



Stuart Bailey: An Exercise in Imminent Doom

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In bricolage—the simultaneous jarring and cross-infection of images—objects and text convey the clamor of ideas. All frantic correlation, the hunt and the scavenge reveal just enough to point to a cultural moment or locality. Here, subjectivity flips in and out of focus.

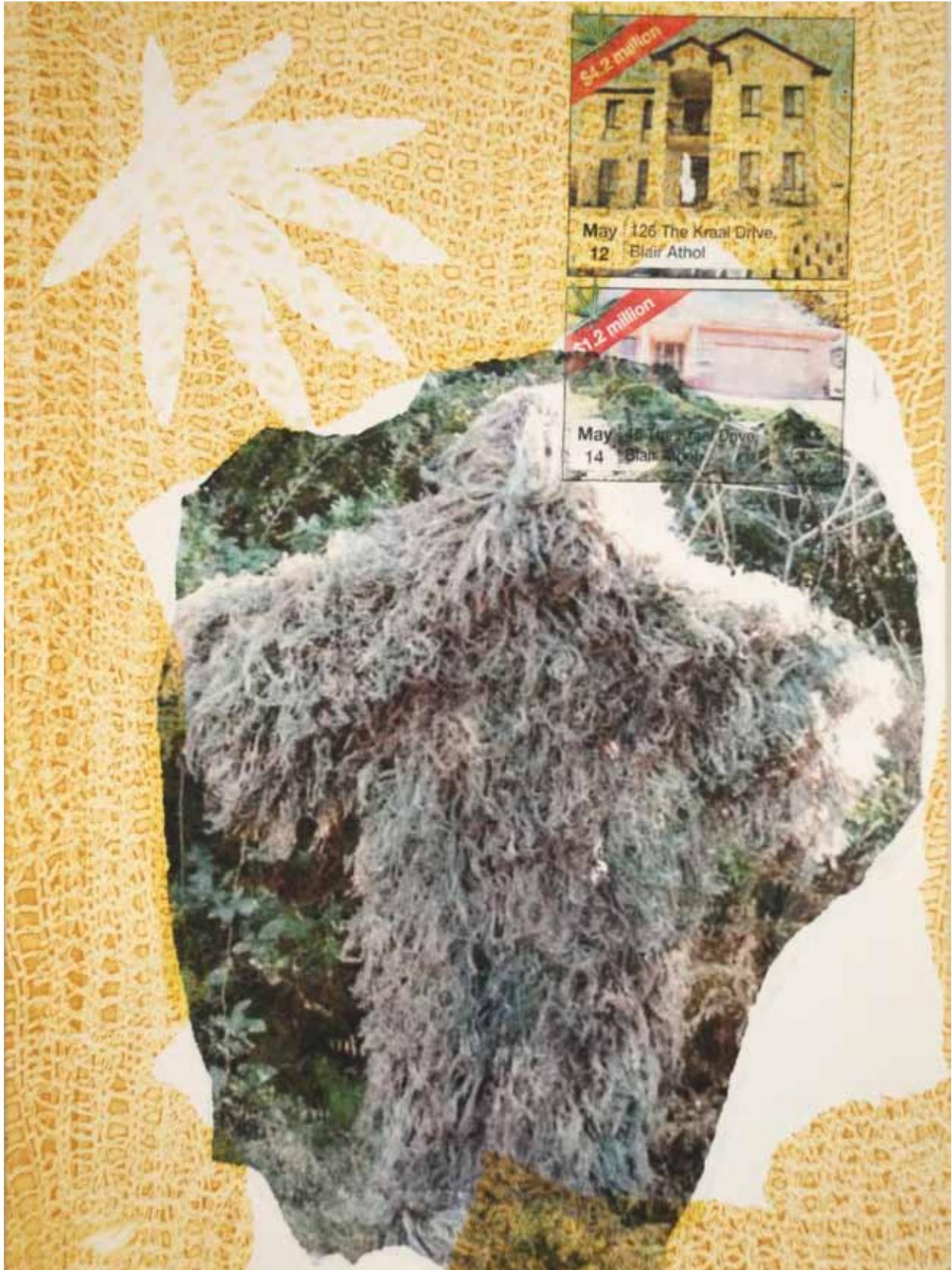
Let's begin with a sense of imminent doom. Flaubert, in describing his experience of the creative process, noted that for him an intense creative period was presaged by a sense of doom. This was also apparently coupled with a feeling that the boundaries of the self were dissolving. Flaubert wrote of being overcome by 'a whirlpool of ideas and images in my poor brain, during which it seemed that my consciousness, that my me, sank like a vessel in a storm'.¹ The violence of this image and the description of this kind of disassociative state, points to the bricolage process.

