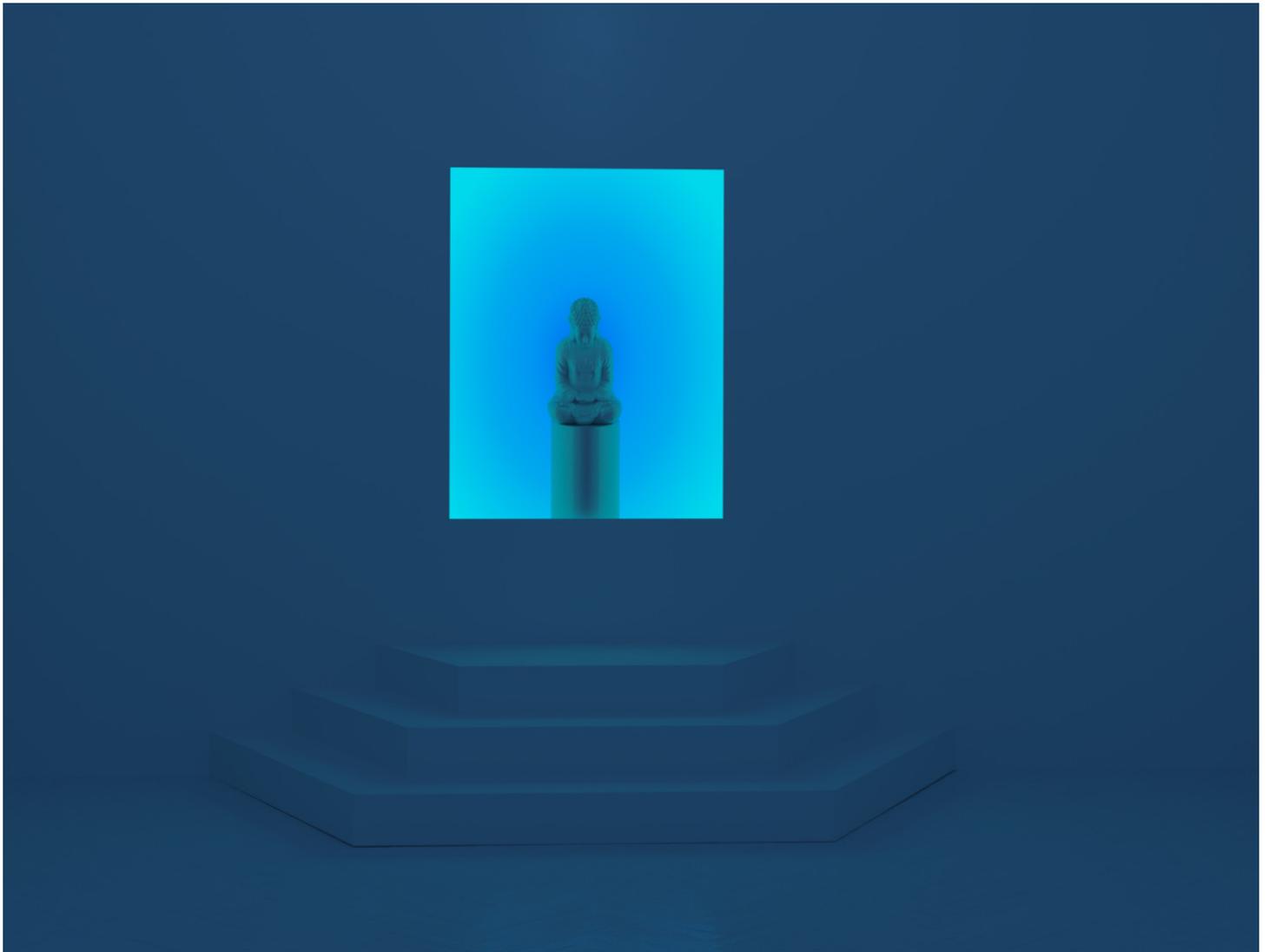


Art & Photography

## This artist drew on his experience with psychedelic drugs to explore the spiritual side of the digital

Dominic Hawgood tapped into the visuals he witnessed while dabbling with DMT  
for a new exhibition at Foam Amsterdam

*18 July, 2019*



In recent years, interest in the expansive experiences and therapeutic effects offered by psychedelic drugs has gained momentum—we all have a friend waxing lyrical on the merits of trying Ayahuasca in South America, right? Although psychedelics have been around since the '60s, their widely espoused abilities to offer a gateway into some higher iteration of the self has gained significant popularity in 21st century life, as worn-out and overworked individuals seek some greater sense of meaning and self-awareness in an overwhelmingly busy, capitalistic and normative society. (Increasingly, psychedelics such as Ketamine, LSD and Psilocybin (magic mushrooms), are being explored as alternative medicines for the treatment of mental illness, namely depression).

