

What can I do now?  
Melanie Flynn

Locust Jones' recent series of works on paper delve into issues of contemporary politics. With quickly worked surfaces reflecting a stream of consciousness process, these works are energetic and sometimes manic interpretations of current issues. From the death of Michael Jackson to the climate change summit in Copenhagen, the works swell with thought provoking images already familiar to us, although sometimes subconsciously, through the various media of the Internet, photojournalism, film culture and nightly news broadcasts.

Born in New Zealand, and now residing in Australia, Jones' works have been largely influenced by his travels. Spending time in locations as diverse as Lebanon, India, New York and remote locales of New Zealand, Jones thrives simultaneously in both isolation from and immersion in distinct cultures. Feeling that his strongest works arrive from states of being challenged, his travels have been the catalyst for works that expose the physical pressures of being in unfamiliar or threatening environments and the psychological states required to deal with these environments.

This is particularly true of his travels to Lebanon, in both 1999 and during a residency in Beirut in 2004. These experiences sparked major changes in his understanding of the effect that media bias has played in forming his own opinions on issues such as the Israel / Palestine conflict. His exposure to environments, as diverse as refugee camps and beach resorts during these travels have resulted in works which map out not only our ability, but our willingness, to accept the extremes of the human condition.

In *Michael Jackson's heart attack & the Tehran riots* (2009), a haunting face (a terrified looking news reader) takes central place amongst a collage of political dignitaries, placard holding protesters, a spirit like figure and a scene of humanities ascent from apes, and its subsequent potential decline. Various gestures of a raised hand can be seen across the work, from a protester's fist or a politician's wave. Captured by a camera-wielding journalist, the diverse gestures are morphed into a symbol of insecurity and confusion, mingled with defiance and strength. The images are drawn from Jones' daily trawling of newspapers, magazines and the Internet. Using both his everyday routine encounters with news imagery and his personal archive of images from magazines and publications of international photojournalism, Jones' works become a powerful chronicle of daily and historical news on one piece of paper.

Underpinning this piece, as can often be seen in Jones' work, is sprawling text. Brother, Sister, Mother, Father appears before the longer more hidden text, which declares itself a rant. Largely indecipherable, the text, like the images, consists of a stream of thought, instigated by a particular news item. Using oil and ink applied with Bamboo calligraphy sticks and sharpened Bamboo poles, emphasises the spontaneity inherent in the medium, the text, imagery and its message. In the series of works titled *Climate change*, this relationship is evident. The works, which were made in the lead up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, reflect on the feeling of impending doom for the future of the Earth. *Climate change 1* (2009) shows continents discernible from the surrounding oceans although with geographic borders between ocean and land starting to blur. *Climate change 2* and *3* (2009) show a more chaotic picture, as the ink pours over the surface of the globes, the world becomes a flooded, unrecognisable mass, overrun with spirit like faces of the former human inhabitants. In a recent publication accompanying the exhibition *I Walk the Line: New Australian Drawing*, Christine Morrow and Kit Wise refer to the medium of drawing as capable of reflecting on temporality, a dynamic state of being or a unfolding of an event. The 'inherently democratic' medium of drawing, which is described as 'lo-fi', informal and modest,<sup>1</sup> is cited as being 'the best vehicle for the voice of dissent'.<sup>2</sup> With this summation of the characteristics of the drawing medium in mind, one can understand why Jones has chosen it for his striving to make sense of the world we live in. In Jones' words, the process of rendering with vigour his 'warped diary' of events, distorts, and impregnates with urgency and emergency the lack of control we have over world events.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Morrow, Christine & Wise, Kit, *I walk the line: new Australian drawing*, Museum of Contemporary Art Limited, Sydney, 2009, p.3, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Dexter, E., *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*, Phaidon, London and New York, 2005, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, Locust, 'I'll burn that bridge when I come to it', *Until Never* (exhibition text), Melbourne, 2008, <http://until-never.blogspot.com/2008/10/locust-jones-ill-burn-that-bridge-when.html>