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Left: James Cunningham, *Melaleuca Swamp*
(still), 2023, Photomedia animation and stereo
sound, 64min 15sec.

NorthSite
Contemporary
Arts

X-rays of Time

28 SEPTEMBER – 5 DECEMBER 2026

X-rays of Time is a series of long-form animation artworks that slowly evolve in texture, colour, and form. Each work is generated from an ultra-slow walk through a specific environment and paired with immersive binaural audio

recordings that guide the listener through that real-world location as a virtual journey. Designed to loop indefinitely, the works encourage viewers to pause, linger, and engage deeply with the present moment.

“The slowness of my walking practice addresses conceptual, physical and technical challenges. My attempt at being in present-moment awareness is a way for me to inhabit a performative connectivity to the action of walking.

- JAMES CUNNINGHAM



X-rays of Time

Q&A with James Cunningham

THE TENSION: What are the primary conceptual or physical challenges you are trying to solve in your current performance and photomedia animation?

The slowness of my walking practice addresses conceptual, physical and technical challenges. My attempt at being in present-moment awareness is a way for me to inhabit a performative connectivity to the action of walking. It is also a method for managing a chronic nerve pain condition I've been living with for over three decades. I carry my media capture devices on my body, so even though the deliberate slow and smooth action of my walking enables continuity between shots, sharpness of imagery and a quiet audio recording, there remains an organic movement to the picture framing that would not exist if I used a dolly for example.

My camera always records the ground I walk on. I follow lines, borders between water and land, narrow trails, small creeks. As well as all the textual details, I try to embed the work with graphic geometric divisions of the screen. A kind of modernistic aesthetic that allows the imagination to construct depth from 2D flatness—sometimes a landscape, sometimes a galaxy, or nervous system. I see my animations like abstract paintings. Rather than using paints, brushes or a graphic application, I paint with photos and walking.

THE MATERIAL: For you, the “materials” are time, audio, space, and the human body. How do these elements dictate the direction of your photomedia animation work? Did you encounter any happy accidents or physical limitations during shooting/recording that forced a change in plans?

I enact ultra slow quiet walks in different environments, capturing hi-resolution photographs and binaural audio recordings that I use to make these animation artworks. Embedded in the work is my mindful intentional walking practice, it dictates the slow pace.

I try to remain cognitively present, meaning aware of what is happening at that moment.

My yoga and meditation practices have taught me to attend to the sensations I feel, but also to what I'm looking at or what I can hear. I have had nice encounters with snakes and dragonflies. I love being accompanied by dragonflies because they wait a couple of metres in front of me and only when I'm within a metre, they fly on one metre. It's a little dance that can go on for half an hour. When I encounter a snake we both freeze. I will be transfixed, looking at the snake's head, and it will be constantly licking the air to tell if I'm advancing. We stay there awhile. I'm glad my slow pace didn't completely startle the snake and allowed me to see it from a safe distance. After a while I break the deadlock by moving ever so slightly, and the snake dashes off.



Top Left: James Cunningham, *Arsläjan*, 2023, Photomedia animation and stereo sound, 28min 25sec, Installation View, NorthSite Contemporary Arts.

Bottom Left: James Cunningham, *Das KloHäuschen (Macro)*. 2025, Photomedia animation and stereo sound. 45min 55sec, Installation View, NorthSite Contemporary Arts.

northsite.org.au/exhibitions/x-rays-of-time

Below: James Cunningham, Photomedia animations and stereo sound, (L-R) *Place Pie #1*, 2023, 56min 25 sec | *Rue Sebastien Bourdon*, 2025, 40min 10sec | *Guanxi Wood*, 2023, 46min 55sec | *Melaleuca Swamp*, 2023, 64min 15sec, Installation View, NorthSite Contemporary Arts.



Sometimes I see up ahead an obstruction to the path, like a fallen tree in a creek amassed in flood debris. I'm often surprised that by going slowly, when I'm actually right at the point of needing to find my way through, an opening becomes apparent.

THE BOUNDARY: Performance can feel infinite in the editing room. How do you decide that a photomedia animation piece is officially finished? What does it look like when you “overshoot” or over-edit a sequence, potentially changing its original energy?

Each work encapsulates a walk that I've taken in a real world location. The length of the walk is sometimes clear, but often not. For example, a walk around the block has a natural end point, but a walk along a coastline ends when I choose to end it. It could be three hours, or thirty minutes. I don't edit much out — a few rogue shots, some

interference in the audio, but essentially it's all there. The length of the animation is only slightly less than the actual walk taken. I control the angle of the camera, and the pace and pathway of my walk, but I don't frame any shot, nor any sound that arrives in the recording. The processes I use to layer and animate the imagery are of my design, but there are chance elements in both capture and processing.

THE TRAJECTORY: Where does photomedia animation work sit within the larger evolution of your practice? Is it a continuation of a familiar theme, a radical departure, or a bridge toward something entirely new?

The durational stillness and conscious walking practice I've had since 2007 has informed my live performances, workshops, animations, and photo-media works. My practice focuses on presence, deliberate action, and heightened

awareness of the body's relationship to surrounding environments. Through slow, mindful walking in creeks, wetlands, laneways, and urban spaces, I investigate temporality, embodiment, and environmental perception. The photomedia animations in X-rays of Time embody these themes, and the temporality of those walks. They are creative representations and maybe somewhat metaphorical too, in the sense that the connection one might make between audio elements and abstract visual texture can be likened to connections I experience between my own inner bodily sensations and external sounds in the media capture process.

THE AUDIENCE GAZE: Photomedia animation is a time-based medium, but viewers often scan quickly. What do you hope a viewer experiences about the pacing, sound, or subtle actions after having engaged with your work?

I hope some viewers take a little bit longer than a quick glance. The works change a lot slower than most media items. I think it requires people to slow down, quiet the mind and zone into noticing and aligning one's perception to the rhythm of the work they are observing. The image will have completely changed within two minutes and continues to evolve at a steady pace. Visitors could take them simply as nice abstract images with rich colour and texture, or briefly listen to the audio in various locations. Or after one circuit of the entire exhibition, on the second go around see whether each work has changed dramatically or not. Or one might choose to sit and let themselves be taken on a journey of imaginative associations with the morphing imagery and literally through the environment via the audio recording. The works are designed to be played on loop for indefinite time periods, and viewed for any amount of time at any moment throughout.