

KALIMANRAWLINS

David Griggs on *ZODIACS AND GODS* at KALIMANRAWLINS, September 2011

Jarrod Rawlins: David, this new body of work ZODIACS AND GOD is a departure from your last few exhibitions. Can you tell me something about how you approached this one, what was the starting point?

David Griggs: When I'm not painting I do a lot of research for a film I'm making here in the Philippines. Basically, imagine if you combined the Burke & Wills story with the Captain Thunderbolt story, then mixed the two with *Apocalypse Now* and iced it with Gangsta Rap, imagine putting all that together, that's how the film is going to play out, that's where I began with this group of paintings.

Jarrod Rawlins: So your plans for developing this film have started to influence the paintings?

David Griggs: It's a different feel with the perspective in these paintings, it all comes from the research for the film, because I'm also swapping many of the images so it really does come from the film research, which is a parody on culture and a parody on colonialism, a parody on imperialism, and how all of that mixes into the Philippines. Then it's about how do you relate that to something in Australian history, and why would you even do it? It's sort of stupid, but that's what I love about it.

Jarrod Rawlins: So the elements of black humour and the absurdities that emerge from ideologies of colonialism and our own history remain an important part of your paintings?

David Griggs: Completely! A lot of the figures in these paintings are sourced from anthropological photographs taken in the Philippines in the early 1920s of tribal peoples from different Filipino groups. The photographers had really staged the shots. So from the start you are looking at something completely directed. So then when I'm thinking about how staged the film will be, everything is basically my own comedy. Like the tribal girl with a pirate patch and bowler hat which is very European. I'm playing on all these clichés like I always do.

Jarrod Rawlins: There seem to be a lot of cross cultural references in this body of work - why is it important to you? And the palette of these paintings seems really very different, almost a departure for you, can you tell me more about these points?

David Griggs: With this show I'm really trying to mix the different cultures, ideas and places using my research, and now I'm making a group of paintings with it, it's just like that. I'm not a purist nor am I a communist. It's as if we all are striving to be good people by holding a moral ground. But the flip side could be that we are all the anti-Christ? Then talking about the palette, I guess this is sort of a part of a trend, like modernism is coming back I guess, it's radical again. The palettes in these paintings have been taken straight from Picasso, not the images, just the palettes. And some of the palettes are also taken from old paintings of the Australian outback, or the Arabian desert, so the palette alone here is referencing something else. I guess this is the first time I have referenced the palette with something from art history. Maybe it's because I'm lazy.

Jarrod Rawlins: There seems like more than just art historical palette references in this exhibition.

David Griggs: About half of the works in this show make some kind of reference which is stolen, not borrowed. I've stolen references from certain artists. Except for the Nolan horse which is really identifiable, all of the other images make reference to something in art history. I know what they are, but they are more obscure than some, so it's like I've stolen them rather than referenced them. And it's also my way of showing off. If you do not know the references in some of the paintings then just Google it.

Jarrod Rawlins: Are there any other elements found in this body of work that you want to discuss before we finish up?

David Griggs: You know the images I sent, the one of the semi-native American tribal guy on the left and on the right there is a pilgrim with a gun. Usually in a painting of this sort the subjects would be exchanging something: culture, goods, trust, blah blah... instead I have their hands placed under the dress of the tribal girl, so it sort of becomes erotic or sort of perverse, you know. Also, I'm growing a beard.