

Alexis Kyle Mitchell

The Goal of Our Health

24 May – 2 August 2025

The Goal of Our Health, is the first solo exhibition in the UK by New York and Glasgow-based artist Alexis Kyle Mitchell. Working across moving image, performance and experimental collaboration, this exhibition deepens Mitchell's interest in the politics of space, place, and embodiment.

The exhibition comprises two works: Mitchell's hour-long film *The Treasury of Human Inheritance* (2024) in a new immersive installation; and *Plates* (2025), a new series of short 16mm black and white film 'screen tests'. *The Goal of Our Health* brings these works into dialogue to interrogate how idealised notions of health, movement and ability influence science, technology and the body. The work attends to the ideological origins of a eugenics movement, the shadows of which we continue to live with today.

The Treasury of Human Inheritance comprises hand-processed celluloid film developed using genetic bodily materials – the recipe of which is included as part of the film's narrative. The footage shows abandoned architectures teeming with new growth, domestic video and audio documentation of Mitchell's family, and somatic and spiritual rituals for life after death. Reflecting on one family's experience of living with and alongside disease and disability, *The Treasury* seeks out different forms of kinship and belonging.

Central to the cinematic focus of *The Treasury* is an immersive analogue synthesiser soundtrack Mitchell created in collaboration with filmmaker and musician Luke Fowler and composer and musician Richy Carey. Resonating throughout the gallery, the 5.1 soundtrack mimics the looping patterns of myotonic dystrophy, a genetic condition that is both described in and structures the content of the film.

The exhibition's title is drawn from the name of a 1920s photographic publication by Dora Menzler, a German gymnast whose book depicts the 'ideal' body in motion. Mitchell reconstructs these poses in *Plates*, while also referencing the artist's ongoing interest in photographer Eadweard Muybridge's plates of animal locomotion – in particular, his documentation of disabled people moving from the 1880s. Each *Plate* lasts the duration of one manual hand-crank of the camera (approx. 30 seconds), while the hand-processed celluloid film is developed using coffee – bringing questions of productivity, labour, and extraction into the material itself.

Throughout the exhibition, Mitchell explores the fragility and weight of history and inheritance. By working with the

delicate materiality of celluloid film and combined with the mechanisms of repetition and motion, the works in this exhibition wrestle with the aesthetics of authoritarianism in order to undermine the power of their form.

The Goal of Our Health is part of Peer's 2025 Programme, which addresses themes of inheritance, memory, health and home, and is accompanied by a series of events as part of our Talks, Events and Workshops programme.

Screening times:

The Treasury of Human Inheritance is 60 minutes long and screenings at Peer begin on the hour from 12pm, with the last screening at 5pm.

Biography:

Alexis Kyle Mitchell is based between New York and Glasgow. Exhibitions include Glasgow International, Glasgow; GTA24 MOCA Triennial, Toronto; Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; Kunstverein Munich; and Mercer Union, Toronto; screenings at International Film Festival Rotterdam; Art of the Real, New York; and IndieLisboa International Film Festival, Lisbon; in performances at MOCAToronto; University of Toronto and the New School, New York. Residencies include Cove Park (Scotland); MacDowell (USA); Sommerakademie Paul Klee (Switzerland); and Akademie Schloss Solitude (Germany). Mitchell was a postdoctoral fellow at New York University in the Center for Disability Studies and is currently a visiting scholar in the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality.

Four questions to Alexis Kyle Mitchell:

Ellen Greig (Director, Peer): This exhibition comprises two separate but related bodies of work: your hour-long film *The Treasury of Human Inheritance* (2024) and *Plates* (2025) a new series of short 16mm black and white film ‘screen tests’. Let’s start by talking about your densely layered long-format film work: at its core the film is about your family’s experience of living with and alongside a genetic disease and the fragility and importance of kinship and home. With all this in mind, I’m curious about where you drew inspiration for the title of the work?

Alexis Kyle Mitchell: *The Treasury of Human Inheritance* is a title that comes from the first science journal ever to study ‘Muscular Dystrophies’, a group of diseases that includes the disease my family has, Myotonic Dystrophy. This journal, studying human genetic disorders, was published between 1909-1958 by the Galton Laboratory in London. The lab was named after Francis Galton, as a continuation of his work on human inheritance and eugenics theory and practice. The title holds a lot, as the word ‘treasury’ suggests. But the film is also about that tension - the fragile connection between dark and light, life and death. It felt like a title that honoured that disparity and connection.

