

KIERAN BOLAND CAMOUFLEURS

2 – 19 October 2014



Camoufleurs (2014)

2K video projection, aspect ratio 2.35:1, colour, stereo sound, 9'30" loop, edition of 3

\$5,000

Featuring Sam Hillary, Sound Design by Geordie Miller

"As long as we could have choppers like taxis it took real exhaustion or depression near shock or a dozen pipes of opium to keep us even apparently quiet, we'd still be running around inside our skins like something was after us, *ha ha, La Vida Loca*. In the months after I got back the hundreds of helicopters I'd flown in began to draw together until they'd formed a collective meta-chopper, and in my mind it was the sexiest thing going; saver-destroyer, provider-waster, right hand-left hand, nimble, fluent, canny and human; hot steel, grease, jungle-saturated canvas webbing, sweat cooling and warming up again, cassette rock and roll in one ear and door-gun fire in the other, fuel, heat, vitality and death, death itself, hardly an intruder."

– Michael Herr, *Dispatches*

Sigmund Freud once noted that the "fateful question" for humanity is whether the instinct for aggression and self-destruction will dominate, noting that: "Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent... [that] they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man." Freud hails this as the cause of the general "mood of anxiety,"¹ that assails humanity a similar conclusion to what Hughes dubbed the "age of anxiety."²

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents (Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud)*, (W. W. Norton & Company; Reprint edition, 2010) p. 92

² Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (Knopf, 2000) p. 543

This instinct that Freud identified is clearly inbuilt, most especially in the males of the species. From almost the moment they can stand up, boys will find 'swords' and 'guns,' their imaginations aflame with physical potency and domination. They will find and wear 'uniforms' and 'helmets' and emulate their anime heroes, thirsting to draw first blood. They will form 'tribes' and battle each other into submission.

The boys in *Camoufleurs* (2014) are in fact a tribe of one, the single warrior transformed into a platoon of Anzacs. Their unseen enemy is that of loneliness and isolation, the plague of all pubescent boys. Their weapon of choice is one that most of us have fired, that machine-gun staccato bliss-out of plastic bubble-wrap. The 'soldiers' are adept with this murderous tool; one moment it is a keyboard controlling overhead drones, the next an AK47 firing relentless rounds until its ammunition is exhausted as it is squeezed tight.

In the first rotation of *Camoufleurs* the accumulated sound of the sharp shrill of popping air is faintly reminiscent of an anti-air artillery flak raid from a World War II film. At the start of the second rotation, our Anzacs pause to listen to sounds of warlike activity overhead. The soundtrack transitions seamlessly into a bombing raid before their attention returns to the sheets of bubble wrap once more. Fantasy is only briefly interrupted by reality. Is there a real battle just over the horizon line? Evidently not as the exploding air bubbles and the bombs are one and the same. Naturally this encounter leads to a reflection on that most potent of war film soundtracks; *Apocalypse Now*. Perhaps the *whop whop whop* of choppers that open Coppola's film was just a single fan moving through the moist air of a Vietnam hotel room.

In addition to references to the surrealist origins of the disruptive patterns of camouflage such as those executed by English surrealist Roland Penrose, who turned his talents to camouflage design during WWII, are echoes of less heroic figures from war fictions such as Radar O'Reilly from *M*A*S*H*; a character whose remarkable hearing could even distinguish whether or not the distant choppers carried wounded soldiers or not. Radar is the man-child at war, a naïf who survives through his innocence. The revolving scene also brings to mind a myriad of boys' own worlds from bygone eras, suggestive of an alternate timeline of desert island activities from William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* or the war-time internment of the youth Jim in J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*.

War, they say, is Hell. That is unless, of course, you're a boy playing safely in the bush in which case, of course, War is Heaven.

- Ashley Crawford, 2014