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Memorial

William Andrew Finlay Stewart
April 10 – May 2, 2015

William Andrew Finlay Stewart's video installation, *Memorial*, is at once quietly meditative and poignantly thought provoking. The work challenges the viewer to draw a connection between the scrolling list of film credit names and those we chose to honour in war and post-catastrophe memorials. As the video progresses, this juxtaposition reveals itself to be both simple and profound.

Inspired by the lists of deceased and missing service members displayed in a book at the North Atlantic Aviation Museum in Gander, Newfoundland and at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, as well as the names of those who died during the 9/11 Twin Tower attacks at the 911 Memorial in New York City, *Memorial* places the credit sequence in a similar tradition. On his website, Stewart describes the similarities of these memorial lists and film credits as follows:

It is the experience of being told "These names represent people. People who have done something. Remember them". In this way film credits, like war memorials and post-catastrophe lists of names, overwhelm, but unlike those solemn tributes they are presented in the context of entertainment.¹

Stewart was struck by the similar manner in which film credits resemble these memorial lists. In this work, he treats film credits with a level of reverence usually reserved for sites of mourning and veneration, while also subtly hinting at a general state of indifference or boredom towards these same lists.

¹ Stewart, William Andrew Finlay. "Memorial." *Wafs.ca*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Mar. 2015.

The video, a symmetrically pleasing static shot, depicts an audience in a cinema after the film has ended. The flashing light of the projector and an accompanying soundtrack by Jon Lawless signal that a credit sequence has started. While cinema staff routinely go about their cleaning tasks, a few attentive audience members remain in their seats watching the credits scroll while others choose instead to stare at their phone screen or leave the theatre entirely.

The installation space mirrors the cinema seating in the video and generates a slightly disorienting effect on the viewer, giving them enough time to wonder “am I watching myself?” In this way, *Memorial* offers two perspectives. The viewers of the installation become the object dismissed by the on-screen audience while simultaneously recognizing themselves in the as those who dismiss. In combination with the durational aspect of *Memorial*, these multiple perspectives add a dynamic and layered dimensionality to the work. Over time, the viewer is able to move between perspectives.

The durational aspect of *Memorial* allows the viewer to meditate on the work. The continuous 12-minute take does not bombard the viewer with continuous action, but instead offers an image on which they can ruminate over a set period of time. By spending time with the work, one begins to draw connections between three separate concepts: the virtual video space and the installation space, the spectators in the video and the viewers, and memorial and cinema.

The title, *Memorial*, in relation to the video is unsettling because it directly places ideas of memory and loss into the context of entertainment. The way Stewart sets up this juxtaposition is simple, and yet the questions invoked in the minds of critical viewers are insightful. Does it signal a gap in our appreciation of the film industry and those who work to bring us a widely popular source of entertainment? Does the work suggest that as viewers we ought to give more of our attention and time to the hundreds of people whose names we routinely ignore by leaving the cinema before their names make it to the screen? *Memorial* does not provide any definitive answers, but it certainly leaves its viewers with questions. The piece, like a list of names, has the potential to evoke a quiet moment of contemplation if they take the time to appreciate the image in front of them.

- Nathan Hoo