DECENT EXPOSURE: THE UNIVERSITY ART COLLECTION UNDRESSED

GREGORY BENNETT
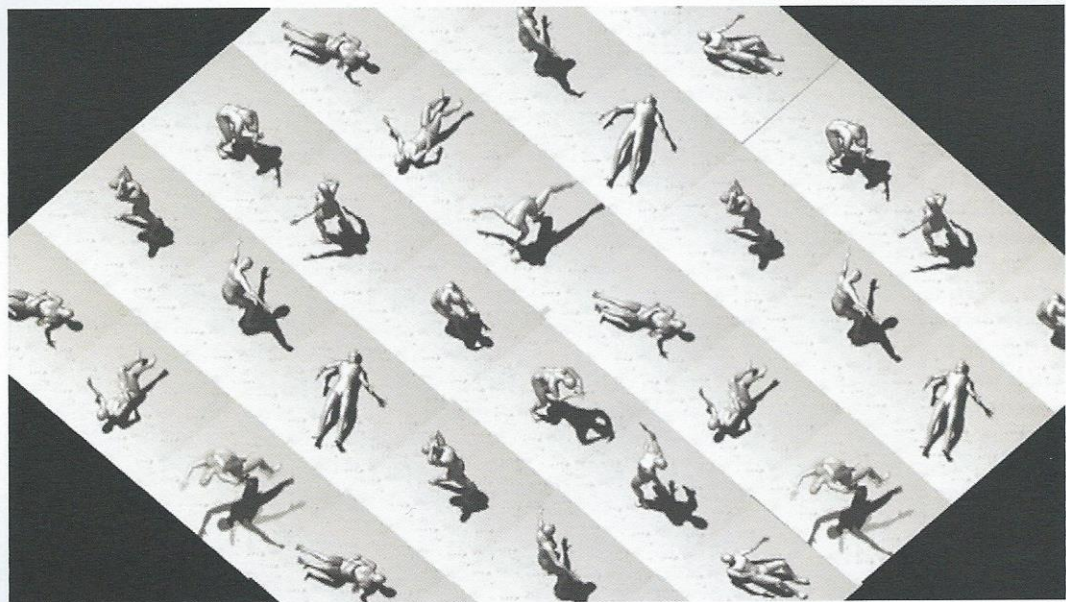
CATRIONA BRITTON

Employing 3D modelling and animation software to replicate movements of digital human form, Gregory Bennett's animation style is reminiscent of early video games constituted from building blocks of large pixels and shapes. This primitive technique is made complex by the relationships figures have with one another, as well as their interactions with the environment.

Bennett concentrates on generic, faceless male figures—similar to mannequins that greet us in shop displays. These animated figures are given a controlled lease of life through movements manipulated by Bennett. Their expressionlessness disconnects us from establishing a relationship with them as subjects. Figures replicate in individually unique loops and cycles in a reference to Eadweard Muybridge's early twentieth-century photographic studies of humans in motion. Is Bennett referring to the routines of our everyday lives, where we become the clichéd "cogs in the wheel"? Physical limitations to the figures' movements within tightly contained spaces suggest proscribed roles for behaviour in the domestic and work realms.

A harsh bright light is thrown onto the figures in each sequence as they enter from one corner of the screen and float to the other through a quasi-dystopian, endless black space, casting shadows across a barren yet textured surface. These are social beings, congregating together within the same crowded environment despite the desolate, monochromatic landscape. This calls to mind German sociologist and film theorist Siegfried Kracauer's idea that people will subconsciously sacrifice their individuality to find some vague meaning in mass participation and mass belonging.

In several sequences, the monochrome is suddenly broken and fiery red seaweed-like streamers ripple out from the sides of cubes or arch over the figures, entrapping them in an electrifying bubble. Sometimes lone figures are lying on a bed, a place of retreat and relaxation, but writhe around in this bubble, as if consumed by their own thoughts. Occasionally they are surrounded by many standing figures packed into a small space. Physical boundaries of personal space in a private area are tested, as opposed to mental boundaries.

As bodies are stacked on top of each other performing synchronised movements, kaleidoscopic patterns blossom and flourish in a geometric choreography reminiscent of 1930s American filmmaker Busby Berkeley's large-scale chorus-girl musical numbers. Bennett mimics the camera's aerial shot so synonymous with Berkeley's dance sequences. Stacked-up bodies in both Bennett's and Berkeley's routines look almost mechanical, denoting the Machine Age and the second wave of industrialisation. Where Berkeley's numbers had musical accompaniments, Bennett's figures are met with "black noise", the opposite of white noise, as if they are stuck in a vacuum of silence. This lack of sound only adds emphasis to those figures that are eerily isolated despite being surrounded by other bodies. It reminds us that even if we are surrounded by other people or constant movement, we must be comfortable with being alone with our own thoughts and own space.