

## Lookin Up

Dianne Jones' art is informed by a politics of transforming and inventing a radical shift in the popular ideologies of Australian representation and cultural identity. The title of a previous work, *Look 'Ere!*, on Captain Cook referencing Duchamp, is indicative of Jones' approach. That's her style, to point to something ridiculous in its gravity as if to say, come have a look at this – Are they for real? Is this reality?

Jones' Exhibition, titled *Lookin Up*, explores ideas of how certain gendered and raced bodies are socialised to look up to masculine heroes, idols and role models. In examining which identities were privileged in her memories of growing up as a young girl, Jones moves from the personal effects to the wider implications of why specific figures were present in the position of role models or aspirational figures.

In the *Holy Cool Series*, Jones draws on the pictures which hung on living room walls where she grew up, questioning the impact of pervasive imagery on identity formation. In her recollection, there was no portrait of the Queen, or three china birds making an exodus out the kitchen window; it was Elvis and Jesus who stared down from plastic gilded frames. Here, Jones creates herself in their image and the implications of role playing these particular 'role models' are multifaceted.

Jones positions herself as Jesus in the image titled *Ye Shall Be Born Again: John 3.7*. The idea of rebirth, redemption and re-invention works with irony on a few levels. In taking on a divine image, Jones is literally playing on the idea of 'man' created in the image of god and producing a rebirth through art. On a personal level, Jones was raised in a born again family, where her father was the preacher. When she came out as a lesbian, she was expelled from the church after a failed attempt to exorcise the lesbian spirit out of her. Now though, looking back, Jones says that when she was growing up, she felt Jesus really cared about her. He was an outsider too, fighting for truth and not being accepted in his society. There was a lot to see in the compassionate images of this man, but it was a compassion that did not end up being extended to her. Also at play, is the link between Christianity and colonialism, with the images of a white god and son pervading Indigenous homes, such as where Jones grew up. Through the forces of missionaries, the notion of being 'born again' has loaded connotations from imperial domination to cultural erasure.

In *A Little Less Conversation*, Jones identifies with Elvis from the film *Flaming Star* (1960), where he played a character struggling with issues of racial violence

and prejudice. His character is the child of a white father and American Indian mother. Hence, Elvis plays a cowboy but he also identifies as American Indian and it's not easy for him to work out who exactly he should be shooting. It is an archetypal image for fractured identities. This image of Jones, gun in hand, in fighting stance, which leads to the next line of the Elvis classic, 'a little more action'. She is positioned directly on the faultlines, an iconic pop image but in the current context, also a political statement perhaps on the state of Indigenous affairs - more positive action and less talk. And what if as a young girl, there had been on screen representation of such a heroic nature of Aboriginal women? Interestingly, *Flaming Star*, behind its smooth exterior of Hollywood idol glamour, is a tale that did attempt to speak to the tragedy of racial intolerance, and also is one of the few where Elvis played a role authentic to his own American Indian background.

In *Men's Business*, Jones counters the media portrayal of Indigenous men in relation to fatherhood and family by presenting the images of men she knows well, her father and brothers. As a response to contemporary debates, with the emphasis on drunk and predatory Indigenous men, Jones rejects the generalising and demonising of an oppressed minority in Australia. With mass media informed to a large extent by bias that perpetuates race relations based on colonising mythologies, the public rarely has the opportunity to have access to Indigenous voices unmediated by white culture. *Lest We Forget*, Jones' work on Indigenous soldiers, connects with the negative treatment of Indigenous men, showing a history where even when fighting for Australia and being acclaimed as heroes, they were still not afforded basic human rights or considered citizens.

In the *Mona Lisa Series*, Jones is looking at contemporary race issues which affect the next generation - her nieces and nephews who have one Indigenous parent and one white parent. Evoking the position of *Flaming Star's* hero, they have had at times, to endure the hype, ambiguity and division over where they belong and with whom they identify. As with all Jones' images representing Indigenous peoples, these are affirmative, strong and beautiful portrayals inhabiting spaces generally designated to privileged and culturally elevated bodies.

And that's the power of it - *Lookin Up* directs the gaze as opposed to being the object of it.

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