

MATHEW JONES

RIOT

26 April - 20 May 1995

Perhaps because queer people are good de-cipherers and consumers of signs, queer people love to wear them. There's a micro-industry of queer kitsch meeting the demand to declare and be counted as out, queer and proud, usually in the context of gay and lesbian festivals where the presumption is already one of out and proud. Rainbow flags have flourished, as have t-shirts whose various rhetorical forms are of the closet kind: "I'm not gay but my boyfriend is" (whose effect depends entirely on gender) and 'Nobody knows I'm gay' are just two favoured forms which extract their humour from that fuzzy logic of disclosure and deflection.

But there's one t-shirt slogan which exceeds the boundaries of its intended witty rhetorical effect. "The Family Tree Stops Here."¹ It has a literal dead-pan ring to it. Sure enough, the aphorism has its sights set on heterosexual culture's ability to think itself endlessly through the collapsed metaphors of love, family, unity and normality. and underwriting this assault is the poleaxe of the sodomite whose practices, as Pierre Klossowski put it so elegantly, are not for species bonding or familial celebration, "but an act done to gore the partner and release the germ of the species in his excrement."² Problematic here though, is that what actually constitutes the death of the family, is the tangible death of the very subject who proclaims "The Family Tree Stops Here". The sign ricochets off its appointed target in the family, it backfires, it places him - the one who will die - precariously close to a gay/AIDS spectacularisation whose ways are invariably manoeuvrable. The aphorism is a maverick of meaning trying so hard to instil a sense of radical, sexual otherness against the norm of the straight family that it forgets that it also speaks what Eve Sedgwick called the "fatal bond in the heterosexist *imaginaire*"³ - the daydream of a world without queers.

In the same way, Mathew Jones's suturing into a lineage of signs formed out of Robert Indiana's LOVE says the "Family Tree Stops Here." LOVE's family tree is a prodigious one with each generation extracting its pound of signification from the simple, bombastic strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE embodied the aspirations of the tripped-out 60s only to become a merchandiser's windfall from which Indiana complains, he never received a penny. The story of LOVE, as Paul Taylor once remarked, "turned its creator into a metaphor of his times"⁴, but as metaphors have a habit of doing, LOVE covered more than it revealed: Indiana's lack of control over his work, his gradual ostracism from New York and its pop-art-queens, his reclusion in a fishing village and the persecution by small-town authorities for procuring homosex for money. If LOVE embodied the artist, then the disjuncture between the sign's universalist economy and the artist's sexual difference provided other artist's with the means for bringing the sign back to earth. The four letters of LOVE have been displaced by AIDS in works by Juan Davila and the Canadian collective General Idea. It worked as the ground for ACT-UP to mobilise discontent over government negligence for those effected by HIV/AIDS in "STONEWALL '69, RIOT, AIDS CRISIS '89" and has been used by Queer activists to reliberate FUCK.

However, Jones relationship to this genealogy is ambivalent, distracted and critical. Although all the key signifiers are in place (the boxed four letter words, the red, blue and green schema, the individuated italic letter, even the type faces and the various modes of display and mediums in which these dislocations took place), the anxieties of what the post-Indiana generation means

ROSLYN OXLEY9 GALLERY

by RIOT, FUCK and AIDS are staged to reveal conflict at the very point at which they are most assured of meaning what they are supposed to. Obvious intention and its effects are everything in these works. If, for example, ACT-UP's real purpose was to incite a riot like the one which fabled the post-war gay movement of Stonewall in 69, its failure in RIOT was thinking the political by recourse to its own Stonewallian legacy. It placed, in effect, too much faith in a theology of signs and its own liberational philosophy. Jones marks this moment as a limitation in 69/96...*A BRIEF HISTORY OF TURNING THE SAME THINGS UPSIDE DOWN AND BACK TO FRONT WITHOUT REALLY CHANGING VERY MUCH*. But in a fiat that has become something of a signature discourse for Jones's work, the limitations, sometimes rendered with a queen-speak bitchiness, opens onto other ways of thinking the political in queer culture. 69 might be the limit, but this boundary finds its future in 96. There is a syncopated questioning repeated in many of these works whose power is to place the viewer at the dead-end of signs, all the while opening up to that question, and then what? DEAD... and then what? LOST... and then what? CUTE ... and then what? FUCT ... and then what? The Family Tree Stops Here ... and then what?

Do even queers, then, dream of a world without queers? I hesitate to ask the question, thinking of the implications and how it might be misunderstood. Given that it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish queer from the not so queer, the cause from the effect, LOVE from the DEAD, the lines often drawn around identity are diffuse. It is around these lines that Jones complicates our familiarity with signs.

Robert Schubert

¹ The slogan has also been used in David MacDiarmid's Rainbow Q-aphorisms.

² Klossowski, P., *Sade: My Neighbour*, Lingis, A. (transl.) Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1991, p.viii.

³ Sedgwick, E., *The Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press, Berkely, Los Angeles, 1990, p.128.

