

ALLUSION

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PAUL COMPTON
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AN EXHIBITION OF WORKS ON PAPER

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The exhibition title, *Allusion*, was chosen because of the imaginary elements in the four artists work. Rona Green states that each artist toys with observation, “twisting it through the imagination for a strange and unusual end result.”¹

Allusion/illusion, what is the difference? An allusion is from the Latin ‘allusionem’, “a playing with, or reference to,” it is “a figure of speech that makes a reference to a place, person, or something that happened.”² The allusion is never explicit; it is a passing reference to a subject or thing. An illusion is, “something that deceives by producing a false or misleading impression of reality.”³ What a difference a letter can make! Both the allusion and illusion rely on a presupposed knowledge held by the viewer, lest the passing reference stays hidden. This essays intention is to pick apart some of the references, overt or otherwise, divulging layers of meaning.

Franky Howell states that his work is: “A personal response to political irritability and geo political conflict.”⁴ The artist uses the language of maps to express disquiet with societies structures, and the boundaries between people, both geographically and personally. Brilliant, pellucid colour, pattern, and crystalline forms are employed along with a visual exploration of scale. An intense focus on certain, seemingly banal two dimensional depictions of rocks drive the viewer to reconsider the complex structures of the everyday object. Therefore, to further reconsider the historical boundaries between countries and pre-existing differences between societies groupings and individuals.

Works on paper such as *Rock and a hard place no. 1* or *Rockette no. 1*, are similar in colour, layered jagged juxtapositions, and explosive impact to a late 1980’s Frank Stella screen print. The focus of these two Howell works is a central rock. The banal object floats; zygotic or embryonic, within the colourful maelstrom, detailed with imagined, trompe l’oeil textures and surface preparations. Shadows of illusionistic three-dimensional shapes are layered atop two-dimensional depictions, to make the third dimensions illusionism on paper much more pronounced. Ultimately to make the viewer see the unreality of the image depicted and then search for further meaning.

The acrylic, ink, and pencil on paper works in the *kingdom*⁵ series by Paul Compton are playful, dark, animated, birdlike, wispy, body-tied structures that remind one of birds, monkeys, wings or a play on light. The textures of wood lie near forms hinting at items of clothing, dresses or ghosts. Flames and skulls explicitly appear. The flow of water, of diaphanous material, feather, or flame, and waving, twisting silk also appears within the picture frame.

The escaping of the threads of material through gaps, holes and openings could easily be a sexual metaphor; however, if the allusion is to items floating in space, the creatures or wisps are emerging and disappearing through black holes. If the allusion is of the body they appear through a perforation in the dark body-form, an escaping delicate, gossamer lightness out of the herniated, internal, darkness. On first viewing, one develops the impression that the blackness or void within the work represents a mind without thought, and the white wisps are constructed thought, word, and/or statement, appearing from the black canvas of the mind.

Compton’s imagery is intuitive, an automatic drawing, and each work is a meditation on a single word or statement. His inspiration is “Victorian-era spiritualism, raw art and religious iconography.”⁶ The artist states that: “The aim with *kingdom* is to create a kind of personal mythos, an ongoing body of work that has a spiritual and ethereal quality whilst retaining a strong element of darkness.”⁷

Three titles of the pieces *the wound spoke*, *open like scars*, and *little wound*, seem to adhere to my allusion of bodily placement, herniated wounds, the escaping of an energy or pain from the darkness. Other titles, such as *kingdom*, or *constellation*, have an affinity with a reading as objects in the deep blackness of space.

The feather like structure escaping from a hole in *little wound II*, 2014, is dissipating to the right of the paper seemingly blown away by a wind. The dotted texture around the illusionistic perforation, presupposes, possibly, another such irregular, circular opening to the left of the first. More sheer cobweb like force pushing to be free, to enter the visual sphere. The insignificant nature of the ‘little wound’, the small escape of material makes one think of small emotional scars, minute fractious comments which do little in isolation, but when combined can cause a great disturbance.

