Good evening ladies and gentlemen

I have known Pablo for a few years now, and have seen his photographic practice strengthen, gain momentum and explore diverse presentations for the work, and as a consequence how it is viewed and interpreted by the audience. This to me shows an artist who understands the strengths of his own practice, his direction and intentions, and is not scared to push the boundaries within which the medium operates and by extension his own methodology.

In ***The Photograph as Contemporary Art***, Charlotte Cotton comments “…non-human things, often quite ordinary, everyday objects, can be made extraordinary by being photographed.” She goes on “edges or corners of things, abandoned spaces, rubbish and decay, and fugitive or ephemeral forms, such as condensation and light.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This is the photographic imagery that pervades the exhibition *Escape Artist*, the forgotten and frayed edges of the action.

John Szarkowski in ***The Photographer’s Eye (1966)*** comments “to quote out of context is the essence of the photographer’s craft. His central problem is a simple one: what shall he include, what shall he reject? The line of decision between in and out is the picture’s edge. The photographer’s edge defines content. It isolates unexpected juxtapositions. By surrounding two facts it creates a relationship. “[[2]](#footnote-2)

There is a compelling clarity in these images. Documenting the detail that the naked eye perceives as possibly trivial, maybe only noticed by a scattering of fleeting glances or most often even overlooked, the images suggest that perhaps the subject presented is not trivial at all but loaded with meaning, just disregarded behind a veneer of indifference until now, until the moment when we are convinced otherwise by the photographer’s vision.

*Escape Artist* is auto-biographical, a travel self-portrait that documents a form of escapism and yet it does so lightly without autobiographical heaviness.

The photographic images allude to particular scenes from a fictitious film, *Escape Artist* and act as a stimulus to encourage the viewer to become actively involved in each scene or frame, as with a film.

In ***The Problems of Philosophy[[3]](#footnote-3)(1912)***Bertrand Russellquestionsif what we see is what we get? Does the world correspond to our experience of it? *Escape Artist* invites the viewer to explore their own interpretation of the images, creating new relationships and escaping into new if illusory realities and explorations.

These works document a resilient sense of presence and quiet sense of absence. In works such as ***Clouded Dreams*** there is a sense that Pablo has captured a defining moment[[4]](#footnote-4) (to use the immortalised words of Cartier-Bresson), which has less to do with a dramatic climax than a visual awareness of the importance of time and the fugitive nature of an image.

In this context the title of the exhibition has also taken on a site specific relationship to Heathcote’s previous incarnation as a mental health treatment facility. Pablo has intentionally wanted to explore the idea of escapism as more than merely breaking free it is also about looking inward, avoiding normality and routine. To see the role of the escape artist as someone that personifies freedom and pushes the limits of their own realities.

The connection between the film posters, the photographs and Heathcote’s past, traces a more personal escapism; one of people’s need and ability to escape reality intentionally or subconsciously, the *Escape Artist* was once here, in the now vacant rooms or behind the windows, curtains, doors and residues of existence in the photographs.

Details and fragments of a whole, they cannot tell the whole story, the ripped layering of the film posters in the first room attest to the remnants of a once perfect setting, sequence of filmic existences, a measure of the passing of time, which for the patients in this structure must have seemed endless, in their repetitive and prohibitive timelessness.

*©Paola Anselmi, April 2015 – opening night speech, Escape Artist. Pablo Hughes, Heathcote Museum & Gallery, 18 April – 24 May 2015.*

1. Cotton, Charlotte. *The Photograph As Contemporary Art*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2009. Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Szarkowski, John. *The Photographer's Eye*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007. Print. P.69 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.ditext.com/russell/russell.html#pref> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cartier-Bresson, Henri, and Clément Chéroux. *The Decisive Moment*. Göttingen: Steidl, 2014. Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)