

URC RESEARCH REPORT

Name of Researcher: Julian Hooper

Date: 25 March 2009

Project Title: Making Ancestors

RMOL#: 1019

What are the research questions?

How can a visual portrait language that has been developed out of a specific personal genealogy be expanded to illuminate a broader cultural background?

How can traditional portrait conventions be appropriated to create historical weight for imaginary subjects?

Rationale

The rationale included in my application has remained relevant.

Methodology

The methodology included in my application was followed closely.

Outcomes / findings

At the start of this research project I prepared multiple generations of drawings that resolved imagery towards paintings. I had initially intended to produce 40 paintings, to fit 40 frames selected from the collection of the Otago Settlers Museum. After several weeks of drawing I had produced dozens of new images. I assessed the results and observed a sudden drop in the success of the images after the best 20 drawings were selected. I produced about 5 more successful images, but it was evident that with the decreasing strike rate this was becoming an un-economical use of time. The production of paintings followed quickly, and I began constructing a digital image of the exhibition. Within this digital image, each painting as it was finished was set into an image of its frame, then scaled and placed onto a virtual model of the gallery. Through this digital model, I immediately noted how well the combinations of painting and frame were working. This raised questions about the suitability of my intended Salon-style approach to installation; it now seemed important to allow each individual work the physical space to be viewed not only as part of a series but also independently of the other works.

These observations caused me to shift the emphasis of the project. I decided to produce a more ordered installation of fewer paintings, and to document the exhibition with a larger publication. I delivered 26 paintings to the DPAG, and hung 24 in the exhibition. I titled the exhibition *The Future's Counsel*. I selected twelve paintings for reproduction in the catalogue, with 3 installation images also included. I chose a larger format of publication than anticipated to allow for larger reproductions. This was necessary because most of the frames were wide enough to occupy a lot of

space in the photographs, thus diminishing the size of the actual painting in each reproduction.

I installed the exhibition with Aaron Kreisler, the new curator at the DPAG. At this time Aaron and I began discussing approaches for his catalogue essay. We continued this communication throughout the duration of the exhibition and for several months afterwards. We eventually agreed that he would take an introduction-like approach for his contribution, and that I would also contribute a text component. I selected twelve quotations from literature to be set against the twelve works reproduced. These quotations provide the reader with another framing device through which to consider the paintings.

In *The Future's Counsel*, I expanded the visual portrait language already operating in my practice to broaden the reading of my work beyond a personal ancestral narrative. I achieved this by utilising motifs for the paintings indiscriminately of the motif's cultural or geographical origins. While on a brief visit to Tokyo in December 2007, I acquired the five-volume book *Shurinzū: Illustrated Book of Fish and Aquatic Animals compiled by Matsudaira Yoritaka, the Lord of Takamatsu in 18th Century Japan*, and a smaller but equally useful set of flower illustration books. I drew directly from these volumes for some of the paintings in *The Future's Counsel* - particularly *Elokelo*, *Ongo Me'a Mali* and *Count*. I also made use of architectural forms, sourced from books of Gothic architecture, for the paintings *Mister* and *Bride and Groom*. It was satisfying to find this versatility to my approach to portraiture.

I made extensive use of 19th and early 20th Century portrait photographs as a source of traditional portrait conventions. Almost all the paintings in *The Future's Counsel* borrowed directly from an early portrait photograph. This provided me with a structure on which to build each image, and resulted in portraits of historical resonance. I had intended to enhance this historical aspect by mimicking a 19th century portrait gallery in the installation of the works, with a coloured wall and Salon-style hanging. Instead I used a modernist approach, with the paintings centred at a consistent height and evenly placed around the gallery. This approach worked in tandem with the contemporary approach to image construction, and functioned in contrast to the clear historical aspects of the work.

Publications and dissemination

Exhibition: *The Future's Counsel*, 1 March – 1 June 2008, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand. <http://www.dunedin.art.museum/exhibitions.asp?p=3&y=2008>

Publication: *Julian Hooper: The Future's Counsel*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand, 2009. With an essay by Aaron Kreisler.

My website: <http://julianhooper.com/FuturesCounsel.html>

When the exhibition finished the DPAG removed the frames, which they returned to the Settlers Museum, and returned the paintings to me. In September 2008 I exhibited thirteen of these paintings in modern frames at Gallery9, Sydney, Australia. <http://www.gallery9.com.au/20080902-index.shtml>

In November 2008 I was contacted by Japanese freelance curator Naoko Usuki. She had seen *The Future's Counsel* at the DPAG, while on a visit to New Zealand supported by the Curator in Residence Program at Arts Initiative Tokyo. Naoko subsequently recommended me for the AIT residency program. AIT has officially offered me the residency for June – August 2009, and has succeeded in procuring

funding for my position through the Ishibashi Foundation. AIT will provide my return airfare, an apartment in downtown Tokyo, and a per diem allowance.
<http://a-i-t.net/index.php>