EG: The title of the exhibition as well as the research behind the new works, *Plates*, is taken from the work of German gymnastic teacher, Dora Menzler (1874-1951). Can you tell me about your research into her work and how it has influenced these new works?

AKM: In making *The Treasury* and since then, I’ve been engaging with the theme of repetition. Repetition is the ‘problem’ of my family’s disease, in the sense that there’s a pattern in the programming of genetic code that repeats too many times - and increasingly so - from generation to generation. This repetition leads to a slew of degenerative neuromuscular effects. As is accentuated with this disease, repetition is the thing that brings us all closer to death. At the same time (and I think this is what the film really delves into), repetition is also creation: the splitting and replication of cells, the beating of a heart, the patterns we relive everyday. Repetition is embedded in the creative aspects of life, and the manifold ways we are able to live it.

Plates also emerges from this exploration of the tenuous relationship between creation and destruction, life and death. As I mentioned before, the title of *The Treasury* invokes shadows of the eugenics movement. Some images I’ve been sitting with for a long time (much longer than the process of making the film), are a series of ‘plates’ by Eadweard Muybridge from his photographic study *Animal Locomotion: An Electro-photographic Investigation of Consecutive Phases of Animal Movements*

(1884-85). His images are often referred to as the birth of the moving image, most notably the series depicting a racing horse and rider. But I was interested in his series that depicts people with disabilities moving. I came back to these images as a way of reckoning with the representation of disease and disability – where and when they show up in modern history, how we look at them, what they are productive of, how and why they continue to repeat. By contrast, I happened by chance upon *Die Schönheit deines Körpers: das Ziel unserer gesundheitlich – künstlerischer Körperschulung* (1924), a photography book by German gymnast Dora Menzler, which is where my exhibition title *The Goal of Our Health* comes from. Menzler’s photographic plates struck me as rather odd images of human movement, and I couldn’t help but read her body of work and Muybridge’s in relation to each other. In essence, they are both about the documentation and proliferation of ‘ideal’ forms at a particular moment in time – a time that prefaces the birth of Galton’s eugenics movement. I’ve been fixated on these elements as a way of questioning this political moment we’re living through now, and reflecting on where, why, and which images / forms / bodies get to repeat themselves. Underneath it all is my curiosity about the aesthetics of fascism as they relate to art, dance, movement, mobility and disability.

EG: Yes, in both of the works included in this exhibition you address - or perhaps attempt to undo - an aesthetics of authoritarianism. By using these images against themselves you have created something new; about your family and your friends, as well as embodiment and resistance. What role does history play in your practice?

AKM: I don’t think resistance is ever an explicit intention in my work, but it is nonetheless central to who I am and what I believe in. In my practice, I engage with history as a way of understanding the present because I need distance from something in order to make sense of it. *The Treasury* is maybe the most extreme version of this, as I’m trying to reckon with my own life experience, living alongside a progressively debilitating disease within my own biological family, and I needed to use many tools to create distance between myself and my experience. (Perhaps this is why there are so many references in the work!) All of my projects do this to some extent. For example, my doctoral research looked at the history and culture of the Jewish summer camping movement in America. I was and continue to be fascinated with the idea of summer camp; why and how it evolved as a practice, but also as a way of unpacking the grip that Jewish ethnonationalism (Zionism) has over a diasporic population of Jewish people who should have stronger ties to places all over the world than they do with the relatively new settler-colonial state of Israel. I was going to say that history acts as a mirror to me, but I think it’s more like a prism – it refracts more than it reflects.

EG: Collaboration with your peers is a central part of all the works in this exhibition. Can you tell me more about the importance of collaboration in your practice and who you've collaborated with to develop this body of work?

AKM: Collaboration feels inevitable to me and my ways of working. It's obvious and organic. I couldn't make anything alone, nor would I want to. My forms of collaboration are often highlighted in the work itself. Rather than invisibilising the labour of others, or the network I exist within, I try to draw attention to it. In *The Treasury*, relationality is so much of what the work is about. I only get to comprehend the role of disease and disability in my life through my relationships, and therefore those relationships become the material of the work. But more broadly – and this relates to the previous question – I'm always interested in understanding where we are politically, socially, spiritually, geographically, and questioning what makes up the present, how we got here, etc. These things are always sensed and formed through relations. I often joke with friends about how my long held fear of 'the group' (what it does, how it functions, what it excludes) is probably more of an obsession. It is never just one person who produces anything (ideas, objects, movements. . .), and the more we understand about the relations between people, the more we understand about where we are and what we're doing.