One such individual investigating the properties and potentials of psychedelics is English multi-disciplinary artist, [Dominic Hawgood](#). His latest exhibition, [Casting Out the Self](#), which opened last week at Foam Amsterdam, explores the aesthetic properties of DMT—or N,N-

Dimethyltryptamine—that has largely dropped into public consciousness on account of it being the active component in popular Ayahuas-

ca brews. Where trips on Ayahuasca generally last several hours, DMT trips typically last only 15 minutes, nonetheless offering an experience so intense and powerful that users struggle to describe it.



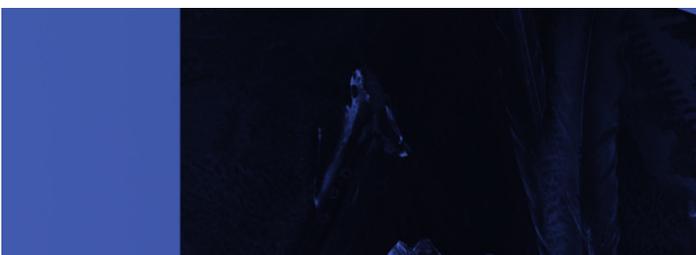
Infinite Wisdom, 2016.



Cosmic Chakra

While DMT and Ayahuasca are frequently rhapsodised over in terms of some otherworldly, spiritual experience, Hawgood was initially interested in his subjective visual experience while on the drug, which he compares to digital, computerised graphics. “I’ve always been interested in psychedelics, and DMT is one that stands out,” explains the Royal College of Art graduate. “Putting aside all the spiritual elements, I was struck by the aesthetics of it. I don’t know if that’s because of my preoccupation with imaging and analysing imagery, but I felt that DMT really kind of offered this digital experience — I felt like I was inside a computer simulation of some kind. It was weird.” Hawgood found himself comparing what he visualised on a DMT trip to the shapes and geometries associated with digital rendering. “You experience strange perspectives, distortions that might feel symmetrical or something like that. There’s unusual depth, noiselessness, clarity—all kinds of things that you associate with building imagery in CG (computer graphics) and digitally.”

Since graduating five years ago, Hawgood’s practice has expanded out of photography, moving into installation, product design, animation, 3D rendering and sculpture. For this new exhibition—a version of which was previously exhibited at Brighton Digital Festival and British Science Festival, Brighton in 2017—Hawgood has brought all of these elements together, with an emphasis on visual computing, computer science research and capturing light. Through an inventive and atmospheric approach to site-specific installation, Hawgood aligns the rituals and obsessive techniques of computer graphics with meditative or transcendental experience. As he says, “I liked the idea that the digital is something that resides within us... I’m interested in exploring its spiritual side.”





CG visualisation, 2019.

Central to *Casting Out the Self*, is the 'ceremonial' and the objects used in shamanic ritual, particularly in UK ceremonies, such as the figure of the Buddha. "For me, the Buddha figure came to represent the digital, allowing psychedelic themes," explains the artist. "So, I took apart this figure that I had been given by shamans and started replicating it in lots of different ways, such as CG animations, in casts, images and photographs. It's continually being replicated and worked upon."

When I ask Hawgood what he wants visitors to take away from this exhibition he is adamant that he has "no interest in recreating a psychedelic experience as such." Instead, he wants visitors to "question how things are constructed, what they are looking at and how this has been achieved." Through ambient lighting in a moody spectrum of deep purple, celestial blue and aqua, computer graphics rendered into dreamy fragments of fantasy, and incandescent Buddhas, Hawgood constructs a space that bridges the gap between the digital and the ethereal. Where commonly the digital world is viewed as sterile, cold and technical, he illuminates its mysticism and magical quality. "When I look towards the research that fascinates me like at USC ICT Graphics Lab, for example, there's magic in the process and techniques being used—with light fields and image-based light capture you can do amazing things. So, for me it's something about the transfer into the digital that's important (the reason why photogrammetry appears within my practice)," says Hawgood. "You can learn about all kinds of imagining techniques and you find out you're hacking your perceptual system, creating illusions and deconstructing the world around you. You can figure out how it's made."

All images courtesy of [Dominic Hawgood](#).

*Casting Out the Self* runs through to 13 October at Foam Amsterdam.