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Perth

- March 24, 2012 Written by [Thea Costantino](#)

[Suspension](#)

Video art is forever haunted by the not-quite-dead specter of cinema. Whether favouring documentary or constructed modes, many contemporary video artists deliberately reference film or at least use it as a point of departure for screen based works. Others prefer to align their video work with static two-dimensional forms such as painting and photography, insisting that the simple fact that the image is moving should not lead viewers to expect the presentation of a fictional world neatly laced up within a linear narrative. In the gallery environment, audiences are regularly divided by video works. The success of artists such as Matthew Barney, Teresa Hubbard & Alexander Birchler and Jesper Just might be partly attributed to their ability to transcend cinema while exploiting its visual, aural and narrative codes so effectively.



Sam Smith, 'Into the Void', 2009, single channel HD video, 5:50 minutes

Suspension is an exhibition of video works that boldly steps outside the forgiving confines of the gallery and enters public space, currently running daily on the large LED screen that has recently sprung up in the Perth Cultural Center. Curator [Erin Coates](#) pitches this program of works as an intensification of cinema's immersive and reality-bending qualities. The works in *Suspension* all seem to inhabit, and elicit, a trance-like state. [Sam Smith](#)'s video 'Into the Void' evinces an interest in altered forms of consciousness, and draws from cinematic devices while reflecting on the nature of representation. A series of stunning cityscapes lull the viewer into a contemplative state. We observe New York through the eyes of a man on an Yves Klein pilgrimage, as he illicitly touches the blue paintings on the walls of MoMA and Gagosian Gallery and absorbs their totemic power. The video closes with a restaging of Klein's famous photograph 'Into the Void', with the protagonist suspended mid-leap, yet moving in time, observing the street below calmly as traffic bustles in the distance.

Other videos in the collection, such as Marcus Canning's '[Hamelin](#)', explicitly reference the psychological tension and physical abjection stimulated by the horror genre. Coates' video 'Thirst' features a single panning shot of a mob of zombies staggering through an abandoned gas station at twilight. There is no narrative crisis in this sequence, no attacks, no acts of heroism or any of the other tropes we have come to expect from the genre, other than the zombies' painful progress. Combined with the setting of the fuel station, a soundtrack featuring gurgling drains and idling motors makes a comment on our societal dependence on oil, while the monotonous gait of the undead seems to suggest the existential horror of a world in stasis.



Erin Coates, 'Thirst', 2012, HD video, 5:09 minutes

This collection of screen works offers several videographic explorations of suspension and the complex passive / active consciousness of the viewer. This thematic focus is further enhanced by Coates' choice to present the work outside of a gallery, challenging conventional viewing practices of video art.