

JAMES GUPPY

Your new body of work situates businessmen or politicians (suits) in natural and classical settings. Aside from the direct association of the impact of these men on our natural environment, what does positioning these figures in classical scenes convey?

There is something incongruous and suspicious about suits in the natural environment. The uniform is urban so once it is displaced to outside the city ... we may well ask: 'Why are they here?'; 'What do they want?' I think these are questions we should always be asking about people with power.

The works reminded me of that photograph of Ukrainian parliament that was composed like a Renaissance painting...

The fighting men in the clouds are taken from that photo. I've changed it quite a bit ... deleting a few men and placing them in clouds ... they were fantastic photographs. About 10 years ago, I created a small work based on a similar image of Korean politicians brawling. I love these glimpses into the true nature of adversarial politics ... it could just as well be the stock exchange or a shareholders meeting.

And of course Magritte's men in bowler hats...

Absolutely. In the 1950s they were faceless men. Now they've got this sort of masculine bravado – it's about personalities. It isn't the grey men that disappear; it's a cult of personality. They gave a different sense of ego. The effect of what they are doing now seems to be a lot more violent. [The men in this series] represent both business and politics. The essence of fascism is when big business and politicians get into bed together. It's very dangerous when they get too close and when they're indistinguishable, which seems to be the way it's going, it's very worrying.

You have a background as an economist that has informed your interest in the machinations of business – has this body of work been germinating a long time?

This has been germinating for a long time – I tend to dip in and out of themes. I first began painting men in suits in 1991 in a series of diptychs looking at masculinity. In 1992, one of the works in my exhibition was a suited gentleman based on **Watteau's** painting of Pierrot. I've also painted **Fischer** and **Kasparov** playing chess but removed the chessboard – you couldn't see what was happening but clearly a battle was going on – those hidden



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power games – that aspect of masculinity. So this series goes back to work I was doing in the early 1990s about masculinity.

It's also born of the present. I was really frankly pissed off about what is going on in the world – the one per cent taking greed to a whole new level. I'm amazed that after the GFC nothing has happened – nothing. No one has really been penalised – except the poor. It's a whole level of pain and torture that could have been avoided and I just thought, 'this is ridiculous'. Most of my stuff is very self-indulgent and whimsical but sometimes I get too pissed off. We should try and do what we can – occasionally. I loved it when **Mike Parr** sewed his lips together in support of refugees; sometimes we just need to say enough is enough.

What's next?

I'm excited about my next body of work and I'm torn between several competing starting points. One is combining the landscapes in computer games (I love computer games!) and Buddhism's Blessed Realms or Sambhogakaya. The other is returning to ideas I never followed up from my 1996 series *Blemish* ... essentially re-examining the notion of portraiture and disruption. I have other starting points but they all revolve around these two.

Kate Britton

► JAMES GUPPY EXHIBITS NEW WORK AT BRENDA MAY GALLERY IN SYDNEY FROM 1-26 SEPTEMBER 2015.

THERE IS SOMETHING INCONGRUOUS AND SUSPICIOUS ABOUT SUITS IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

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1. // James Guppy, *The Remains of the Day*, 2015. Acrylic on polycotton, timber frame, 82 x 120cm.

2. // James Guppy, *Higher Powers*, 2015. Acrylic on polycotton, timber frame, 120 x 82cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND BRENDA MAY GALLERY, SYDNEY



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