An elemental visage, the principal indicators of a facial structure, a mask, skull, or gaping maw could be divined to be within the works, *cadere*, 2014, *constellation*, 2015, *kingdom*, 2014, *open like scars*, 2014, and *the message*, 2015, tying the work to the face, the most recognisable part of the human body. The face being the area we are programmed to see patterns or read in an instinctive glance. Within *kingdom* the organic, bark-like mask is emanating or seeping

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fluid in a slithering, twisted flow, which is directed through the back of the approximated faces left eye (to continue the analogy of a face), forming a stream, or directed, lamina spray that eventually breaks into its individual light points. A constellation of competing and directing forms, that may allude to numerous materials and elemental forces.

“The owls are not what they seem”,⁸ in Sheridan Jones three-dimensional perched avian depictions, for example *Barn Owl*, 2015. The works are constructed from folded, multi-plate etchings made from the complex processes of colour etching, sugar lift and aquatint. The sculptural bird approximations are made to the scale of the creatures they depict. The twists in their heads, the stance, and the items caught in their beaks animate the once two-dimensional, now three-dimensional works on paper, which are allusions to feathered creatures.

Birds are chosen as a topic of visual arts practice by Jones because of her affinity with the natural world, and to express a respect for that world through depicting the “beneficial connections” existing between humans and other life. The artist believes that birds particularly express “freedom, flight and a connectedness to both land and air”... they ... “become a topic of exploration and a personal expression of joy.”⁹

My son was recently swooped by a magpie while in Mildura picnicking on the Murray and the ominous, pacing stance of the dark as pitch *Raven*, 2015, transports me back to the screaming incident. The beak of my son’s attacker fleetingly piercing the skin behind Raphael’s ear is shown in this birds aggressively styled acicular embouchement, and its arch claws. The cut and aged black block that the bird seemingly paces upon gives the sculpture a formal plinth of the perfect dimension for the item displayed, the tail feathers almost reaching the ground.

The works stillness approximates taxidermy, something more commonly seen in art galleries these days. The three-dimensional staid snapshot of a usually twitchy, ever moving creature, creates an otherness which is compounded by the materials of the sculptural piece.

This otherness, makes the viewer consider the approximation of the animals differences to its Utopian ideal, or the raven just outside this room. The sculptural print makes one consider the reality of not only the item in front of us but of other living creatures and hopefully one’s self.

Lastly Rona Green’s hand coloured linocut, tattooed dogs and cockatoos allude to both domesticated and wild animals, and humans. The human attributes of glasses within *The Zulu*, 2014, and *Mr Correct (Hank)*, 2014, and clothing in the form of collared shirts and ties, jackets, pants, or truckers singlet’s make the personification of these animals familiar to the viewer, while showcasing the deep and marvelous black linocut mark making that Green employs.

The names of the animals, *Brett* and *Curl* for the birds, and *Lazer*, *Mr Correct (Hank)*, *Damarques*, and *The Zulu*, listed in the titles of the works allude to either constructed individuals, or popular culture personalities. The attributes and coloured backgrounds of each of the tattooed individuals make them distinctive, and many have specific stories that have been constructed by the artist.

Green is a tattoo history and culture aficionado. Her 2006 series of *Borneoids* depicted headhunting tattoos inspired by a trip to Sarawak and Sabah in Malaysian Borneo. The Dalmatian *Lazer*, 2013, included in this exhibition, has an affinity with that earlier family of work. The most prominent works of the *Borneoids* series, *Cutter* and *Dally-boy*, are both Dalmatians. The ‘natural’ spots of the bipedal dog *Lazer* are accentuated with two “Bunga Terung” or ‘Borneo roses’ on the shoulders. The “Bunga Terung” is a coming of age tattoo which marks the passage of a boy into manhood. A headhunter neck tattoo appears again in the 2013 work. The three letters: ‘MON’, tattooed on the figure, could be a reference to an ethnic grouping from Burma (Myanmar) living mainly in the Irrawaddy Delta. The upturned crescent moon is a symbol of femininity and relates to the stages of a woman’s menstrual cycle.

However, this Dalmatian is not purely a tribal construct, the other tattoos include text in French translating to ‘be nice’, an eye to ward off evil spirits, UFO’s, and a sailor in profile, suggesting that this lithe character is possibly also a French speaking, naval seaman. ‘GSP’, may refer to Georges St-Pierre, the Canadian professional mixed martial artist and UFC world champion, named ‘Most Dangerous Man of the year 2010’ voted by Spike Guys Choice Awards.

