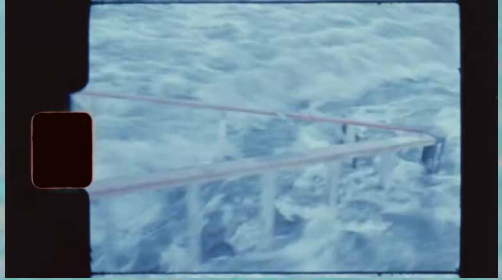


# Jayden Dreher: Revolutionizing Relationships in Embodied Practices

Artworks and artist photos by Jayden Dreher  
Profile by Kiran Dhaliwal



It is important to establish healthy working relationships with the people in our lives, whether at work or school. Is this person reliable? Are my strengths able to compensate for their weaknesses? Do I understand their ins and outs? These are some questions interdisciplinary artist Jayden Dreher may ask of the tools he works with. This care and consideration that he has for something like an old film camera found in a thrift shop comes through in his work, adding a veil of intimacy and authenticity to the documented experience. But there is more to it than just the mutual relationship. Dreher, who is completing a double-major in art history and visual art, describes his practice as being “equal parts theory and content,” crediting art history classes and professors that



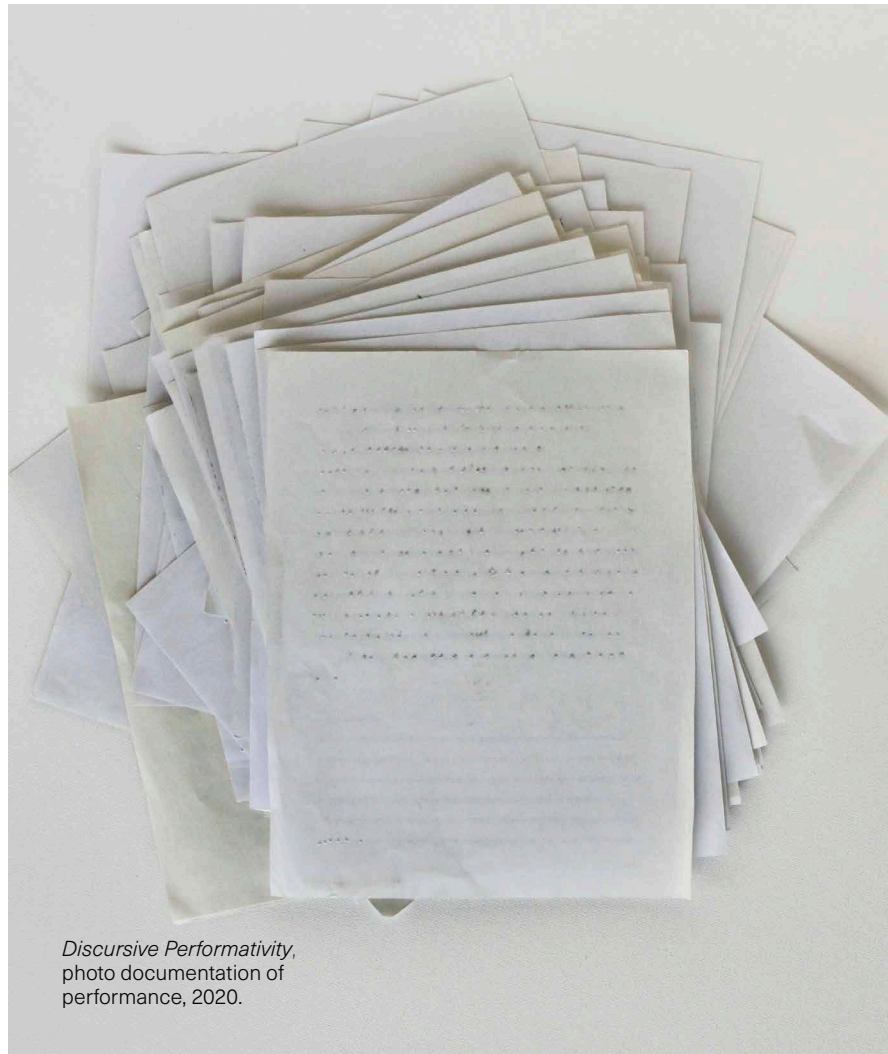
Jayden Dreher:  
Revolutionizing  
Relationships in  
Embodied Practices  
JAYDEN DREHER &  
KIRAN DHALIWAL

