the time, the crash after doing a lot of drugs, there are many different versions. And so I thought that was a great answer. And then a few days went by and I thought, I've got ask Gary a little more about what the crash is, but we didn't really talk about it much. So today I saw the show for the first time and maybe this is overly literal, but if we start with the actual literal car crash piece, can you tell me, you said it's from 1973 and you found the images in a stock car magazine?

GWW: Yeah it was an antique magazine. I have an interest in cars through my own biography. My dad made a living and spent his career racing cars and by all intents and purposes that was my sort of ready-made career. And I had to make that decision for myself during college that I was pursuing art and, you know, finishing my degree and not in fact, hopping into race cars.

We've had conversations about how life trajectories work and I think about the sort of cumulative life experience and making a decision to be an artist, but there's still been that sort of inherent influence of racing for me. The experience of finding the magazine and then coming across the sequence, which seemed rather beautiful. It's a series of black and white photographs that actually reminded me of a Japanese watercolor and I wanted to do something, to create a work, being a sculptor that's interested in photography. I definitely wanted the piece it to have a sculptural element to it.

JW: So I've actually never been to a car race, which is funny, considering our relationship and other friendships I have with people. Coincidentally I have another good friend whose father was a race car driver. So I, being quite a few years older than Gary, I used to be obsessed with cars as a kid, which I think was normal at the time. I used to be really into Road & Track and MotorTrend, and this particular magazine called CARtoons, which we're going to talk about with the poster, which is all cartoons of cars. You can look at it closely to see where that comes from, but it's so like Gary that he found this old magazine and it's sort of funny or interesting to me that I might've seen something like this when I was 11 or 12 years old in one of these magazines and that forty years later he's reading or rediscovering it. And even though there's screeching metal, fire, and possible explosions, there is a kind of, as you said, a resemblance to a Japanese watercolor. Also, it's in a circle and racetracks are, well, they are usually ovals. So there's the circularity of the piece on the wall, and the actual racetrack. And then when you see car crashes, they're like spinning, right? So there are circles happening within each frame or print that are echoed in the piece itself. And that's where it's like, you're a sculptor, but you're also using images. Would you like to expand on that?

GWW: Well, I think there's something about visual rhyming which you articulated. The piece is 12 frames and hung circularly in the way it could be alluded to as a clock. The sequence is currently hung clockwise but it's cleated from behind to be hung counter-clockwise as well. The way the work is mapped out on the wall, it can scale to the wall. So in this iteration it's about 72 inches in diameter to fit this wall, but it could be larger on a different wall. The sequence of images also don't start at 12 noon, it's starting closer to nine o'clock, which was also important. I was thinking about ideas of circularity and specifically how abstract time can be. I'm here today, woke up and making breakfast I swore it was Saturday, not Thursday. How many times am I, like, "What day is it? What time is it?" This is so confusing yet we live in time every day. So the circumstances of the wreck involves the driver in the #77 car, Harry Gant, who had an engine failure, his engine blew and leaked oil onto the speedway and that caused the crash for the other cars involved. So, whether the pieces are hung clockwise or counterclockwise, it's sort of referential to finding yourself on a track going the opposite direction. Forwards or backwards. From a time perspective, the entire sequence of photos, which are found images, the sequence of the wreck was probably five to ten seconds total. And here we are able to experience the crash in the gallery in a limitless amount of time.

JW: The study of time, or sort of poetics of time seems to be pretty important, very important, to what you do. And time is actually like all around us, obviously, but we'll get to this piece "Uluru", which is better known as Ayers Rock in Australia. A very distinct rock formation around 350 million years old, according to the experts. And then you've got the rise of humanity with evidence of humans being there 10,000 years ago. And then in 1873 is when the first Europeans saw it and named it Ayers Rock. So that's really, really, time beyond our understanding. And then coming up to the present, or 150 years ago is a little closer. This piece, the title of it refers to something of such incredible age, and then in the framed piece, the episode

or crash happened in 10 seconds. There's a really nice interaction going on between the geological time, the human history of time, and we were talking today about when people talk about these crashes or incidents it's really common for people say it was like slow motion, right? Everybody says, they were in a car crash, and time slowed down. And, and that's what is explicitly happening here. And then you're looking at the piece and the crash all happened so fast and all this noise and fire. But, the gallery has a way, it has slowed it down to the point of, stasis, almost.

GWW: Well, there are two experiences. There's the experience of seeing the images up close and you're able to read each one in detail, but also when you stand back, I mean, if I squint my eyes from here, it's just a shape on the wall in 12 parts.

JW: I had a conversation with somebody who's now standing outside, when they came earlier, and it was only for five minutes and we were talking. He's a scientist and back to knowns and unknowns, what can be known? And I said to him, I'm not trying to be reactionary, but I don't necessarily believe we should know everything. And I mean, that's an opinion or whatever, my take on it, but that goes back to where we started, there are autobiographical elements in these pieces and the conversation with the scientist was, how much does the viewer need to know? That's an eternal question in art, but to me, it seems like you can come in here and get a lot out of these three works without knowing anything about you. Maybe it's revealed over time and the person I was talking to said, "You go back a few days later to look at the show again, and then it's revealed." So time becomes part of that experience.

GWW: I think I definitely use time, or I'm interested in time, as a material. And what I mean by that is, you know, having a job as an artist, punching the clock, this notion of time involves a more traditional sense of how we use time, which is, you know, a calendar year or an hour. By inserting that time into the work I'm interested in what the work looks like further down the road of time. And I think you see that more in the serial pieces such as with the casting of the leaves. They are cast from a growing tree, a deciduous tree that is losing its leaves on a regular, annual cycle.

