

# DOLLS OF THE DEAD

JACQUI STOCKDALE TELLS **ALEXIE GLASS**  
SHE IS INTRIGUED BY THE POTENTIAL OF  
MEANING TO LINGER IN OBJECTS LIKE  
MASKS THAT WERE CREATED WITH  
SHAMANISTIC INTENT. PORTRAIT BY  
**KIRSTIN GOLLINGS.**



**J**acqui Stockdale has, in the past, been a wandering soul. Widely travelled, her practice traverses a personal cartography of associations that weave irreverently between history, folklore, indigenous cultures and the carnivalesque.

Raised in regional Victoria, she graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1990 before spending a few years in Hobart to study video and filmmaking. She later moved to Sydney where she shared a neighbouring studio with artists such as **Del Kathryn Barton** and **Lara Merrett**, while integrating herself into a colourful burlesque community.

In 2000, she accepted what she thought would be a six week appointment as the Arts Officer at Berrima Prison in Darwin. In the three years that followed, she worked with a broad range of inmates, from Caucasians and Indigenous people – primarily from Northern Arnhem Land and the Torres Strait Islands – to Indonesian fishermen and boat people, guiding them as they created confronting self-portraits, or learned life drawing with wardens or other prisoners acting as sitters. The experience expanded her field of reference and encouraged Stockdale to explore identity and the way its amorphous qualities are affected by closed, hermetic conditions like prisons or studios.

When she returned to Melbourne in 2002, Stockdale began a series of portrait photographs using hand-painted backdrops inspired by the colonial picturesque and the works of **John Glover**. Recently, however, she separated her painting and photographic practices. Human subjects are now confined to the digital realm, while in her painting, she arranges collected objects to create illuminations and unexpected relationships.

Left: Jacqui Stockdale, *Some kind of coyote*, 2008. Oil on linen, 76 x 71cm.

Right: Jacqui Stockdale, *Hopi on the hill*, 2008. Oil on linen, 46 x 56cm.

Opposite: Jacqui Stockdale, *The present 1*, 2008. Oil on linen, 56 x 61cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST



## LESLEY CHOW ON JACQUI STOCKDALE

### Art critic

“As a painter, photographer and mask-maker, Stockdale draws on a range of mediums to produce uniquely ambiguous work. Her paintings are made from older works cut and spliced together – for instance, a landscape pierced with spear-shaped fragments of other canvases, or a head-shaped box, which could serve as either a mask or sculpture. In her collage *Snapper Head*, Stockdale takes a swatch of what was once a mountain landscape and places it at the bottom of a new work; seized from its original setting, it looks like a pile of lush, golden-brown tresses.

“Despite the emphasis on Asian and South American design, Stockdale’s work is full of distorted features and

leering mouths. Many of her pictures are a network of feeding forms, with the chopped-up remnants of one work stuffed into another. Her epic *La Montana* is assembled from paintings of skies, waterfalls and grasses, but the picture is disturbed by the severe black gash of a woman’s hair. Even her nudes are often alarming, with blank, placid faces on top of voluptuous bodies. Stockdale combines the decorative and the aggressive, the lyrically pretty and the scathing.”

Lesley Chow is a Melbourne arts critic. Her reviews have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Photofile* and *Salon*.

Jo Higgins

Her forthcoming exhibition, *Some kind of coyote*, developed from a trip to Mexico in 2007 as artist-in-residence with Circus Oz. Stockdale initiated the residency in 2004 and has travelled widely with the troupe, drawing audiences and capturing performances and backstage activities. While in Mexico with Circus Oz, Stockdale also experienced the Day of the Dead festivities. Drawn to the luminous colours and vibrancy of the Mexican rituals, she was enthralled by the dolls of the dead and the animist beliefs they evoked.

Back in her studio in Melbourne (in the same warehouse as sculptor Kate Rohde, a frequent collaborator), she has assembled objects from her travels into a vast collection exploring the idea of the 'soul' of non-human and inanimate entities. In her work, she plays with this potential of meaning to linger in objects like masks that have been created with ritual or shamanistic intent.

Sitting amidst the hoard of folk and faux objects in her studio, it's hard not to think that Stockdale has created a unique realm of magical thinking. This is a place of collapse and possibility, of worlds outside our own, of worlds without end. So I ask her where to next, imagining her to be gypsy-like, in a permanent state of movement and flux. Instead she looks at me steadfastly, with her arms folded across her pregnant belly, and says, "I'm less nomadic now; the nomads are in my work. I'm here to stay."

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Opposite: Jacqui Stockdale, *Meander of the man linx*, 2008. Oil on linen, 150 x 120cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST

## HELEN GORY

Director, Helen Gory Galerie, Melbourne

AND

## STEVEN JOYCE

Director, Despard Gallery, Hobart

### ON JACQUI STOCKDALE

According to Despard Gallery Director **Steven Joyce**, that time in an artist's career when people finally start to sit up and pay critical attention is now for **Jacqui Stockdale**. The timing has certainly proved right for **Helen Gory**, who has just taken over representation of Stockdale in Melbourne and will show her work for the first time in August. Says Gory: "I think this show is going to be very successful and really going to open her up to a new market of collectors and buyers, people that are really into buying art for the love of art." Gory has in fact already sold two of Stockdale's works from the stockroom and is finding, like Joyce, that collectors have an enormous enthusiasm for her practice, one that includes photography, painting, installation and performance.

Stockdale had two solo exhibitions in 2007, in Tasmania at Despard Gallery and at the Linden Contemporary Art Space in St Kilda, Melbourne, in 2006. A regular in the

Portia Geach Memorial Award, in the last two years Stockdale has featured in exhibitions including the 2007 National Photographic Purchase Award at Albury Regional Gallery and the 2006 Citibank Photographic Portrait Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Joyce has also taken her work to the 2006 Melbourne Art Fair and Art Sydney where, he says, it sold to a really diverse crowd of people, including a Tasmanian antiques dealer who bought two of her works and donated them directly to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Other collectors of Stockdale's work include a member of the National Gallery of Victoria, who purchased an entire suit of 18 images from Stockdale's acclaimed 2005 *Familijia* series. Says Joyce: "Three years on we're still getting people calling up trying to buy images that have sold out."

Gory is confident that if initial feedback from collectors in her gallery to Stockdale's work is anything to go by, her profile is only going to continue rising. When it comes to pricing the work of a new artist to the gallery, Gory has said that prices will simply be a continuation of her last show at Despard Gallery, where they ranged from \$2350 to \$7500.

According to both Joyce and Gory, part of the mass appeal of Stockdale is her versatility as an artist, as well as her passion. Well-known for her photography, she is also an acclaimed painter whose recent commissions include a portrait of former Tasmanian Premier **Jim Bacon** for Hobart's Parliament House. Other collections include Artbank and the William Tan Collection in Korea.

Jo Higgins

