

58. DANIE MELLOR

born 1971

A Point of Order (New Worlds from Old Power) 2010
pastel, pencil, Swarovski crystals, glitter and wash on paper
142.0 x 185.0 cm (framed dimensions: 155.5 x 210.0 cm)
signed and dated lower right: Danie Mellor 2010
inscribed lower left: A Point of Order (New Worlds from Old)

Provenance:

The artist

Buratti Fine Art, Perth

Private collection, Brisbane

Exhibited:

Non Sufficit Orbis: Danie Mellor, Michael Reid at Elizabeth Bay, Sydney, 7 - 28 July 2010 and the Melbourne Art Fair, Melbourne, 4 - 8 August 2010

Danie Mellor, Leslie Rice and Philip Hunter: Debut, Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne, 20 March - 14 April 2012

\$30,000 - \$40,000

Danie Mellor, one of Australia's most unique and esteemed contemporary artists, is strongly influenced by his European and Indigenous heritage. His iconographic lexicon is erudite, complex and richly textured, and plays on historical intersections with Australia's Indigenous people, addressing themes of colonial exploration and exploitation, Enlightenment philosophy, science and culture, and the associated disruptions, disconnections and transformations of Indigenous culture and country.

In *A Point of Order (New Worlds from Old Power)*, Mellor has appropriated an engraving by Johann Martin Bernigerorth (1713-1767) depicting a masonic initiation.¹ Mellor's exploration of Freemason symbology and ritualism exposes the historical privileging of western perception, understanding and valorisation of 'men of high degree'² over Indigenous people who carry the same status in their own culture.

The original exhibition title, *Non Sufficit Orbis*, which translates as 'the world is not enough', has links to Egyptian Atenism and Freemasonry. More meaningfully, the phrase appears on a 1583 medal struck by Phillip II of Spain (1527-1598), the obverse of which reads 'Phillip II King of Spain and the New World'. In this context, the present work's initiation imagery alludes to the involuntary induction of Aboriginal people to western society's cultural practices and norms.

Mellor's predominant and powerful blue conveys multiple meanings: a reference to Delftware (commodification) and Spode porcelain (appropriation), absorbed by the English from the Chinese in the 1780s, the year that England began to 'appropriate Australia'³, or as Mellor describes it, 'the colour blue indicates a European footprint and gaze, or more broadly the idea that the scene is itself an exoticised space'.⁴

Politics in Mellor's highly embellished and visually arresting works are usually heavily nuanced, as he consciously avoids a didactic tone. Instead, his approach has been described by Djon Mundine as creating 'a benevolent binary of ideas' about Western colonial and Aboriginal societies.⁵

The present work's title immediately conjures ideas about colonial discord, and pointedly references the intersection of spear and sword between the two foregrounded figures, reinforcing the notion of a clash of cultures. Commonalities remain unseen, but not unreferenced: Freemasons once traced their designs on tavern floors in blue chalk, which were then erased to protect their secrecy, a practice similar to those employed in many Indigenous secret/sacred rituals and ceremonies.⁶

This commonality, albeit not a shared cultural experience, was at play in *From Rite to Ritual*, which won Mellor the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2009: 'both cultural rituals are ways of transmitting knowledge, progressing through different levels of learning... but packaged differently according to the environments in which the initiation takes place.'⁷

Another device at work in *A Point of Order* is its architectural setting in perspectival space, which invites the viewer to step into the work beyond the theatrical stage and explore its narrative more deeply.

Decorative materials employed in Mellor's oeuvre – floral motifs, crystals, glitter, mirrored surfaces and gold – are similarly designed to lure the viewer into engaging with the message. While clearly signalling the substance of the trope, 'all that glitters is not gold', these embellishments have academic ties to ideas about allegory: art historian Simon Schama writes of their effectiveness as visual clues to a work's 'truth' being poetic rather than literal.⁸

Mellor's celebrated career has been recognised by the Australia Council for the Arts, for which he is Chair of the Visual Art Board and Governing Council member, and his prestigious exhibition profile includes: *unDisclosed*, the second *National Indigenous Art Triennial* (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra 2012), the National Gallery of Canada's contemporary art exhibition *Sakahàn* (2013), and *Primordial: SuperNaturalBayiMinyijirral*, a solo exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland in 2014, the same year as his major Australian solo survey exhibition, *Exotic Lies Sacred Ties* (University of Queensland Art Museum, 2014), the *8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane 2015) and the 2016 Adelaide Biennial.

Footnotes

1. 'Entree du Receptiendaire dans la Loge' from the series *Assemblée de Francs-Maçons pour le Reception des Maîtres*, c1745

2. 'Danie Mellor: Exotic Lies Sacred Ties', UQ Art Museum learning resource, p.13

3. Eccles, J., 'Danie Mellor', *Eyeline Contemporary Visual Arts*, no.81, p.32

4. Quoted in 'Danie Mellor: Exotic Lies Sacred Ties', op.cit., p.14

5. Mundine, Djon, 'Good, Better, Best: the Art of Danie Mellor', *Art & Australia*, Spring, 2012, p.124

6. *Ibid.*, p.129

7. Quoted in Eccles, op.cit., p.31

8. Schama, S., *Landscape and Memory*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995, p.11

Jane Raffan

BA Hons. (Fine Arts); Grad.Dip. Environmental Law
(Ethical Dealing Art & Cultural Heritage)

