

ONE THIRD OF
A SERIES OF ELEGIES:
II, IV, V, VIII, XV & XVI;
Joseph Buckley at
The Private Gallery of
Rachel Carter and Harry Meadley.

David Steans

In the storm of critical vitriol that followed Rubin and Varnedoe's notorious *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art* at MOMA, New York in 1984, attention was drawn by Thomas McEvilley to the exhibition's omission of works by contemporary artists like Eric Orr and Michael Tracy, whose objects and fetishes incorporated human blood and hair. Like Tracy and Orr, Joseph Buckley's work is ritualistic, but does not plunder an aesthetic semblance of ritual. The work looks like contemporary art, yet the domestic interior in which it is shown (the flat of Rachel Carter and Harry Meadley) is transformed into a shrine and the gallery (the Private Gallery of Rachel Carter and Harry Meadley) into a reliquary.

In the flat's bathroom, a number of potted house plants threaten to engulf the sink, the toilet and the shower. Slick and green, their rude presence does not menace, but mock. They *live*, in the most insidious, seething fashion. In light of human death, their unthinking growth becomes repulsive. They do not threaten our lives, like a triffid, or the giant anthropophagous venus fly-trap of a fevered colonial nightmare might, they simply persist, their stupid tenacity a thuggish affront to our fragile mortality. The house plants and an accompanying video work comprise Buckley's *ELEGYV*.

Untrammelled, unthinking growth is afforded further allusion courtesy of *ELEGY IV*, a certain but unspecified amount of black ink that has been emptied out of three containing perspex boxes onto the floor. Upon entering the gallery one must step over the spillage. Soon enough the oily liquid has seeped under the door and onto the foyer carpet leaving a stain the size of a tennis ball; an unintended but probably indelible death's head. The viewer is deliberately left wanting as to the significance and meaning of individual *ELEGIES*, being granted only the most circumscribing of information about the series as a whole. We know that they are intended as elegies to a real, dead person. We also know that a definite number of eighteen have been conceived, though not all of them have been made yet.

Joseph Buckley's practice is at present solely focused upon the production of a prospective eighteen 'elegies', a third of which make up this remarkable exhibition. Gestures of grief: *ONE THIRD OF A SERIES OF ELEGIES: II, IV, V, VII, XV & XVI* is the penultimate exhibition in an almost year-long program of one night shows in this tiny flat-turned-white cube, and as such its funereal aspect feels apt. The artist takes advantage of the show's intimate setting and brief run by forgoing any interpretative material, instead wandering about and introducing himself to the gallery-goers and offering to field any questions. Forsaking interpretative material is a form of interpretation, a specific approach rather than a lack. It encourages independent thought, and suggests that the interpretation of art is an organic, ongoing process, not a string of pat declarations to be digested - as one would an

instruction manual for a household appliance - without question. The impromptu question and answer session which occurred towards the end of the night between the artist and the assembled visitors stood testament to this. During the aforementioned discussion we discover that *ELEGY IV* and *ELEGY II* (a number of deflated balloons held fast to the ground with a lead weight) have both been exhibited before, in somewhat more triumphant, fighting shape. The former filled its respective boxes; the latter were inflated. This led me to question Buckley about integrity. It is clearly important to the artist that the works properly function as elegies, perhaps more so important than whether or not they function as artworks.

Aside from the recurrence of the colour black, *ELEGIES II, IV, V, VIII, XV and XVI* are devoid of any of the more readily recognisable visual signifiers of death. This wholly personal work buries its sentimentality within a corpus of austere and obscure aesthetic manners. A head-full of lengthy dreadlocks (*ELEGY XVI*) are nailed to the wall in the main space - a living room emptied of its furniture - and whilst definitely uncanny, underline the oddly neutralizing effect that the cool formal presentation of these works have.

