



Episode 1: Unleashed!

Priscilla Bracks

Making The Empire Cross

DAVID BROKER

There is little doubt that news and current affairs broadcasters claiming to bring us the truth, are aware that the trouble with truth is: it is open to interpretation and manipulation. While audiences are increasingly more sophisticated, I continue to be surprised (and use myself as a text book case study) at just how gullible they are. I know from the most basic of history lessons for example, that propaganda is rife in times of war: that it is designed to make us feel heroic military efforts are going well, and that the job is almost done. Movies depicting brave feats in the face of an often-faceless dehumanised enemy, complement news and current affairs broadcasts, in a complete propaganda package. Of course I am being simplistic here, and for all my gullibility I find little to be positive about where the progress in Iraq, for instance, is concerned. Truth must be some where

Years ago media theorists noted that television (and media generally) comprised something of a continuum where the boundaries between news, soap, sitcom and drama blur. Ask Princess Dianna and family. The characters in daily news impinge upon our lives in a way that tends to render them as soap stars and ultimately like comic book characters. To begin with, the conflict between good and evil forms the foundation of many a good story. Unfortunate terms like the "Coalition of the Willing" sound as if they have been lifted straight from the pages of a cheap comic (the more sophisticated version would show greater imagination), and the characters involved in this group are represented as the light in a dark world. Just when we think that John Howard, Tony Blair and George Bush have lost ground, another attack by the evil opposition strengthens their positions. Looking at global politics in this way it is almost a struggle not to have some, albeit limited, admiration for the ultimate escape artist Osama Bin Laden, the wicked dictator Saddam Hussein,

Right: **Priscilla Bracks**, *Show Me Yours and I'll Show You Mine*, 2005. Lenticular Image, Archival Digital Print, 75 x 50 cm.

Far right: **Priscilla Bracks**, *Commander -in-Chief*, 2005. Lenticular Image, Archival Digital Print, 75 x 50 cm.





or a host of lesser characters that provide seemingly endless diversion. Meanwhile, the rantings and ravings of the Coalition of the Willing ensure that it is difficult to take serious issues, seriously. So while I am well aware of which team to barrack for, I am also aware that "it's only a movie" or in this case, like a movie.

Priscilla Bracks' *Making the Empire Cross* abounds with comic book convention in an attempt to reveal the "truth" behind news and how this connects with entertainment. Using lenticular photography, lush, glossy and colourful, Bracks exploits our fascination with the faux third dimension and perhaps childhood memories of playing with lenticular rulers and kitsch religious post cards. She then presents her work on a simulated movie website with all the trappings including the making of, characters, a narrative, behind the scenes, stars and gossip. Based on current news footage the characters are recognisable and audiences are instantly familiar with both them and their story, be it truth or fiction.

When Bracks started out on this epic production she notes:

"After the commencement of the Afghanistan war, I was not sure whether I should be more disturbed by the war itself, or the abundance of cheap war toys which seemed to flood the market at that time. My response was to collect them over a period now spanning four years. Gradually they formed the basis for this work, the darker side of which ponders popular culture and the media, and the way in which these phenomena can be used to make the case for a conflict which is relatively unsupported outside fundamentally conservative communities (of all religious persuasions)."



Above and above right: **Priscilla Bracks, *Unleashed!*, (Frames 1 & 2) 2005.**

Lenticular Image, Archival Digital Print, 75 x 75 cm.

Left: **Priscilla Bracks, *Gl Joe v. Jihad Joe*, 2005.** Lenticular Image, Archival Digital Print, 75 x 75 cm.

Far left: **Priscilla Bracks, *Public Enemy # 1*, 2005.** Lenticular Image, Archival Digital Print, 75 x 50 cm.

Right: **Priscilla Bracks, *Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch*, 2005.** Lenticular Image, Archival Digital Print, 75 x 75 cm.



If political points can be scored with humour then Bracks is on the money. In a work that relies heavily on a background narrative her story is witty, (somewhat) amusing and insightful on many levels.

Making the Empire Cross. Episode 1: Unleashed, begins with that Crucifixion and brings us up to date on its ongoing consequences. Bracks' black humour elegantly brings together religious mythologies, politics, documentary, literature and entertainment. With "A long, long time ago, in a land far, far away..." she sets the scene for an unfamiliar view of a familiar story in a language that exploits the patronising tone of "infotainment".

"... the peace of the New World is shattered by the evil Jihad Joe who storms the Capital, destroying everything in his path. It seems clear that this dealer of death is merely a foot soldier in a war between two fundamentalist groups, each fighting for the supremacy of their own self-styled hegemony. ..."

So familiar is her territory, and this is the point, that even where the names have been changed no one is actually protected. On the contrary, this work is accusatory and the artist is not afraid to point the finger. One feels, however, that faithful to documentary style Bracks is attempting to generate a distance from the issues she is dealing with. Whilst she clearly has a view and her audience is well aware of this, part of her satire can be found in this scarcely disguised distancing from the issues she is dealing with. In other words her story attempts, and needs to fail at fair reportage as she implicates all of the characters, "good" and "evil", without fear or favour.

David Broker is a writer, curator and
Director of Canberra Contemporary Art Space

Priscilla Bracks would like to thank Gavin Sade for his love, support and invaluable assistance in the production of this work. Thanks also to Robb Kelly, Jay Younger, Sharon Green, Victor Rijken, Adam MacAlister, Glen Marshall, Pari Exon, Phillip Thompson, Nigel Oram and Kayell for their advice, support and assistance. This work would not have been possible without the generous support of the Queensland Government, through Arts Queensland, who provided \$9,999 to produce and present this series of artworks.







Above: Priscilla Bracks, *To Be Continued ...*, 2005. Lenticular Image, Archival Pigment Digital Print, 75 x 75 cm

Front: Priscilla Bracks, *Shiva's Nemesis*, 2005. Lenticular Image, Archival Pigment Digital Print, 75 x 75 cm

Left: Priscilla Bracks, *Bring It On*, 2005. Lenticular Image, Archival Pigment Digital Print, 75 x 50 cm

WWW.MAKING-THE-EMPIRE-CROSS.COM

RAW Space Galleries
99 Melbourne Street
South Brisbane Qld
17 Feb - 10 Mar 2006
www.rawspace.org

Intrude Gallery
122 Gertrude Street
Fitzroy Melbourne Vic
23 Mar - 4 April 2006
www.intrudegallery.com.au

Priscilla Bracks © 2006
info@priscillabracks.com
www.priscillabracks.com.au