



**HARLEY
MORMAN
LET'S DO
THE
TIME WARP
AGAIN**

HARLEY MORMAN LET'S DO THE TIME WARP AGAIN

Art Gallery of Alberta
October 9, 2021-January 30, 2022

What is the Time Warp? In a technical sense, “it’s just a jump to the left, and then a step to the right;”¹ in a more conceptual sense, as Harley Morman intends, it is the blending and morphing of time, where multiple, sometimes conflicting views are held in tandem. It is a questioning of the linearity of time and the queering of it. Morman’s work blends and warps time while it highlights, makes absurd and breaks down the gender binary along with several other binaries that he sets up in his work. This exhibition offers a playful way to examine anxieties about change and assumptions about gender transitions, while also presenting the opportunity to reorder or recontextualize one’s life and one’s points of view.

Many media and materials are used in the exhibition *Let’s Do the Time Warp Again*, but the core of Morman’s interest lies in lenticulars. Although the word “lenticular” might be unfamiliar, these retro animations likely are not. A lenticular print combines two or more usually related images that seem to come alive when you move or tilt them. Lenticulars were used on toys, bookmarks, and might have been found on any number of things at a Scholastic book fair or a prize in a cereal box. Lenticulars are also sometimes referred to by many other names including Vari-Vue or Magic Motion, flickers, winkies, wiggle pictures and tilt cards.² Morman takes great care in naming and titling his works so it is curious that his technology of choice is common and familiar, but its many names are widely unknown and unrecognized. Even though text and language are important to Morman’s practice, much of his imagery functions independent of it. By using lenticulars in his artworks, Morman presents images that transform as you move around the exhibition space to show how a change in perspective can completely alter what and how you see, even if you do not have the words to describe it.

Morman’s work typically centres around lenticulars but also incorporates and references the aesthetic of other childhood novelty materials like Perler beads and different types of stickers and erasers. Most of the materials that Morman is interested in, including parts of the lenticulars, are plastic. This is something that has been extensively considered by the artist. Although plastic has been marketed and is often used as something that is disposable and temporary, in actuality it is not. Morman considers this material’s long lifespan, reaching not only into the future but into the past as well. He has noted that plastic is made of dinosaurs, and it will last forever. This notion is indicative of a sort of fantastical



Best Boy, 2021. Lenticular digital image. Courtesy of the Artist

approach to the world that is unconventionally obvious and logical. Morman considers the materials that he works with as metaphors and he sees plastic as a precious material that is too beautiful to be wasted on disposable objects.

The series of lenticulars in *Let's Do the Time Warp Again* show Morman at various times in his life. One from what we recognize as the past and—even though we know that photography can only ever give views of various pasts—one we read as the near-present. As viewers take a jump to the left and a step to the right in front of the works, the images animate and blend. Morman is trans and in the younger portraits he presents as a young or teenage girl. When one realizes they are engaging with multiple images of one person, the divide between them flickers and dissolves even more and ideas of past and present, young and old, man and girl are disrupted, and multiple views can be seen at the same time. We should not think of the two images in each lenticular as two versions of the artist but rather two points along a process of perpetual becoming.³ Morman is interested in using lenticular technology specifically because of its distortion and disruption of time and linearity. To create this work Morman used his school photos from grades 5 through 12 and paired them with recent portraits. Each of the contemporary portraits has been considered to match, support, or mirror the older portrait. Each relationship created between old and new is unique and speaks to the complexity of knowing the self over time and how the self can change and stay the same in sometimes unexpected ways.

Morman works to reconnect deeply with where he was at and how he was feeling in each of the grade school portraits. Each have corresponding anecdotes that function as artifacts of emotion. In grade 11, the school photographer refused to take Morman's photo because of his purple hair and "this is what a feminist looks like" t-shirt. He made his mom take the photo anyway as a document of both outrage and an outfit he was proud of. In the lenticular, the contemporary Morman stands shoulder to shoulder with his young counterpart. There is a feeling of standing in solidarity with his young self. Morman describes grade 9 as sad. His contemporary portrait in this lenticular is of a much smaller scale and almost fades into the background. Here, young Morman is given centre stage and the space and opportunity to show and feel whatever they like. Morman has monumentalized what he reads as discomfort in the younger portrait. In some of the portraits, the faces line up seamlessly



Never Change (Grade 5), 2021. Lenticular light box. Courtesy of the Artist

to allow you to see a clear transition; in others, they mirror each other's poses, almost facing one another in conversation. In all of them, Morman has spent a lot of time examining and considering his younger self to read into the portraits and then match the affect. This variety speaks to the complexity of selfhood and the blurry ambiguousness of change and transition.