In Stuart Bailey's recent sculptural practice a similar restlessness is conveyed via sculptural props and collage. But this isn't foraging for the mystical or in search of some kind of spiritual transcendence. Instead, Bailey's practice leans towards a disregard of the various and vague promises of ideologies and redemptive belief systems. In fact, in Bailey's installations we are stumbling around for a definitive subjectivity.

In the works *The Nimbin Victims* and *These filthy dreamers defile the flesh* (both 2009), viewers are coerced into navigation within Bailey's rocky outcrops. Elements and images of the Californian desert are represented in concrete-clad polystyrene forms. It is arid and dehydrated, its features a little comic and a little Surrealist. Where navigation usually implies logic and reasoning, in the midst of these installations feelings of isolation, escapism, trauma and disorientation are foregrounded. Bailey deploys entropic symbols within this panorama and in this way, seems to map out the desert of the mind.

Two organisations, both amorphous and aspiring utopia-deliverers are represented in Bailey's collages and installations: naturalists and the military. Through mapping loose representations of these ideologies and pitting them against each other via signs and symbols, Bailey interrogates and dismantles them. These stripped-back symbols are the apparatus through which Bailey critiques ideology. Props such as abandoned flags, empty bottles and discarded clothing are suggestive of a landscape recently deserted by its inhabitants. In this environment, the abandoned infrastructure, the empty system, becomes metaphor. Like Dogma's stage set, symbols become scattered sound bites: evidence of hokey and fractured generalising logic. This project is Meta, but Bailey breaks up the grandeur of each ideology's method and symbols for belonging.

Above: Stuart Bailey, *These filthy dreamers defile the flesh*, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo: Mark Ashkanasy.





In 1807 the United States was described as a Logocracy, a government comprising and being a composite of language, or ‘a pseudo-reality created by mere words’.¹ Both horrific and poetic, this notion feels current again as we manage our ‘Yes We Can’ hangover. As participants in this system we are faced with politics in the form of advertising slogans. The Global Financial Crisis, Global Warming and Terrorism are sclerotic, run-down terms each unspecific, hyperbolic and inflammatory. So it would seem that the threat to the governmental structure is editorial not physical, therein displaying its brittleness.

Similarly Bailey’s installations appear previously masticated or maybe embryonic in their misshapen-ness. Each cluster of boulders are chanced upon dystopic oases. The Naturalists (an actualisation of naked ambition?) appear deluded and naive. These images are paired with quick props—bongs and empty booze bottles—evidence of mind-altering substances, embarrassed into focus. These remnants suggest trauma, intoxication and the how-to-cope of blind faith. Slowly abandoning ourselves to seek enlightenment or refuge in ideology, to further lose ourselves. The solace of unquestioning belief and the comfort of indoctrination.

The camouflaged figure also haunts Bailey’s collages. Heavy with metaphorical implication, the soldier hovers as harbinger of false identity and control. In *Soundtrack to War* (2005), the documentary made by Australian filmmaker George Gittoes, American soldiers in Iraq were asked about the music they listen to in order to psyche-up and chill-out. Several points in the film bear witness to the use of internal sound systems to pipe death metal or hip hop into tanks and humvees. The film also includes footage of moving musical tributes made to fallen troops. This nexus between music and war scripts kid soldiers as participants in real-life computer games. The lineage seems clear: for Vietnam soldiers it was drugs, for soldiers in Iraq its anesthesiation and emotional outlet via music. Employing sub-cultural badges of belonging and misplaced bravado, Bailey pulls apart their reasons for being.