*“I really like being in my work ... and not being able to separate my body from my body of work.”*



challenged students to theorize and conceptualize their art. This was the part of art history he really enjoyed, saying that “it’s these theoretical and conceptual aspects that bolster the work and make it more meaningful.” Dreher mobilizes these aspects in his own practice and also centres his lived experience in everything he creates. This not only makes his work more meaningful, but also allows him to explore his identity and relationship to the world around him. “I really like being in my work,” he says, “and not being able to separate my body from my body of work.”

Dreher arrived in Montreal a day or so before he and I met via Zoom for our interview, and was settling in for his month-long stay there. The idea of conducting an interview is nerve-wracking as is, but to do it online is a whole other story. I was worried that not meeting Dreher in person and seeing his studio, his sacred creative space, would leave too large a hole in my profile of him. Of course, these circumstances weren’t ideal, and when asked about how he is handling isolation and the pandemic, he admits he is someone who “likes people and interacting with people,” but “I can’t complain—everything has been fine and I’m healthy.” Living through a global pandemic has left a mark on us all as we continue to work, create, and survive through it.



*Discursive Performativity*,  
photo documentation of  
performance, 2020.

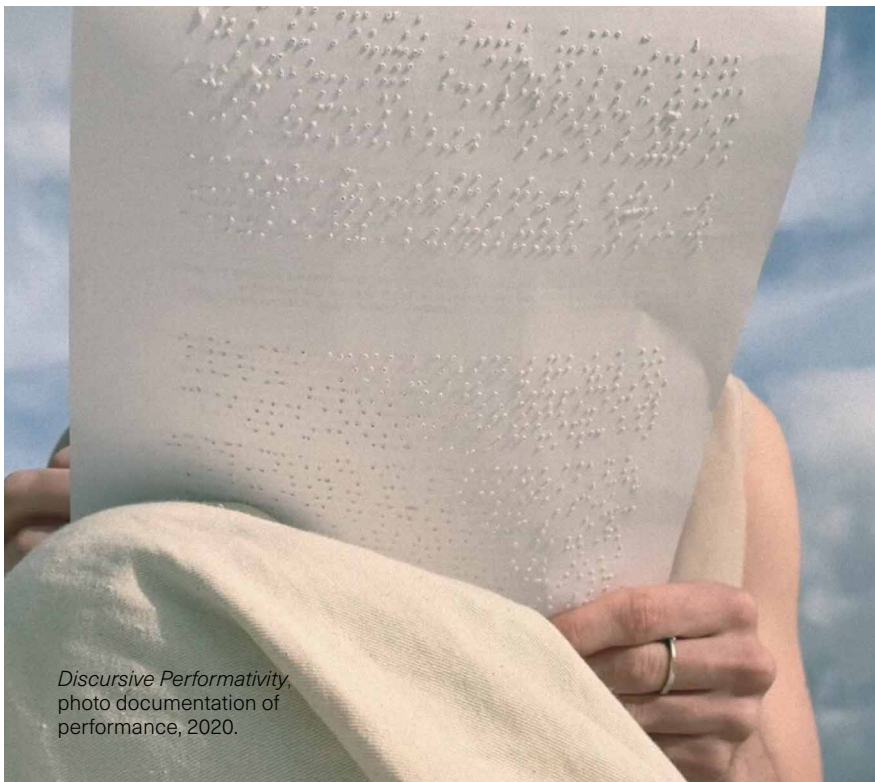
Dreher’s *Discursive Performativity* (2020), photo documentation of a performance, was shot just after Vancouver was first shut down, in the spring of 2020. Although it was intended to be performed in person for class, due to COVID-19 protocols and classes transitioning to remote learning, Dreher had to record it as a video instead. The performance itself consisted of the artist printing off every paper he wrote during his time at UBC,

sitting in an empty parking lot, going through the documents line by line, and puncturing a hole into every letter that included a circle. The papers were then disseminated throughout the parking lot by the wind, after which they were collected, compiled, and stacked into an art object. Although still somewhat legible on one side, this final pile of papers was punctured so the opposite side resembled something



like braille by the end. “I didn’t realize it was going to take that long,” he says, “I was in a parking lot by myself doing this frivolous task for the institution, which is essentially what I had been doing with all these papers [written for school] and it felt so pointless. Then it was being spread and no one was reading anything. It was kind of like this wasted object and—” Dreher pauses and hesitates before adding: “not that I’m comparing my degree to this performance, but it is very similar. What am I going to do with all of this stuff?”