The school portraits give the viewer, and the viewer's body, control of how time is manipulated. The viewer can pause, rewind, replay and reverse at any speed they like, and as many times as they want. Linear time does not exist within the lenticulars, as it is just as likely for the older person we see to change into the younger one as it is for the younger to morph into the older. What Morman is asking of viewers, is to hold these views simultaneously and take pleasure in being able to slide back and forth between them with ease or stand in just the right spot where you can see both. When holding both of the views at once, Morman hopes to breakdown not only the gender binary but to replace an old/young binary with an idea of continuity.

This series of blended portraits is called *Never Change*. Morman describes this as a sentiment that someone who doesn't know you very well might write in your yearbook. It is a common and odd statement. How could you not, or would you not want to, change or grow after middle school or high school? Aren't we/are we always changing? We could also look at this conversely and wonder, how much DO we really change? Although Morman's appearance has changed drastically between his younger and older self, how do we know if he has changed that much at all? In the work, Morman does not answer these questions but allows them to be rolled around and considered by the viewer to think about both the artist's sense of self and one's own selfhood.

Morman's work is nostalgic. He is interested in nostalgia on both a conceptual and material level. First classified as a disease, nostalgia was widely recognized in World War I soldiers and described as a melancholic homesickness and a longing for the past that is mixed up with a longing for home.⁴ These days we recognize nostalgia not only as a negative experience but one that can be mixed with joy as well. For Morman, nostalgia is an emotion rooted in the present. It is not only a longing for the past but an exercise in remaking our perception of it. By revisiting the feelings conjured by the materials that he employs, he is able to



Never Change (Grade 11), 2021. Lenticular light box. Courtesy of the Artist





Left: Source image for *Never Change* (Grade 11). Photograph: Yvonne Morman; **Right:** Source image for *Never Change* (Grade 11). Photograph: Angeline Simon

recreate, rebuild and rethink the past—but with difference. For Morman, working with nostalgia is about being able to hold the contradictory and oppositional elements of this emotion in tandem. This complex emotion is therefore also a metaphor for the anti-binary point of view that Morman is proposing.

Most would not consider play as a frivolous way for children to spend time; play, in children, is seen as a way to learn, to process the world and to cope with anxiety. Most, however, see discarding play as a necessary part of growing up. Morman's work often considers play as a legitimate way to spend time for all ages. Morman does not specifically consider children, or adults, as his audience but in his very approach to the world and to art making, he produces work that is accessible, enjoyable and pleasurable for people of all ages. Morman takes having fun very seriously. Each of the elements in *Let's Do the Time Warp Again* are designed for your engagement, interaction and enjoyment.

Playing with the mirrored elements in this exhibition allows you to see yourself and your surroundings in new ways. Morman is interested in how the mirrors offer unexpected or alternate views of works in the exhibition. They should be used to find different angles and perhaps different meanings in the works.



Mirage, 2021. Optical illusion. Courtesy of the Artist

While considering the exhibition's framework of nostalgia, these mirrors offer the ability to "look back" or see behind oneself. Of course, they also provide the opportunity to look at oneself. This is not purely for vanity but to experiment, and maybe fail, in aligning elements in your view. Similarly to Morman's interest in the glitches in views offered by the lenticulars, he is also interested in the distortion of perception that happens when looking in a mirror—think of the disconnect between eye and hand when trying to cut or style your own hair.

There is a large portion of Harley Morman's work that focuses on his dual interest in stickers and erasers. Both elements are inseparable from a Western middle school experience. Because stickers are used as reward and erasers are used when you make a mistake, for Morman they symbolize success and failure. There is a playful false binary in which Morman positions these two elements.

In *Mirage*, Morman displays an optical illusion that appears to show a tiny rainbow eraser floating in mid-air. This illusion is surrounded by a small selection of his collection of stickers and erasers. The shapes of many of the works in the exhibition are inspired by the vague shapes left behind after a sticker has been peeled off its sheet. Some, like a heart, might be recognizable but most remain an unknowable trace.

There are several elements in the exhibition that attempt to keep track or keep score. The portraits track time, although in the end they ultimately confuse it. Stickers can be used within various tracking systems to mark success or arbitrary advancement but on their own there is no inherent thing they are scoring. Clocks, of course, have the ability to track and organize our lives but the clocks in Morman's exhibition do not abide by linear time. Some march backwards or are stuck, others seem to have their own personal logic that remains unknowable to those observing. The central piece in the exhibition is a scoreboard. What sort of game is it tracking? What type of basket/goal/home run would make it advance? Or might the goal of this game be to get to 0? Who is home and who is away? Who is the underdog and what team are we cheering for? The numbers on the scoreboard flicker between 01 and 10 and, since the entire work is meant to be viewed in a mirror, each number is always 01 and 10 simultaneously, even as they flip back and forth. This breakdown of binary is a wonderful pun that also plays off many other works in the exhibition.