This Dalmatian is culturally mixed, and possibly also gender fluid. It is telling that the upper body only is shown; no marked breasts or prominent muscles are obvious, and the ‘s’ curve in the figure, and the lips, look traditionally

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feminine. The blue background a 'boy' colour possibly solves the issue of the characters sex at birth. Ultimately, this individuals sexual orientation or current gender is his own business.¹⁰

The jocular personification of the animals through human attributes and tattooed markings in Green's oeuvre subtly promotes animal rights viewpoints. Viewers bring their own preconceptions and visual knowledge to the visual clues of character, creating a further affinity with the work. Importantly, the complex visual allusions within detailed constructed personas and faux histories, elicit thoughtful contemplation on the role, and future of humanity.

The artists in *Allusion* promote a respect for nature, and the structures we have created. The depictions of maps allude to boundaries or limitations for society, drawing our attention to those structures and how we can improve them. The visual allusions depicted eventually draw one's mind to the similarities between living creatures, eliciting action in this viewer, to work towards productive change.

Dr. Thomas A. Middlemost
Art Curator, The Charles Sturt University Art Collection
August 2015

1 Green, R., Artists statement, 2015.

2 Oxford English Dictionary online, accessed 16 September 2015, 12:00PM
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/5520?redirectedFrom=allusion#eid>>

3 Oxford English Dictionary online, accessed 16 September 2015, 12:00PM
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91565?redirectedFrom=illusion+#eid>>

4 Howell, F., Artists statement, 2015: "Playing with the illusion of maps, targets and ambiguous areas of colour, inanimate objects becoming the figurative element. A shift of scale, humans/rocks, a depiction of the land? Subliminally affected by my environment, the colours and pattern used to create form and direction. Colours of old Ordnance Survey maps, colonial maps. Maps made beautiful with the cartographers skill, at the same time, the militaristic element, the redrawing of boundaries, carving up the world. Marking our territory, creating a new whole. Creating new patterns, tensions, a heated mosaic of cultures? Displacement, a need for refuge (refugees)?"

5 Compton, P., email to the author, 19 September 2015, 12:20PM. [The artist has explicitly stated that the titles for the 'kingdom' series and any reference to it, are to be listed in lower case; "this is one of the ways I set apart the series from my other artworks"].

6 Compton, P., Artists statement, 2015.

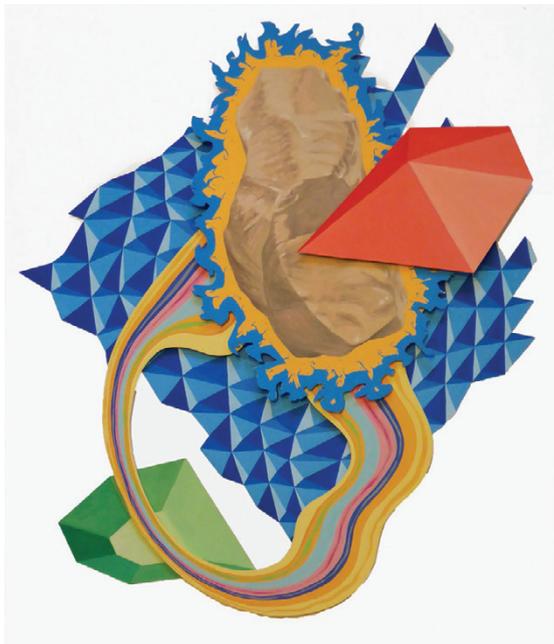
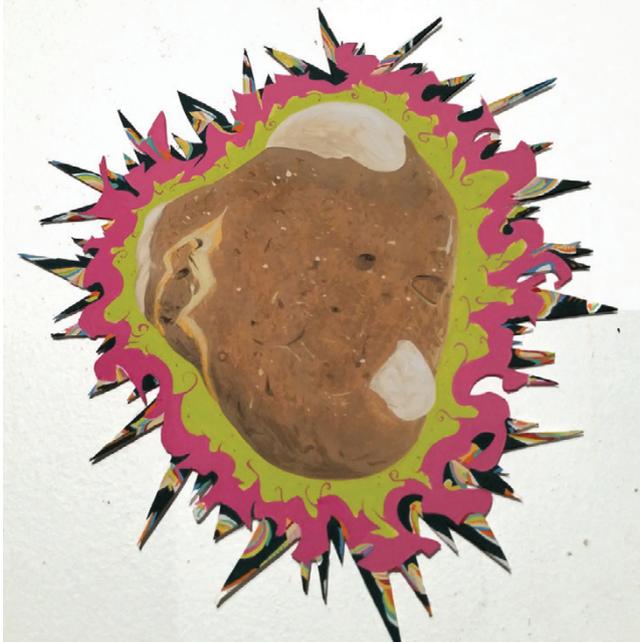
7 Compton, P., Artists statement, 2015.