For *The Treasury*, I materially and spiritually relied on a lot of people while I was making that work – most of which was during the pandemic in Glasgow, following the death of my mother. So there is a community of artists, friends and neighbours who show up in the work as they were in my life. A handful of those I can name include my sister Shelby who is not only featured, but also acts as a translator for ideas and experiences I have not yet found language for; Richy Carey and Luke Fowler helped me develop the sound; Charlie Prodger, Terra Jean Long and Kaitlin Noss act as guides for particular rituals I return to; Lucy Skaer lent me her Bolex camera for an inordinate amount of time; Stuart Middleton whose studio and installation work is present in the visuals of the film; and so many incredibly formative conversations that really shaped the work with Mason Leaver-Yap, Corin Sworn, Constantina Zavitsanos, Tami Bernard and Naomi Pearce. Presently, I'm wrestling with ideas about fascism, movement and form while spending a lot of time in New York, embedded very deeply in a practice informed by dancers and other movement practitioners. *Plates* features Lauren Bakst, Justin Cabrillos, Rachel James, Kris Lee and AJ Wilmore, and was processed at Mono No Aware in Brooklyn with the guidance of Steve Cossman.

Talks, Events and Workshops:

Sunday 25 May

Artistic Body Training: A closed workshop

Artist Alexis Kyle Mitchell hosts a closed workshop, *Artistic Body Training* with invited collaborators. The workshop is part of an ongoing process in the development of a new body of work exploring the concept and practice of repetition.

Tuesday 27 May, 6.30pm

Artist talk between artist Alexis Kyle Mitchell and writer Larne Abse Gogarty

Join Alexis Kyle Mitchell and writer and art historian Larne Abse Gogarty for a conversation on Alexis' exhibition at Peer and her wider practice.

Sunday 8 June, 12pm - 6pm

Special Sunday opening hours and exhibition tour at 2pm with Ellen Greig, Director of Peer

To coincide with London Gallery Weekend, Peer opens on Sunday 8 June with a special tour of Alexis Kyle Mitchell's current exhibition, *The Goal of Our Health*.

Thursday, July 24, 9am - 10.30am

A community coffee morning and special closing event for Alexis Kyle Mitchell's Peer exhibition, *The Goal of Our Health*.

Saturday, 21 June

Direct animation workshop with not/nowhere

Leena Habiballa leads a closed direct animation workshop at not/nowhere with the current cohort Peer Ambassadors.

*All events are free to attend, unless otherwise stated.
No booking required.*

List of works from left to right:

1. *Plates* (2025)

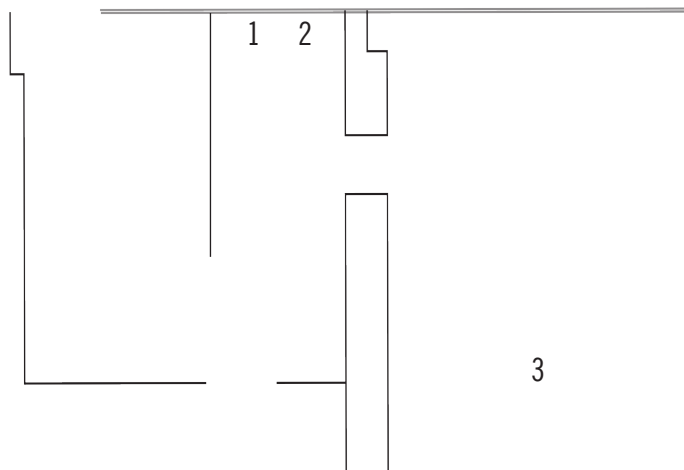
16mm b/w film hand-processed in coffee and transferred to video, 2 mins 15 secs.

2. *Plates* (2025)

16mm b/w film hand-processed in coffee and transferred to video, 2 mins 24 secs.

3. *The Treasury of Human Inheritance*, (2024),

4K video, 60 mins.



Thanks:

Larne Abse Gogarty, Richy Carey, Sophie Crichton Stuart, Jemma Desai, Leena Habiballa, Onyeka Igwe, Dominique Le Gendre, Mason Leaver-Yap, Ingrid Pollard, Emily LaBarge, Iva Radivojevic, Sasha Wortzel, Laura Clarke and the team at Site, and Ellen Greig and the team at Peer.

Credits:

The Goal of Our Health is an exhibition produced by Peer in collaboration with Site Gallery, Sheffield and is conceived in collaboration with Mason Leaver-Yap.

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Opening hours:

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