

JAMES GUPPY



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MY NEW PAINTINGS, *In Flagrante Delicto*, are the most explicitly political works I have done. I have had a slow, simmering anger over many years about the men in power, the businessmen, bankers and politicians – the men in suits and the chaos they create – apparently on our behalf.

For several years prior to these works, I was creating mythological works but last year I felt it was time for a radical change. No more angry fairies and middle-aged muses. I needed to add my voice to the chorus of criticism about the behaviour of those at the top.

For the paintings I do, research is really important at both the gestation phase and prior to the execution. At first the research is wide-ranging ... more inspirational and oblique. Once I know where I'm going with a series, I start sketching and gathering images. For this body of work the images were of men in suits and the environments I wanted to place them in. My son-in-law, Pete, was very generous, doing two photo shoots for me in his work suit. For some of the paintings I needed men fighting. For this I used parts of the beautifully captured images of the Ukrainian Parliament brawling last year.

In two of the works I wanted the suits battling it out in the skies like gods. For this I looked at Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's frescos. Tiepolo was famous for painting the ceilings of palazzos with Greek gods cavorting amongst golden clouds. They were well suited to my intention of depicting our mercenary "gods" brawling above us.

For other environments I either used Google Images, my own photos or my imagination.

For instance, the landscape for one painting, 'The Romantic', came out of my sketchbook as a compositional idea. This needed fleshing out, so I used Google Images to gather pictures of ravines and went through my own photos for images of clouds. I often photograph clouds – I never know when they might be useful. The suited man was from the photo shoot with Pete.

The process of combining all these elements is more organic than a simple cut and paste job. From the ravines I took textures and a couple of details of light and dark. Pete was copied reasonably faithfully although I changed the colour of his suit. Over the years I've become very good at extracting what I need from a photograph and ignoring the irrelevant parts. I often see students who use photographs but become trapped by slavishly copying every detail – both the good and the bad. When I see this, I think it's better if the student draws from the photograph, then puts it aside and works from their drawing.

Even though this work is political, I am first and foremost an artist and as such my principal desire is to create engaging artworks. The visual aesthetic here is not contemporary, nor modern. I wanted a tension between the ideas and those pre-modernist notions of beauty. I hope it achieves my aim of showing the actions of these men as ludicrous and reprehensible.

I am attracted to ovals and circles and began placing images in them back in 1992, returning to them only recently. I find framing images in rectangles and squares visually modernist and, much as my art education was grounded in 20th-century art, my work is not modernist. For me, the oval is an elegant circle and circles have always suggested mandalas, so in a way these works become a microcosm of the universe, a worldview. This is how I see the world: strangely beautiful, but blemished by these grey creatures who inhabit land, air and sea. Whether they are politicians or businessmen,



the suited man is ubiquitous in our world ... hence the subject matter that pulled me into these paintings.

I have an abiding devotion to the history of Western art and I can't help referencing it. I think in many ways artists are in a dialogue with all that has gone before. This, combined with my style of realism and the oval-shaped canvas gives the paintings a Victorian feel. After all, the Victorian era was the birthplace of modern capitalism. I'm quite happy with this. The patterns of the past will always inform our understanding of the present. ▣

EXHIBITIONS
 Sydney Contemporary
 10-13 September, 2015
 Brenda May Gallery, stand A20
sydneycontemporary.com.au

In Flagrate Delicto
 Brenda May Gallery
 1-26 September, 2015
www.brendamaygallery.com.au



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- 01 The Valley of Sufficient Requirements, 2015, acrylic on polycotton, timber frame, 82 x 120cm
- 02 Negotiated Settlement, 2015, acrylic on polycotton, timber frame, 120 x 82cm
- 03 The Remains of the Day, 2015, acrylic on polycotton, timber frame, 82 x 120cm

Courtesy the artist and Brenda May Gallery, Sydney.