8 Lynch, D., "Twin Peaks" television series, "The Giant" episode: Season 2, Episode 1. (1990). [Quote from the series.]

9 Jones, S., Biography of the artist, 2015.

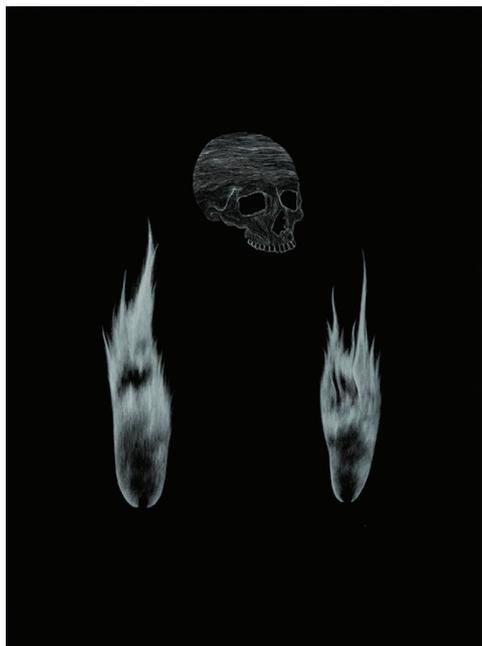
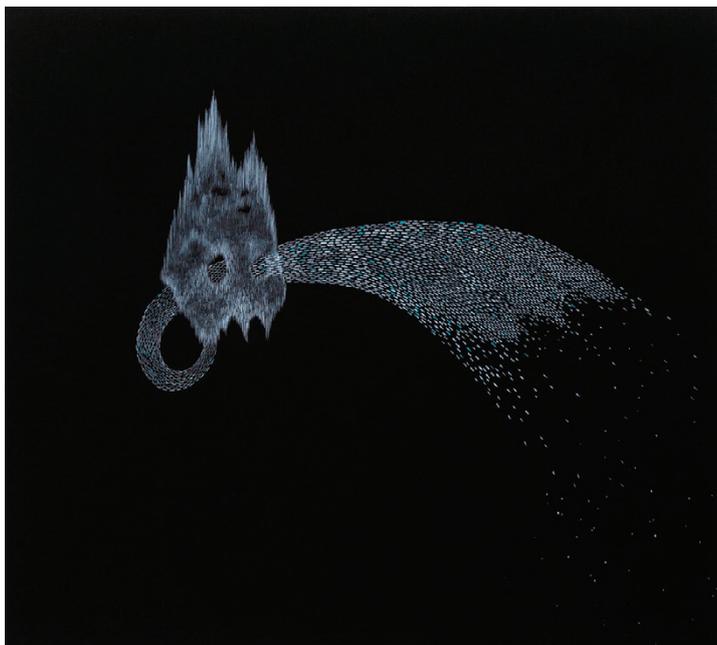
10 Green, R., email to the author, 27 August 2015, 3:51PM. Many of my guesses are shared by the artist, some are still a mystery. Green states: "Lazer is a diet conscious heavy exerciser. And he loves dancing. Of French origin. Has done his fair share of travelling. Is a fan of Adam and The Ants (and new wave music in general). Makes a few dollars here and there from kick boxing. Did a stint as a stevedore at some stage. Very superstitious. Doesn't talk much. I don't know if he would like me telling you all this..."

