

# The milk carton kids of the 80s (vital symbolic work in the context of panic domesticated)

## A response to *Shelter House* by Zoe Crook

What may first strike one as they enter this exhibition is not a lightning bolt from above (hastily drawn outline), but rather how clearly the textures and obsessions within Grace Crothall's aestheticised and reference-heavy dialogue have been translated into being.

This is not a show about religion, nor is it a personal exegesis.

*Father and son/Mind and stomach/Adult and child/  
Flammable and concrete/Knowledge and naivety.*

The dualities in the architecture, spatial layout and design are what initially appear to sit at the core of *Shelter House*.

But, as one becomes accustomed to the space, what is gradually exposed is how these relationships are purposefully disproportionate, an unevenly weighted power dynamic. Never reaching equilibrium, the cycle of energy flows one way like an hourglass, requiring intervention to be upended. It is a metabolism of sorts.

*It is a welcoming embrace and then a cold shudder.*

These relationships are further emphasised in the series of texts present in the second room: "End time Prophecies",

“Love only god”, “this demonstration seeks to teach children about the elasticity of sin”. The multiple textural contradictions—effervescent colouring in, moody hazed painting, seductive banners and a carpeted wall—allow the gestalt to float between ideology and form; the essence of the work exists in this fluidity.

*An occultic stew pouring fantasy on fantasy.*

The door separating the two spaces, glassy and institutional, suggests a transparency that does not really exist. What this membrane actually comes to represent is a portent for acid reflux.

*Wise digestive body with pop syncopated metabolics; construed metaphysics.*

Abject in all regards, as something befitting a body horror advancing into satanic panic (and the fluids therein), the bodily exposition is succinctly summarised by a game of Operation.

*Filmic technology as a prosthetic for human memory.*

It is to be remembered at this point that Satanic panic is a focus on an entirely fictitious conspiracy. Framed via a losing battle between tradition and a newly secularised world, fantasy bled into reality, media fueling the moral risk. Technology and science were brought close to the center, slickening the sacred space into a global mogul.

*If this show was a treatise on fluid it would be about a viscose tapioca-like false orange cheese. Based on something real but then stretched and sinewy when lifted,*

*whipped to a foam on demand.*

Crothall touches on this through purposeful adaptations of capital mainframes and neoliberal textures, and references to an unheimlich (un-homely) corporality. The brand of the megachurch, playing with pop culture and big experience, is similarly pre-ordained, and concreted by highly stylised aesthetics.

*But the VHS was GA.*

Dealing with big thematic tropes is never fun, and rarely is it pulled off, but let's be clear, *Shelter House* is very far from a foray into reverence unless you have a keen eye for Lynch. Inherently tied to the nineties, this exorcism of potent fantasy inebriated by reality (from the ilk of the school dungeon and fudge cake consumed in *Matilda*) has a distinct tinge of horror to it.

*Shelter House* relies on a child-like sensibility that when present, pulls abstract units into a narrative. The sensation that is created becomes a thing of its own, and it is this thing that Crothall speaks to.

Exploring complexity through abstraction whilst invoking cinematic grammar; dramatic effect here is an ode to Kuleshov, justly exposed in the editing.