

# Mathew Jones

In comic strips *POOF!* registers a moment frozen in anticipation of sudden appearances and disappearances. This simultaneity of appearance and disappearance exemplifies that pure spectacle – that spectacle for spectacle's sake – which is identity politics.

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It is known that initially queers wanted at the very least to defeat prejudice, the environment suitable to the unlimited deployment of new passions. But of course this was not easy and so we found ourselves forced to rethink our uniqueness. And during the entire course of events various social projects had to be abandoned and a good number of our innate capacities were not employed, as is the case – but how much more absolutely and daily – for countless numbers of our counterparts.

In a work presiding over this history, Mathew Jones has now deftly respun a few old myths and is carving out a space in which to lose all of them. What more tenuous commentary could there be? We have become accepted, we are told. But our time, which has not yet uncovered all of its ambiguities, is also far from having afforded solidity to all of our behaviour. Jones has come out so much, here and there, that many people do not know that above all he is an artist of the closet, the permanent heretic of a movement that cannot tolerate any indiscreetness. Few of his bent have contributed as much as Jones has to the origin of this partitioning: he scavenges among 'La Race maudite', he comes up with staid icons, and even in the most confident plenitude he often finds the means to etch out the most telling holes that have accumulated in our defence. The quarter century that has passed since the clash at Stonewall has indeed begun to change the world, but not our latitude.

Jones is an artist who is not changed by identity but rather who continuously changes the stakes of identity. He is opposed to those who, at one time, built their definition on the basis of emancipated, direct *acts*; he is also leery of those

who, more recently, claim to establish their generally rhetorical *typology* by the mere affirmation of an exclusionary stance that is both total and totally unemployable. Instead, Jones does not hesitate to intervene, in even the most wily fashion, in all categories that seem pre-empted to him. In *POOF!* Jones jumps in and tackles the very founding question of our assumption into empowerment, demonstrating that what is spawned in the rage of distinction is an even greater definitional barrier, which saps our ability to believe in 'the homosexual' as an unproblematically discrete category. The airy and subtle forms, the irregular clouds between different levels of perspective, the lighting, the requisite pink, an archway, columns, the most vague sort of always diffuse ambience, all woven together in a perfect screen, compose one of the most obscure and, ultimately, one of the best elucidated landscapes that one can encounter in the space of the queer ghetto. Selfhood finds its contour there without difficulty.

For anyone who has not forgotten the conflicted and passionate relations, this must appear as a sort of Sodom in relief: a people caught forever in the tumult of its genesis. Among other things and in passing, the cruisers of Gomorrah were nothing if not dissolute. Similarly the preternatural epiphany in the aspect of the work makes it, if not the locus of a glass closet (whose capacity for voiding the link between secrecy and brute life is exposed by Jones), then at least the nimbus of the sexual. Those who love to ponder in vain what we might have been will be wondering for quite a while about this numinous evocation of the winds of identity.

## Paul Foss

This text is an edited version of the catalogue essay written for the artist's exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne May 1993

*POOF!*  
1993, installation  
at the Australian Centre for  
Contemporary Art, Melbourne