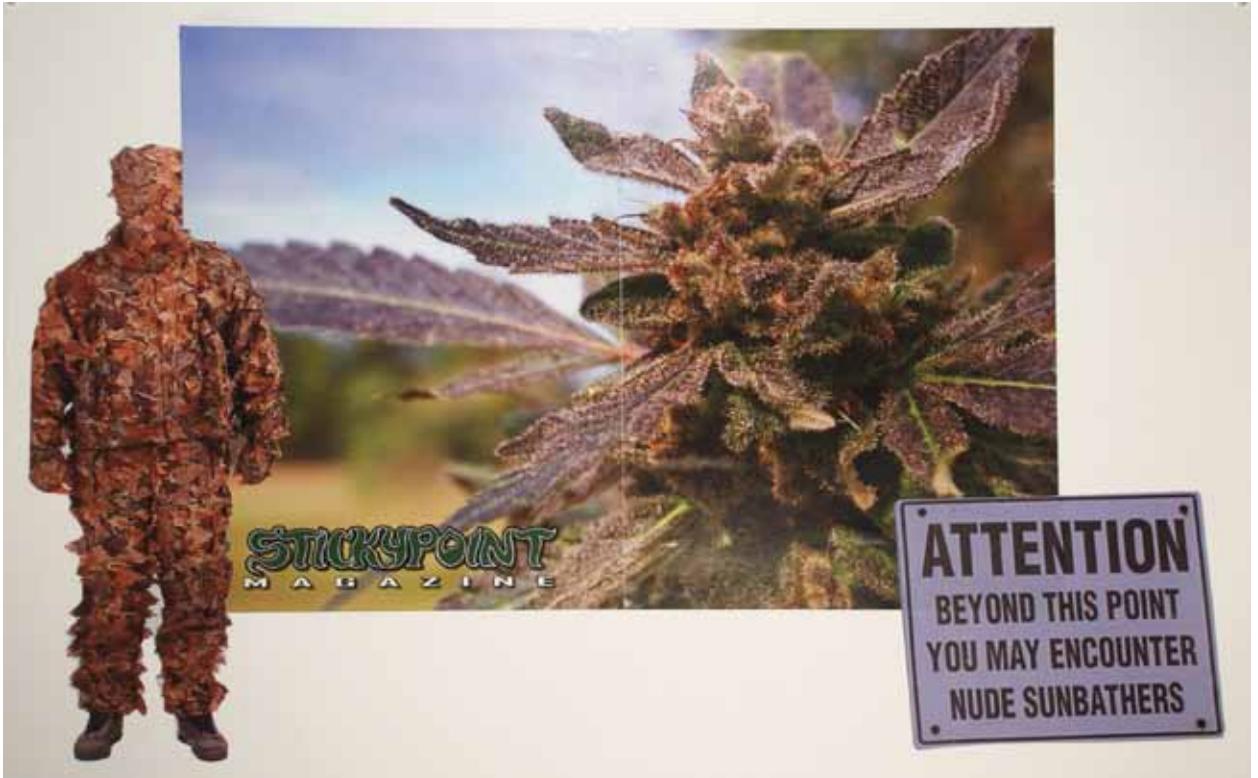
In Bailey’s work, it’s okay to feel a little lost. These non-sequiturs are set in unsteady terrains. In the video work *Desert Mouth* (2009) Bailey himself is stoned and lost in the desert. He stumbles around in only a t-shirt adorned with a marijuana leaf and sneakers: ruder than nude. Lost and confused. The work could be construed as a portrait of a resident of post-heroic society. He is intoxicated by the reiteration of slogans, mottos, headlines, mantras, buzz words, jingoistic catch phrases and epithets. He hides in a haze of escape and intemperance. Like the portrait *jamais vu*.

1. Alice W Flaherty, *The Midnight Disease* (2004), 240.

2. Christine D Tomei, *Russian Women Writers* (1999), 1310.



Stuart Bailey, *Untitled*, 2009, collage on paper.



Above: (top) Stuart Bailey, *Untitled*, 2009, collage on paper; (below) Stuart Bailey, *Untitled*, 2009, collage on paper.

