

leaves no sense of selfhood and humanity at all. Ultimately, the subjects have ceased to exist as individuals, becoming one single indistinguishable governing mob, dictating from behind an obfuscated plane. The artist is acutely aware of the potency of these images and the impact that his interventions have on their interpretation. He has purposefully left the scale of the works the same as the book they were sourced from so that the viewer is encouraged to ‘read’ the images and contemplate the possibility of alternative storylines.

Garifalakis presents two new bodies of work in this exhibition that augment the *Mob rule* series, welcoming further groupings of powerful figures into the masked clan. In this instance, it is portraits of the Royal Family and an ensemble of war lords that are subjected to the artist’s manipulation. These groupings are so radically different to each other that their blunt juxtaposition further illustrates the artist’s indiscriminate attack on agents of control. In contrast to his previous *Mob rule* portrayals, Garifalakis censors all but the insignia of these leaders, removing their distinctive humanness and leaving only symbols of their royal office or dictatorial past – such as crowns, jewels, and military medals – reminding us that behind each person is a more substantive institution. Indeed, this point is reinforced by Garifalakis’ focus on portraiture, since the genre itself has a clear lineage of memorialising the rich, the privileged and the powerful, and portraits are often commissioned by governments and corporations for state and family records.

There is a clear political undercurrent to *Mob rule* that is characteristic of Garifalakis’ work. Perhaps the series alludes to a desire for an anarchic society without publicly imposed order of any kind, linking the artist to the rhetoric of thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche who greatly valued individuality and was suspicious of any form of nationalism. Fundamentally, though, *Mob rule* is not simply a renunciation of modern rulers; it is, in fact, an exploration of the semiotics of power.

Garifalakis chooses to incorporate subjects from the full spectrum of ideologies, political affiliations and geographies, but does not single out any one in particular. In a sense, this ambivalence cements the artist’s objective: to challenge our understanding of the way symbolism and representation influences our perception of power, and to dislocate the conventional wisdom of hierarchy and status. With these portraits, Garifalakis does not paint a picture of his imagined future; instead, he attempts to break us out of the doctrines that prevent us from seeing our own.

Iván Muñiz Reed
Assistant curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia

AGNSW
CONTEMPORARY
PROJECTS

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BIOGRAPHY

Over the last decade Garifalakis has explored the iconography and symbolism of fear and the myriad forms it takes in contemporary culture. He has recently undertaken several studio residencies, including the International Studio & Curatorial Program in New York in 2008, which informed the works presented in this exhibition. His recent solo exhibitions include *The philosophy of misery* at Yutepec gallery, Mexico City, 2011; *Affirmations* at Daine Singer, Melbourne, 2012; and *Angels of the bottomless pit* at the Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide, 2013. His work has also been presented in a number of curatorial projects and group exhibitions, including *Dark heart*, the Adelaide Biennial of Australian art, 2014; *Negotiating this world: contemporary Australian art*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2012 and *Theatre of the world*, Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, 2012.

Garifalakis’ work is held in numerous public collections in Australia, including the Monash University Collection, Melbourne; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart; and the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

READING. LOOKING LIST
by Tony Garifalakis

- Michael Barkun, *A culture of conspiracy: apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2003
- Alain Declercq et al, *Alain Declercq: documents*, BlackJack editions, Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris, 2010
- Ann Goldstein, Eva Meyer-Hermann & Lisa Gabrielle Mark (eds), *Mike Kelley*, exh cat, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam & DelMonico Books, Munich, 2013
- Jim Keith, *Black helicopters over America: strikeforce for the new world order*, IllumiNet Press, Atlanta, 1995
- David Icke, *Children of the matrix: how an interdimensional race has controlled the world for thousands of years – and still does*, Bridge of Love Publications, Isle of Wight, 2001

LIST OF WORKS

Mob rule 2013
enamel on offset prints
24 x 31 cm each

Mob rule (family) 2014
enamel on C type prints
64 x 44 cm each

Mob rule (warlords) 2014
enamel on C type prints
64 x 44 cm each

Declassified document 2014
enamel on various publications
25 x 40 x 30 cm

All works courtesy of the artist
and Hugo Michell Gallery

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ARTIST TALK

Wednesday 11 June, 6pm
Contemporary project space, lower level 2

AGNSW Contemporary Projects is a proposal-based program jointly selected by the curators of contemporary art.

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MOB RULE
TONY GARIFALAKIS

#3.14

12 JUNE – 21 AUGUST 2014

AGNSW CONTEMPORARY PROJECTS

DEFACING POWER

A sense of anarchy descends when confronted by Tony Garifalakis’ masked mob. Their faces have been viscerally sprayed with black enamel, the excess dripping down like blood. These sinister works are inspired by Garifalakis’ longstanding interest in (and defiance of) social, political and ideological doctrines and institutions of authority. The Melbourne-based artist engages photography, collage, sculpture and installation, using interventions – like juxtaposing discordant elements or subtly modifying existing imagery – to invite the viewer to reflect on their relationship with agents of power. While his subjects often represent the extreme end of their respective spectrums (be it politics, religion, entertainment, or otherwise), his practice is the aesthetic embodiment of a generalised resistance, challenging us to re-think the structures in which we operate, and perhaps forewarning us of their impending collapse.

For *Mob rule*, Garifalakis presents an ongoing series that found its genesis during a studio residency in New York in 2008. While abroad, the artist became interested in censorship as a form of government control and began collecting and studying declassified FBI files. However, his interest in these documents extended beyond the implications of such ‘control mechanisms’; he was also drawn to the aesthetic qualities of the silenced files, finding a certain lyricism in the stark, abstract lines stretching across the pages. Garifalakis experimented with these qualities using text and subsequently transitioned into the pictorial, covering up images sourced from magazines and movie posters so that only a few remnants remained visible through layers of black paint. This simple gesture dislocated the celebrity subjects’ power as cultural signifiers and repurposed them as spectres, their eyes and teeth piercing menacingly through the dark – disembodied, anti-social and alien.

Mob rule extends this earlier line of enquiry. For this series, Garifalakis uses his disempowering erasure tactic against a more closely aligned selection of subjects – on individuals inherently defined by their political power. The first of three *Mob rule* iterations presented at the Art Gallery of New South Wales is a 2013 series of defaced pictures appropriated from the book *Power: portraits of world leaders* by photographer Platon Antoniou. Each leader has had parts of their face concealed with black paint which Garifalakis sprays on and then reworks with a brush, in most cases only leaving the eyes and/or teeth of the subject exposed. Personalities such as Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin, George W Bush, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Robert Mugabe are stripped of their status as global icons of power and are left staring anonymously into the viewer’s eyes.

The construction of these sabotaged portraits echoes graffiti and its status as a clandestine tool for conveying rebellious social and political messages. On the one hand, Garifalakis has stripped all but the most essential of features from each subject, leaving only a few clues that might still allow us to recognise the obscured leaders. On the other hand, the coldness and uniformity of the portraits, en masse,