Let's Do the Time Warp Again is a lighthearted manifestation of both academic rigour and critical reflection on the nature of the self over time and of time itself experienced through a queer and trans perspective. Harley Morman's work in this exhibition encourages viewers to playfully consider how they regard themselves and others. The works offer absurd binaries and both fluid and stilted transitions that push towards seeing things on a continuum rather than in terms of opposition. The work is deep yet accessible and makes the act of seeing, looking back and being seen fun.

Endnotes

- 1 *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, directed by Jim Sharman (Michael White Productions, 1975).
- 2 Frank Didik, "VARI-VUE (tm) Inventor of the Lenticular Imaging Technique," accessed August 10, 2021, http://www.didik.com/vv_his.htm.
- 3 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 235.
- 4 Michael Roper, "Nostalgia As An Emotional Experience In The Great War," *The Historical Journal* 54, no. 2 (2011): 421-451.

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY HARLEY MORMAN

Harley Mormon's visual work takes a playful approach to examining the social relations between art, artists and institutions. A settler on Treaty 7 land, Mormon is trans and has lived with multiple sclerosis for over a decade. While earning a B.A. in Sociology from the University of Saskatchewan (2003) he worked in communications with various queer and cultural non-profits. In 2016, he received an M.F.A. from the University of Lethbridge, where he is currently a PhD student in Cultural, Social, and Political Thought. Living between a used RV dealership and a potato chip factory, Mormon can be found riding his red tricycle around around around around, over, under, and through.

WRITER'S BIOGRAPHY LINDSEY SHARMAN

Lindsey V. Sharman is Curator at the Art Gallery of Alberta. She has studied Art History and Curating in Canada, England, Switzerland and Austria, earning degrees from the University of Saskatchewan and the University of the Arts, Zurich. From 2012-2018 she was the first curator of the Founders' Gallery at the Military Museums in Calgary, an academic appointment through the University of Calgary.

LIST OF WORKS

Never Change (Grade 5), 2021

Lenticular light box
Courtesy of the Artist

Never Change (Grade 6), 2021

Lenticular light box
Courtesy of the Artist

Never Change (Grade 7), 2021

Lenticular light box
Courtesy of the Artist

Never Change (Grade 8), 2021

Lenticular light box
Courtesy of the Artist

Never Change (Grade 9), 2021

Lenticular light box
Courtesy of the Artist

Never Change (Grade 10), 2021

Lenticular light box
Courtesy of the Artist

Never Change (Grade 11), 2021

Lenticular light box
Courtesy of the Artist

Never Change (Grade 12), 2021

Lenticular light box
Courtesy of the Artist

Scorekeeper, 2021

'Backward' scoreboard with
lenticular numbers & hanging
mirrors

Courtesy of the Artist

Wow Mom, 2021

Motorized lenticular
Courtesy of the Artist

Spaced Out, 2021

Motorized lenticular
Courtesy of the Artist

Maybe, 2021

Motorized lenticular
Courtesy of the Artist

Lemon-Lime, 2021

Motorized lenticular
Courtesy of the Artist

Really Drives You Insane, 2021

Motorized lenticular
Courtesy of the Artist

SuperShades, 2021

Lenticular makeup palette
Courtesy of the Artist

Time Slip, 2021

Clock with lenticular digital
images
Courtesy of the Artist

Best Boy, 2021

Lenticular digital image
Courtesy of the Artist

Scholastic, 2021

Lenticular digital image
Courtesy of the Artist

Great!, 2021

Lenticular digital image
Courtesy of the Artist

Lucky, 2021

Lenticular digital image
Courtesy of the Artist

Never Change, 2021

Lenticular digital image
Courtesy of the Artist

The Transylvanians, 2021

Three hand mirrors with
lenticular eyeglasses
Courtesy of the Artist

Mirage, 2021

Optical illusion with assorted
small artifacts
Courtesy of the Artist



ISBN: 978-1-77179-038-3

Design: Charles Cousins

Photography: All photog

Essay: Lindsey Sharman

Printing: Burke Group

Printed in Canada



Canada Council
for the Arts

Consell des Arts
du Canada

