

PearlLam Galleries

Hong Kong

Ben Quilty solo exhibition 'Straight White Male'



Left: Portrait of Ben Quilty, Photo courtesy of Rachel Kara

Right: Ben Quilty (b. 1973), **The Photojournalist (AQ)**, 2014, Oil on linen, 140 x 190 cm (55 1/8 x 74 7/8 in.)

Exhibition Dates

15 January–1 March, 2015

Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm

Pearl Lam Galleries, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

Hong Kong—In January 2015, Pearl Lam Galleries will present its first solo exhibition of Australian artist Ben Quilty's work, *Straight White Male*, opening its 2015 programme with one of the hottest contemporary artists of the moment. The exhibition sees a return for the artist to the most traditional forms of art, painting landscapes and portraits, which furthers Quilty's continued exploration of Australian initiation ceremonies and forms of masculinity.

Since 2007, Quilty has been using a painting technique that creates a geometric monoprint of thick oil paint by pressing a painted canvas onto a clean one. The technique was inspired by the inkblot tests created by the 19th century psychologist and pioneer of mental health research, Hermann Rorschach. Quilty's reappropriations of these early inkblot paintings involve the viewer in the artist's process of creating a new visual language; according to the original theory, if the viewers can 'see' figurative images in the inkblots, they were said to be showing signs of paranoid or delusional behaviour. Quilty's Rorschach portrait works obviously

contain a strong figurative element, and it is through this subversive humour that Quilty looks at notions of the extreme nature of the masculine experience.

Some of the portraits in *Straight White Male* are of an Australian war veteran, Private Phil Butler, who was conscripted into the Vietnam War in 1970 and spent twelve months at Nui Dat. He subsequently suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and insomnia. Having spent October 2011 at the Australian base Tarin Kowt in southern Afghanistan as an official war artist, for Quilty, these paintings are symbolic of the future that the young men who fought in Afghanistan face. By exploring notions of the extreme nature of the masculine experience, Quilty looks for examples of initiation and the participation in rites of passage in western youth culture, which are too often violent and self-destructive, with war as the ultimate portrayal of this initiation. Another subject is Myuran Sukumaran, a convicted Australian drug smuggler, who has been on death row in Kerobokan Prison, Bali since 2005, and a man who Quilty has mentored since 2012. Sukumaran is paying an extreme price for the risk-taking and self-indulgent behaviour of so many young Australian men, and is therefore a very powerful subject for the artist.

The major work in the show is the twelve-panel landscape *Rorschach of Fairy Bower Falls*, which is located in the southern highlands of New South Wales, Australia. The beautiful site is now a popular tourist destination, but one which has a dark history as the site of a massacre of aboriginal people in the early 19th century. Using the Rorschach practice, the original painted image is both damaged and duplicated in the process of its creation, echoing the disturbance and violence the site has witnessed, and challenging the conflicted histories of colonisation in Australia. Quilty also forces viewers to reconsider their perceptions of a landscape as a place of idyllic beauty in his new series *Pacific Island/Ocean*, which references his time spent with Sukumaran. The palm trees in these works act as signifiers of the darkness that hides beneath the beauty of a place like Bali.

“For me painting is the most vital, immediate and effective way to make a statement about being alive. With the use of the most primitive tools I can quickly make comments about my own existence and of the world as I see it. I am excited to have the opportunity to start that dialogue with native Hong Kong and Chinese collectors and curators”. —Ben Quilty, artist

About Ben Quilty

Ben Quilty was born in 1973 in Sydney, Australia. In 1994, Quilty completed his Bachelor of Visual Arts, majoring in painting at the Sydney College of the Arts. He later went on to receive a certificate in Aboriginal Culture and History from Monash University in 1996. In 2001, he received a Bachelor of Visual Communication at the University of Western Sydney.

Quilty grew up in the outer suburbs of north-western Sydney, where his youth typified the self-destructive character of Australian masculinity: drugs, alcohol, and recklessness. He was a willing participant in this risk-taking and destructive behaviour, but always questioned it. It was this period of his life that inspired most of his work today. Images such as skulls, snakes and grotesque Siamese-twin compositions have since been seen in his paintings, creating a dark and uncanny genre across the majority of his artworks.

His works are featured in the collections of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. Quilty was the recipient of the Doug Moran Portrait Prize in 2009. In the same year Quilty was named runner-up for the Archibald Prize for the same portrait. He then won the Archibald Prize two years later for his portrait of Margaret Olley. In 2014, he received the top award at the inaugural Prudential Eye Awards in Singapore for his painting *Smashed Rorschach*.

About Pearl Lam Galleries

Founded by Pearl Lam, Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. With over 20 years of experience exhibiting Asian and Western art and design, it is one of the leading and most established contemporary art galleries to be launched out of China.

Playing a vital role in stimulating international dialogue on Chinese and Asian contemporary art, the Galleries is dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from the region. The Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore collaborate with renowned curators, each presenting distinct programming from major solo exhibitions, special projects and installations to conceptually rigorous group shows. Based on the philosophy of Chinese Literati where art forms have no hierarchy, Pearl Lam Galleries is dedicated to breaking down boundaries between different disciplines, with a unique gallery model committed to encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

Contemporary Chinese Abstract art is heavily represented in the Galleries roster. Influential Chinese artists Zhu Jinshi and Su Xiaobai, who synthesise Chinese sensibilities with an international visual language, are presented internationally with work now included in major private and public collections worldwide. The Galleries has also introduced leading international artists such as Jenny Holzer, Jim Lambie and Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) to markets in the region, providing opportunities for new audiences in Asia to encounter their work. Pearl Lam Galleries encourages international artists to create new work which engages specifically with the region—collaborating to produce thought-provoking and culturally relevant work.

Press Enquiries

Rosanna Cator / Sutton PR Asia
rosanna@suttonprasia.com / +852 2528 0792