⁴ Taylor, P., "LOVE Story: The Trails and Tribulations of Pop Artist Robert Indiana", *Outrage*, March 1992, p.25

MATHEW JONES



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Roslyn Oxley9
Until May 20

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Mathew Jones' new show at Roslyn Oxley9 is a set of variations which plays with Robert Indiana's iconic painting of the '60s LOVE in which the word was arranged in a square block of psychedelic coloured type. It has been reproduced endlessly on T-shirts and postcards. It also has a history of being transformed by other artists working particularly through the representation of AIDS by the Canadian sculpture collective General Idea, ACT UP and Juan Davila for example. All these works are in turn quoted in the exhibition.

What Jones does is historically extend the icon across the '70s, '80s and '90s, playing with it, undercutting it, having a bit of political fun.

Whereas in the '60s it was possible to have one universalising icon LOVE in whose name human liberation could be undertaken, by the '70s — if not before — that had begun to break down; and in his commentary on Stonewall, the Mardi Gras and political activism, Jones turns the icon back on itself and inside out, shattering its unity.

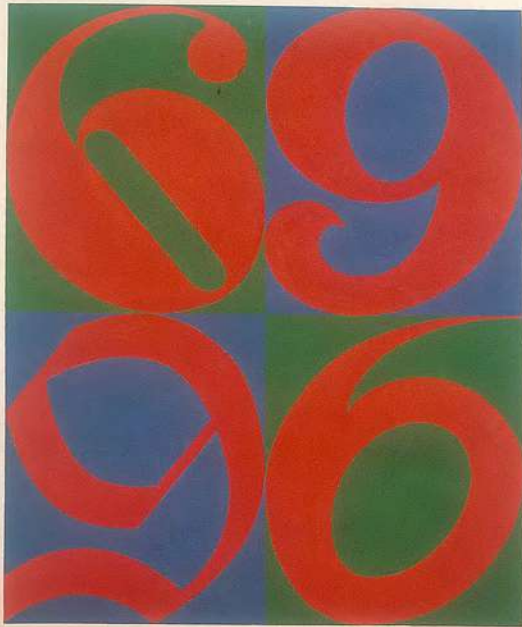
It is sometimes argued that Jones is the queer artist par excellence working in Australia today; but in this exhibition, as in *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight* during Mardi Gras, and *Room 32* at the Springfield Hotel late last year, his range of concerns appears to be an extension of traditional gay left issues.

Behind his work lies a sense of real unease at the loss of an activist space and role in the '90s and the function of a political art and a political artist.

The political artist can keep commenting in galleries about political subjects, raising different issues, like the relationship between the gay movement and paedophilia, for example, or the movement of gay politics from a politics of activism to a politics of signification, but where does it go from here?

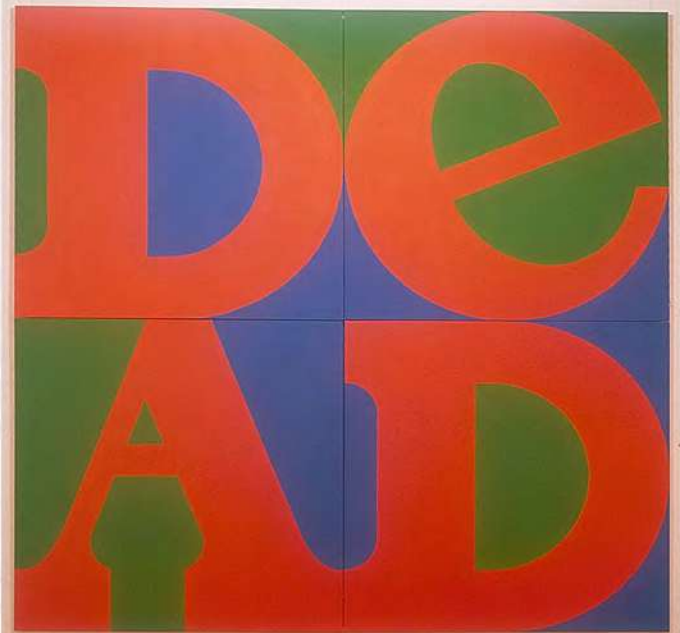
— Leigh Raymond





STONEWALL '69 to '96

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TURNING THE SAME THINGS
UPSIDE DOWN AND BACK TO FRONT
WITHOUT REALLY CHANGING VERY MUCH



It is usually understood that the word 'LOVE' is a prodigious one with each generation extracting it the simple, benighted strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE sign is a prodigious one with each generation extracting it the simple, benighted strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE sign is a prodigious one with each generation extracting it the simple, benighted strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE sign is a prodigious one with each generation extracting it the simple, benighted strength of four letter words.

In the same way, a message of signs fanned out of Robert Indiana's LOVE sign the "Tough family tree is a prodigious one with each generation extracting it the simple, benighted strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE sign is a prodigious one with each generation extracting it the simple, benighted strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE sign is a prodigious one with each generation extracting it the simple, benighted strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE sign is a prodigious one with each generation extracting it the simple, benighted strength of four letter words.

However, Jones' reflection is not always so critical. Although all the key signifiers are words, the red, blue and green scheme and the various modes of display the various modes of display and meanings in which these dislocate of what the post-illuminated generation means.



desire of a world without queer.

