



Some kind of Coyote

Oil on linen. 76 x 71 cm, 2008

Jacqui Stockdale has, in the past, been a wandering soul. Widely travelled, her practice explores intuitive logic and considers the innate presence of objects in her very personal cartography of associations that weave irreverently between history, folklore, indigenous cultures and the carnivalesque. Interestingly, she describes herself as a "portrait artist who works in different mediums", and yet her works do not often draw from an interrogation of the living subject but instead articulate a response to the inanimate or intangible. Even when dealing with individual subjects directly, she negotiates a distance between herself and the sitter through the introduction of artifice, costuming or the faux decorative. There is authentic material quality to the way Stockdale interacts with the world, a tactility and sensuality which seems antithetical to the surface qualities of painting and photography—the mediums she is most recognised for working with—but which allow for a compelling confluence of inspirations.

Raised in regional Victoria she graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1990 before spending a few years living in Hobart where she studied 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 performance and burlesque community. In 2000 she accepted what she thought would be a six week appointment as the Arts Officer at Berrima Prison, Darwin. This extended into three years, during which time she worked with low to medium security inmates, mostly men, though occasionally women, who were a mix of Caucasian, Indigenous people primarily from Northern Arnhem Land and the Torres Strait Islands, Indonesian fishermen and boat people. This experience was pivotal in altering the direction of her practice. Whereas in the past as a consequence of her training she may have drawn from more formal methodologies, in the gaol she worked more laterally, guiding the inmates to create confronting self-portraits of themselves and introducing life-drawing classes, where the sitters were frequently the wardens or other prisoners. This turned her practice towards a more expanded field of reference; she began to explore the subjective terrain of identity and its amorphous qualities and how these are affected by closed, hermetic conditions such as the prison or studio. Upon her return to Melbourne in 2002, Stockdale commenced a series of portrait photographs that bought together hand-painted backdrops inspired by the colonial picturesque, primarily the works of John Glover. These works featured formally arranged figures who were often involved in actions that subverted her constructed worlds, such as a bodiced figure wearing a monkey mask or a modern girl with a benign expression holding a taxidermed animal's head, both of which serve to challenge the viewers' gaze. More recently she has separated the painting and photographic practices, relegating the human subjects to the digital realm where she controls their actions with precision and surreal tenderness. In the paintings (it is tempting to call them still-lives - however she refers to them as portraits), she arranges collected objects either through intention or accident to create illuminations and unexpected relationships.

Her exhibition, **Some kind of Coyote** has developed from a trip she took to Mexico in 2007 as artist-in-residence with Circus Oz and to attend the Day of the Dead festivities. In 2004 Stockdale initiated a residency with Circus Oz which started with her drawing the audiences. Stockdale then began travelling across Australia and internationally with the troupe capturing both their performances and their backstage activities, as well as creating portraits of the performers in the studio. These relatively swift, energetic renderings have a febrile and responsive life force that resonates across her works and that runs parallel to her experiences in Mexico. Drawn to the luminous colours and vibrancy of the Mexican rituals, it wasn't only the ubiquitous skeletons that held her enthralled but also the dolls of the dead and the creatures that represented more animist beliefs.

Back in the studio in Melbourne (situated in the same warehouse as sculptor **Kate Rohde**, a frequent collaborator), she has assembled objects that she accumulated during these travels so that they explore the idea of the soul of non-human, often inanimate, entities. Painted loosely with a mixture of wash and outline, these vignettes have an informal intimacy that belies the potency of the assembled totems. Stockdale doesn't dalliance with the Gothic or dark arts, but instead plays with the potential of meaning to linger in masks or objects created with a ritual or shamanistic intention. In one painting, a 100-year-old Indian Hopi doll captures the literal combination of taxidermy, feathers, bones and wood that it is comprised of, yet also communicates something of its uncanny force and potential for psychic disturbance, while in other paintings animals and humans collide. And sitting amidst the hoard of folk and faux objects that run along the walls and floors and heap upon the shelves of 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 steadfast and poised, arms folded gently across her pregnant belly, "I'm less nomadic now, the nomads are in my work. I'm here to stay."

Written by Alexie Glass, as appeared in Australian Art Collector, Issue 45, July-September 2008.

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JACQUI STOCKDALE SOME KIND OF COYOTE

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OPENING THURSDAY 14 AUGUST, 6 – 8PM

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Hopi on the Hill
Oil on linen. 46 x 56 cm, 2008



The Present
Oil on linen. 56 x 61 cm, 2008



Apocalyptic Masquerade
Oil on linen. 150 x 120 cm, 2008