Dreher started his artistic journey at UBC interested in more traditional practices such as drawing and painting. His love for film and video was a slow burn and there were a few different factors that contributed to his deep appreciation for these mediums. “Film offers a very intimate but also performative and exposing ability for an artist,” he says, “there’s a lot of layers to my love for film.” Dreher first got involved with older cameras through a print film class, and began to question how he was documenting his work while taking a performance art class. He becomes visibly excited when talking about finding different cameras to capture authentic experiences and the idea of how a particular camera was meant to be used when it first came out. He



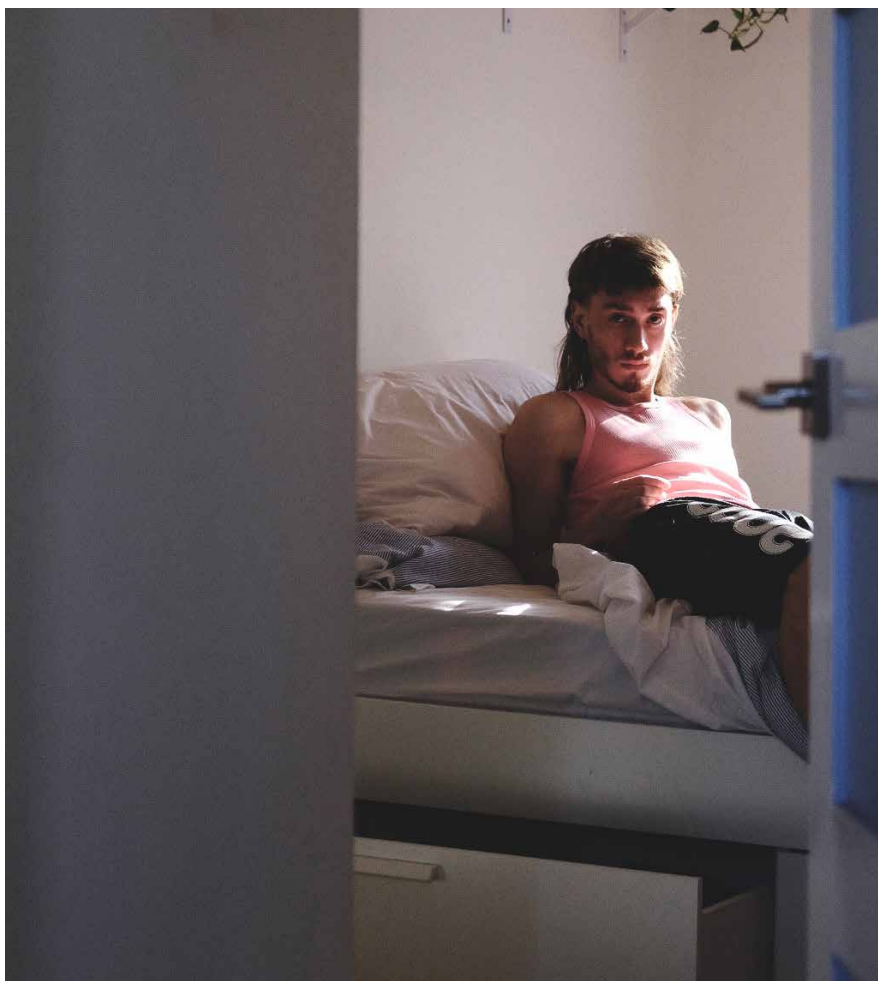
*Discursive Performativity*,  
photo documentation of  
performance, 2020.