The *ELEGIES* are produced in memory of an unspecified individual whose death clearly had a seismic impact on Buckley, and who stated - to paraphrase - that making art, or mounting this series in particular was all he felt he was capable of doing in the face of his loss. The works then, without necessarily being cathartic, fulfill a personal, private function as well as two public ones (as elegy and as artwork). Crucially however we are not asked to mourn, but consume. It is as though the work is cognisant of its own worth and appeal beyond this governing impulse of remembrance, yet exists and operates regardless of the fact.

(2007) A RELIGION WITHOUT BELIEF
Eva Ilouz

(1995) THE INVISIBLES
Grant Morrison

(1956) THE STARS MY DESTINATION
Alfred Bester

(1985) HEIRS OF THE PERISPHERE
Howard Waldrop

(2004) MAYFLOWER II
Stephen Baxter

(1964) THE CRIME AND GLORY OF COMMANDER SUZDAL
Cordwainer Smith

(1963) THE LADY WHO SAILED THE SOUL
Cordwainer Smith

(1935) ODD JOHN
Olaf Stapledon

(1998) TURN OF THE WORLD
Jeanette Winterson

(1952) THE WORLD SHE WANTED
Philip K. Dick

(1951) NO PARTICULAR NIGHT OR MORNING
Ray Bradbury

(1960) FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON
Daniel Keyes

(2005) PROMETHEA
Alan Moore

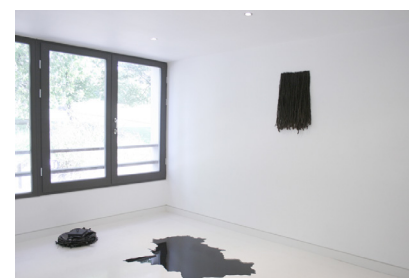
(1954) I AM LEGEND
Richard Matheson

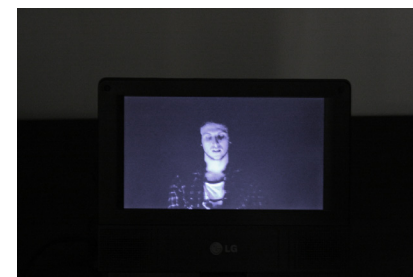
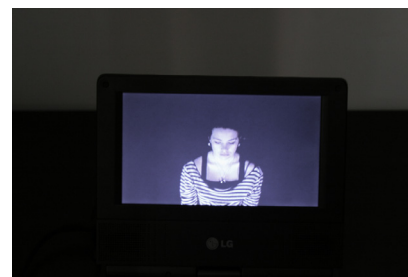
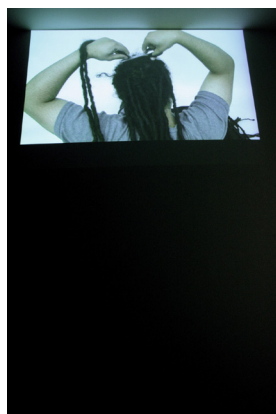
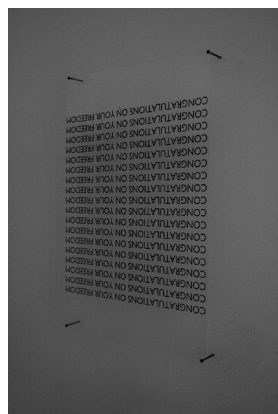
(1937) STARMAKER
Olaf Stapledon

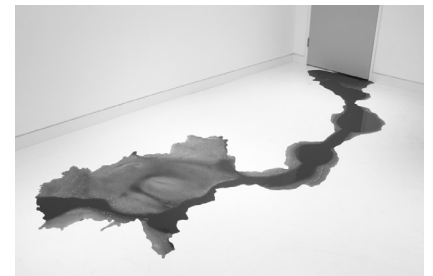
(1962) CITIES IN FLIGHT
James Blish

(1949) KALEIDOSCOPE
Ray Bradbury

(1990) THE USE OF WEAPONS
Iain Banks







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Photographs courtesy of:
The Private Gallery of
Rachel Carter & Harry Meadley

Typeset in 18pt Gill Sans
by Harry Meadley

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Joseph Buckley

1800-2000
18|06|2010

The Private Gallery of
Rachel Carter & Harry Meadley

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