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Thu Van Tran
Jemima Wyman

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Jemima Wyman

Pairrebeener people

Born 1977, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Lives and works in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia,
and Los Angeles, United States

Red flares, white smoke bombs and the yellow smog of tear gas come together in Jemima Wyman's towering collage *Plume 20* 2022. Wyman gleans hundreds of haze-filled scenes of protest from online sources. Printing and cutting each image by hand, she severs air from its original context, layering disconnected smoke trails into a vast, leftward-blowing plume. Organised gatherings and spontaneous uprisings, actions of both the political left and right pool together in this final collage, as scenes from Kyiv, Santiago, New Delhi, Minneapolis, Hong Kong and elsewhere curl into one dense cloud. Occasionally, we can just make out a human figure amid the haze.

The 'Plume' series emerged from the artist's ongoing focus on different masking strategies used by activists. Plastic Guy Fawkes disguises, colourful Pussy Riot balaclavas and makeshift face coverings have become central motifs in her study of collective anonymity; however, this new project looks past these disguises to the 'mask' created by smoke and haze. The smoke from flares and torches envelops a crowd, creating a shared identity, yet haze can also intercept and disorient protest in the form of police-issued tear gas and stun grenades, or 'flashbangs'. Acknowledging this, Wyman highlights smoke as both a mode of camouflage used by demonstrators and as a weapon deployed against them. Air – usually invisible and intangible – is revealed as a site of contest in which the State and its subjects confront each other.

Like many of the artist's works, *Plume 20* has a pages-long subtitle that details her source images:

Smoke from hand-held smoke bomb during a 'Yellow Vest' protest, Nantes, France, 11 May 2019; Smoke during a protest over failing economic situation, Beirut, Lebanon, 17 October 2019; Smoke during student strike and protest advocating for investigations into police violence and political reform at the University of Hong Kong in the Shatin district, 11 November 2019 . . .



Just one small section of this full caption traces disparate chapters in contemporary world politics — French populism, Lebanon’s financial crisis and the Hong Kong independence movement. Continue reading and certain patterns emerge from this seemingly disjointed list. For instance, most of the images of Ukrainian resistance date from 2014 to 2021, in the wake of the 2014 Russian incursion into Crimea and the Donbas, anticipating the latest invasion of 2022. Wyman reveals that the signs of future conflict are often present before they erupt: trapped beneath the layers of 24-hour media coverage.

Plume 20 is perhaps what American Marxist philosopher Fredric Jameson imagined in 1984 when he speculated on political art in an age of proliferating media images. Jameson called for a practice of ‘cognitive mapping’ that tracked the economic and political agents concealed within the everyday montage of news, advertising and entertainment. In this way, he hoped art would provide some sense of historical footing within the ‘perpetual present’ of compounding images.¹ Wyman offers us possible pathways through the world’s discord — her collage and captions suggesting the coordinates of a ‘Jamesonian’ map.

The implied connections of these smoke fragments can lead us to many hypotheses. Do these episodes all lead back to a boom-and-bust global economy or perhaps the returning threat of authoritarian leaders? Do they speak of the ghosts of European imperialism or are they spectres of new power relations borne by technologies of surveillance?

Globalism, postcolonialism, neoliberalism, capitalism — in seeking answers, a long string of ‘isms’ come to mind. While Jemima Wyman doesn’t propose any definitive conclusions, her patchwork cloud suggests that each incident forms part of a larger system, albeit one that seems indeterminate — foggy, disorienting, all-encompassing. [SR](#)

The artist dedicates this work to the memory of Mark Webb (1957-2022).

¹ Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism, or The cultural logic of late capitalism’, *New Left Review*, no.146, July–August 1984, p.92.

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Cover

Jonathan Jones

Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi peoples

Australia b.1978

with **Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM**

Wiradjuri people

Australia b.1940

(untitled) giran (detail) 2018

Bindu-gaany (freshwater mussel shell),

gabudha (rush), gawurra (feathers),

marrung dinawan (emu egg), walung

(stone), wambuwung dhabal (kangaroo

bone), wayu (string), wiiny (wood),

48-channel soundscape

Sound design: Luke Mynott,

Sonar Sound

Installed dimensions variable

Purchased 2018 with funds

from Tim Fairfax AC through

the Queensland Art Gallery |

Gallery of Modern Art Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery |

Gallery of Modern Art

Photograph: Natasha Harth, QAGOMA

Back cover

Dora Budor

Croatia b.1984

Origin I (A Stag Drinking) 2019

Custom environmental chamber

(reactive electronic system, compressor,

valves, 3D-printed elements, aluminium,

acrylic, LED light, glass, wood, paint),

organic and synthetic pigments,

diatomaceous earth, FX dust, felt, ed. 3/3

152 x 160 x 86cm

Purchased 2021. Queensland Art Gallery |

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Photograph: Merinda Campbell,

QAGOMA

(pp.2-3)

Yhonnie Scarce / *Cloud Chamber* 2020

(installation view, 'Looking Glass: Judy

Watson and Yhonnie Scarce', TarraWarra

Museum of Art, Healesville, Vic. 2020) /

Image courtesy: Yhonnie Scarce and

THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne /

Photograph: Andrew Curtis

(pp.10-11)

Lee Mingwei / *Bodhi Tree*

Project 2006 / Photograph:

Chloë Callistemon, QAGOMA

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