In the same way, Matthew Jones's swirling into a lineage of signs formed out of Robert Indiana's LOVE says the "Family Tree Stops Here." LOVE's family tree is a prodigious one with each generation extracting its pound of signification from the simple, bombastic strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE embodied the aspirational of the top-out 60s only to become a merchant's windfall from which Indiana complains, he never received a penny. The story of LOVE as Paul Taylor once remarked, "serves its creator into a metaphor of his times", but as metaphor how clear it is of doing. LOVE covered more than it revealed: Indiana's lack of control over his work, his critical gaze, one from New York and his pop-art queens, his reckoning in a fishing village and the possession by small-town activities for securing business for money. If LOVE embodies the artist, then the disjunction between the sign's universalist economy and the artist's sexual difference, provided other artist's with the means for bringing the sign back to earth. The four letters of LOVE, now both displaced by AIDS in works by Juan Davila and the Canadian collective General Idea. It worked at the ground for ACT-UP to mobilise its content over government negligence for those affected by HEAVENS in "STONEWALL '69, RIOT, AIDS CRISIS '89" and has been used by Queer activists to reiterate F*CK.

However, Jones's relationship to this genealogy is ambivalent, disavowed and critical. Although all the key signifiers are in place (the boxed four letter words, the red, blue and green schema, the individualized sans letter, even the type faces and the various modes of display and mediums in which these dislocating took place), the ambiguity of what the post-Indiana generation means

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SYDNEY GAY & LESBIAN MARDI GRAS 1996

In the same way, Matthew Jones's swirling into a language of signs formed not of Robert Indiana's LOVE says the "Family Tree Sappa Here?" LOVE's family tree is a prodigious one with each generation producing its proud, self-signification from the simple, bombastic strength of four letter words. Indiana's LOVE embodied the alpha-logic of the top-down 60s only to become a manufacturer's windfall from which Indiana complains he never received a penny. The story of LOVE as Paul Taylor once remarked, "turned its creator into a metaphor of his times", but as metaphor breaks back of doing, LOVE carved more than it revealed, Indiana a lack of control over his work, his practical experience from New York and his pop-art quest, his reckoning in a fishing village and the prosecution by small-town authorities for producing banners for money. If LOVE embodied the artist, then the disjunction between the sign's supermarket economy and the artist's social difference provided what artists with the means for bringing the sign back to earth. The four letters of LOVE now form displayed by AIDS in words by Juan Daville and the Canadian collective General Idea. It worked as the ground for ACT-UP to mobilize its dissent over government negligence for those affected by HIV/AIDS in "STONEWALL '86, RITE, AIDS CRISIS '89", and has been used by Queer activists to refigure ROCK.

Having Jones relationship in this genealogy is ambivalent, devalued and critical. Although all the key ingredients are in place (the boxed four letter words, the red, blue and green scheme, the individualized four letter, even the type face and the viewer's choice of display and medium in which these dislocations took place), the language of what the post-Indiana generation means

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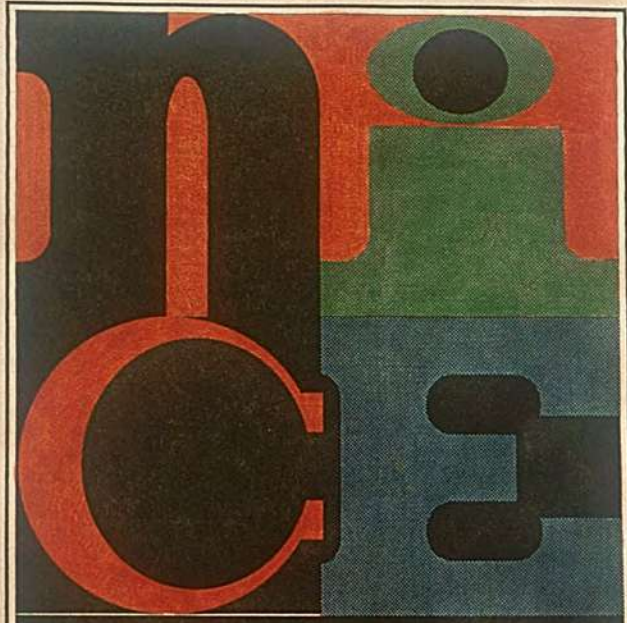
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Art in the Age of Sentimental Curators

The nicest exhibition I've ever seen. K.C., Perth

NICE!!! Kate

Very nice exhibition. No more unprotected sex for me. (Brisbanite)

Until March 5

National Gallery
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Parvati is not unrepresentative of the new Indian woman. She is 26 years old and a graduate of Delhi University. She had previously gone to a convent school, not because she is a Catholic but because

strong relationship with a Western man. When she marries it will be for love, rather than an arranged marriage which


Continued — Page 2




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Art in the Age of

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Mullumbimby High Year 9

♥♥♥♥♥


These people have something more precious than a virus - It's called HOPE! Michelle

♥♥♥♥♥

Very sobering exhibition. No more unprotected sex for me. (Brisbanite)

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