FRANKY HOWELL



clockwise from top left
Rockette no. 1 2015 gouache on cut paper 20 x 22 cm
Rock and a hard place no. 2 2015 gouache on cut paper 25 x 37 cm
Rock and a hard place no. 1 2015 gouache on cut paper 30 x 45 cm
Loop de loop de rock no. 1 2015 gouache on cut paper 55 x 55 cm

PAUL COMPTON



clockwise from top left

kingdom 2014 acrylic on paper 41 x 46 cm

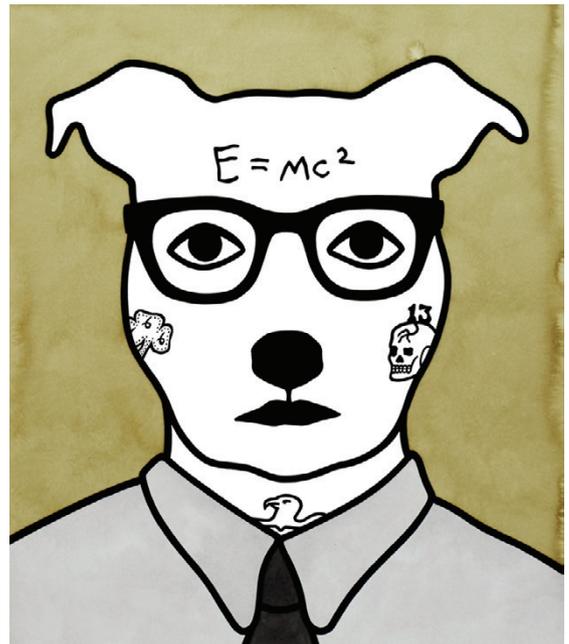
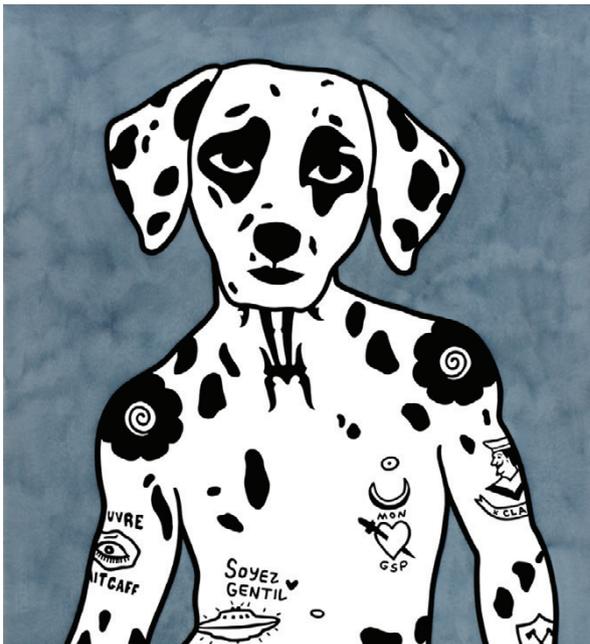
little wound II 2014 ink on paper 29 x 21 cm

cadere 2014 acrylic on paper 38 x 28 cm

open like scars 2014 ink on paper 76 x 57 cm

paulcompton.net

RONA GREEN



clockwise from top left
Brett 2014 hand coloured linocut 38 x 28 cm edition 40
Damarques 2011 hand coloured linocut 45 x 28 cm edition 33
Mr Correct (Hank) 2014 hand coloured linocut 56 x 48 cm edition 23
Lazer 2013 hand coloured linocut 83 x 76 cm edition 23

SHERIDAN JONES



clockwise from top left

King Raven 2015 etching with gold leaf 43 x 27 x 11 cm variable edition 10

Prickly Pear 2015 hand coloured etching and stained paper 30 x 30 x 10 cm variable edition 10

Brush Turkey 2015 linocut 41 x 54 x 21 cm edition 5

Song Birds 2015 hand coloured etching variable size edition 5

sheridanatthelaundry.com

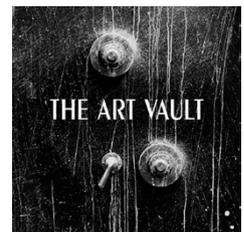
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