*Beyond the Frame  
(how to care for a  
fallen ladder), Super  
8 Film, 2021.*

references *Beyond the Frame (how to care for a fallen ladder)* (2021), a three-minute short film shot on a Super 8 film camera. The film depicts Dreher attempting to foster a relationship with a ladder. There are shots of him carrying it in and out of the water as well as washing it by hand with a cloth. The entire film is tinted blue, adding a cold atmosphere that counters the warmth the performance exudes as Dreher tends to the ladder. This project speaks to the one-sided relationship many artists have with their tools. No one asks about the conditions of a painter's brushes, how they're treated, or whether they are repaid for all they give. Dreher found the Super 8 camera at a thrift store for only two dollars, adding:

I didn't even know if it would work. The whole thing was my relationship to the ladder, the actual visuals, but then also my relationship with the camera. So there's a parallel because I need





*Untitled and unfinished—work in progress*, Stills from camcorder footage, 2021.

the camera to work in order to get the product, but I don't know if it will and that's just what the project is going to be about. The same way the ladder needs me to set it up and stand it up, I need the ladder to get out of the water.

Dreher's most recent project follows a similar process of "finding a camera, trying to establish a working relationship with the camera, and seeing what that collaboration will bring about." *Being in Time (dancing with david)* (2021) is an experimental video montage that explores queer identity, the notion of documentation, and being in a specific time. The maximalist



film consists of personal footage taken from Dreher's daily life and interspersed with the main performance art footage of him dancing and stripping for the camera. Visuals are spliced and laid over one another, accompanied by various sounds and audio clips in a way that makes it all feel like a collection of memories. For this project, Dreher didn't have a singular intention or end goal, instead he remained open and allowed for the film to develop on its own—adjusting and



reworking as new footage was added. Dreher shows his ability to curate visuals and footage in a way that centres both him and his experience through film and documentation. As he was about to elaborate on the footage of him dancing, he suddenly stops and asks me: “Do you know David Wojnarowicz?” I shake my head and receive a quick summary. Wojnarowicz was a very prolific, largely self-taught, queer artist who came to prominence in 1980s New York through his photography and film. During the AIDS epidemic, he took a strong activist stand and fought until his tragic death from the illness in the early nineties. Dreher goes on to talk about seeing Wojnarowicz’s work two years ago at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery on campus—specifically referencing a monologue that has stuck with him from *Fear of Disclosure: the psycho-social implications of HIV revelation* (1989), a five-minute



film of two dancers. “It’s weird, this time that I’m in, and I want to dance with David, but I can’t,” he says, “so I’m trying to rectify my daily existence and this time that I can’t access.” So this is *the* David, “it’s specifically my relationship with David. But more vaguely, my relationship to that time I have a nostalgia for, I wish I was alive in,

but I don’t have access to.” In this film, Dreher creates a space where he can insert clips of his life on the same plane as clips of queer artists of the past whom he admires, to be in the same time. Dreher also uses this project to think about his relationship with queer artists that lived and died during the AIDS epidemic, and with their work—





specifically David Wojnarowicz. What stands between him and these artists is time. By researching their body of work, he is, in a way, establishing a relationship with them. This film is therefore both a product of his research and a reconciliation with himself and the inseparability of time and self. He concludes his project statement with: “Through the maximal layering and fragmenting of clips,



I attempted to create a queer video archive of performance and life in order to help understand my time, my place, and my life.”

*Being in Time* embodies all the ideas that are integral to Dreher’s practice: incorporating theory and concept while also blurring the lines between himself and his project, and building non-exploitative and unconventional relationships with the objects he works with. After over an hour of talking, it was evident that art and creation are such an important part of Dreher’s life. He describes it as an urge, saying, “I’m making art because I have to. It’s all I know. It is the main way for me to understand who I am.” What makes Dreher’s work so distinct is how unique it is to him. The things he creates cannot be replicated or recreated by anyone, including himself. The methods he used to arrange footage were based on what he thought worked well together at a very specific time. Those methods could be completely different now. For Dreher, the process of creating is just as integral to his work as the finished product. The relationships he builds with all aspects of his work not only make him distinctive but allow him to turn his tools into a vehicle to better understand and express himself, giving objects equal power so they meet him where he is.