JW: Specifically an apple tree. The cast of this fallen leaf. There's a lot of razzle-dazzle and static and noise out there in the world of art and culture, whatever you want to call it. And even if we're in opposition, it's hard to not be swept up in it, because it's just a never-ending deluge, right? Art in the broadest sense, and in this specific sense gets us out of that onrush. Not to get into advocacy but there's something really important about that, which maybe gets lost a lot in our incredibly narcissistic and fast paced society.

GWW: Yeah. I think coming from New York City, you're forced to appreciate space and be respectful of space because it's such a commodity. It forces me to be very efficient with space which I bring to the gallery and the gallery as a framing device for ideas. When we walk through that door and enter this space, it ends up becoming very different from what you describe as the razzle-dazzle outside. Different from media, cybernetics, and notification culture where we're just always being buzzed and prodded. I would say in terms of the tone that I set with my work, apprenticing with my father and building race cars set me up as an artist. When I started making art a quality developed that I think in the art world, someone would call minimalism, but for me, seemed natural to the processes of working in this other field. So I think tone of space and tone of work for me helps create something more contemplative. Maybe it goes back to the idea of information or an artist withholding information or mystery, and it's really just to be able to promote wonder and curiosity without being too revealing. I think it's important to be generous

with information, but at a certain point you don't want someone handholding you through your own experience and that's something I'm very sensitive to.

JW: I'm all for it Gary, because people expect instant gratification, honestly, and things to be like wham, bam, and you know what it is. And maybe that's not all positive?

GWW: So for the three works in this show their culmination happened almost simultaneously. To say that I had any answers about what they would be before I could install the pieces, would be kind of humorous. I installed "Uluru" into the gallery floor, specific for this floor. It was not something I was able to execute in my studio. So it was the first time I was seeing the finished work, just a few days ago. Likewise, I had a maquette of Crash Sequence in my studio. It was exciting to see it come together and committing to the show without knowing exactly what the show was. I mean, there's a trust between a curator and a gallerist and an artist, to that extent, but that's what you go to school for and continuing to exhibit. To feel comfortable with unknowing.

JW: The leaf, it's quiet. I think we could use a little bit of soundlessness. We talked about this earlier, but can you discuss the history of materials between the leaf and specifically what's going on there?

GWW: I think for someone coming into the gallery, seeing a leaf and a racetrack, they might ask what do these things have in common? And that's also the question I was asking myself putting them together. I'm growing this plant which is now two years old. I'm not a horticulturist and I'm learning as I'm going along. The first winter when it started losing its leaves I thought I was killing the plant. So there was like this freak-out moment. I knew I couldn't show the plant, because I think the plant is separate from the art. Casting the fallen leaves is almost like a sculpture that's growing itself. Of course it's reproducing leaves as it continues to grow and eventually will produce fruit. I'm thinking about processes of photosynthesis and time and natural materials in the earth in relation to, consumption of fossil fuels, which are actually a direct result of, of nature and earth. The contrast of RPMs of a race engine, consuming, versus the sort of slowness or perceived slowness of photosynthesis and the plant growing, or dying. Drawing that connection. "Uluru" then becomes the oil slick, but it's also the globe. It has the potential energy of a half sphere that is reflected to complete the full sphere and somehow its incompleteness is sort of bringing the crash and the leaf together

JW: There is a biological flora or plant-like aspect to "Uluru" that's interesting. I think there's a lot more to talk about, but I believe though this ship should travel towards its conclusion. I don't want to overdo it but one conversation we had and I hate to use this word, but it came up because this recent last year and a half, the question of safety and COVID obviously because people were freaked out that they were going to die. And my initial reaction was like, well, aren't you freaked out that you're going to die anyway? And so this is maybe not the way to end, but we have to make an attempt to. We talked about all kinds of things, Jersey barriers, and ski lifts and people wearing helmets while they ski, which they didn't do 30 years ago. And the topic of the discussion was, what's kind of going on? Living life is risky, right? But we're making all these attempts to sort of diminish the risk of it. If you're going to drive a race car 150 miles per hour, there's going to be risk involved. And the same if you're going to jump off the rock that's 15 feet high on skis. This is going to sound like I'm being almost glib, but driving up here from Tennessee, I saw highway signs that say, if you've had a crash, tow your vehicle to the side of the road. Does there really need to be the sign that says that? Because we live in a society where there's all these directives do this and do that, and don't do this, and this is bad for you, that is bad for you. And if you're doing this, you have to have this equipment and it's been a real sea

change. In my view this sort of takes away a little from what makes life the precarious endeavor that it is. Of course we want to feel safe and secure, but to overdo that aspect is a sort of stripping away of something that is at its essence.

GWW: We want to feel responsible as humans that share the world, to learn. There are definitely advancements in science and medicine that enables our life expectancy to be longer than it was a hundred years ago. Obviously we're thankful to all our first responders and doctors, yet at the same time, I think these safety mechanisms are a way to process or feel like we're being productive through trauma. Something that I've been thinking about with the work in relation to the trauma of the crash is, what is an artist's role in the world? At it's best, how do artists take chaos and trauma and transform it into something beautiful? The work becomes a reflection of the direct impact of this trauma. A reflection of the impact of the crash.

JW: Yes, I don't think I could top that Gary, seriously. I don't want to be abrupt but I feel that was a very good summation of art in the broadest sense. Art can be all sorts of things, but it does let us contemplate the crashes in a way that maybe softens them or gives them more perspective. I do think if you can achieve that it's a real accomplishment.

GWW: A way of helping us continue to live.