

**PEACE**



**TRIPS**

**LIAM OSBORNE**

**MEOW II**

**30.08.21**

# PEACE FROG

Two events occurred during the production stage of this exhibition. Melbourne entered its 6th Lockdown. The 9pm curfew was reinstated as was the 5km radius. More pointedly and unexpectedly (in its speed and efficiency) Kabul and most of greater Afghanistan fell to the Taliban after the announcement of a complete withdrawal of US and NATO troops by sitting American President Joe Biden. The forever war is over.

There is a sick voyeurism watching significant global events unfold while experiencing the stasis of a lockdown in a city with relative state security. Whilst we live in a so-called liberal democracy Afghanistan is one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world and has been ravaged by decades of Imperial destabilization. The heightened mania around the chaotic withdrawal of troops created a media storm, surreal footage of Taliban soldiers testing gym equipment or gleefully driving bumper cars was a stark reminder of the polarity between Tribal life in Afghanistan and life in Kabul under the US puppet regime.

Operation Cyclone was the last meaningful proxy battle of the Cold war. Zbigniew Brzezinski said in a 1998 interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur* when referring to the Carter administration's arming of the Mujahideen "That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter, essentially: "We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR

its Vietnam war." Operation Cyclone was the most significant foreign policy intervention of the Cold War. The repercussions still reverberate to this day. It set the stage for the emergence of both the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Decisions made on all levels of Government led directly to 9/11 and the subsequent middle eastern interventions. From the creation of FEMA in the Nixon government, the broad planning for COG (Continuation of Government) during the Reagan era all the way through to the Project for the New American Century in 1997. Each project outlined how to coalesce executive power and create guidelines for the expansion of US Empire under the guise of national emergency.

In this recent press cycle a lot has been said about the similarities between the Afghanistan occupation and the War in Vietnam. Most focusing on the images of Helicopters evacuating US personnel from a helipad in Kabul and similar images in Saigon after the North Vietnamese forces liberated the city in 1975. But there are other comparisons. Both used deep events to justify occupation; The Gulf of Tonkin affair (proven false flag) and 9/11 (suspected false flag). Both are central regions for the Opium trade (cultivation and exportation of heroin exploded after the US Invasion and Occupation of both countries) and both Wars explicitly benefited the transnational corporate class and were planned long before their initial invasion dates. In 2005 Henry Kissinger exclaimed to the *Washington Post* "Victory over the insurgency is the only meaningful Exit Strategy" a lesson he was trying to impart to the Bush/ Cheney Regime. Sixteen years

later Afghanistan, like Vietnam before it, failed to enact this victory.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred in 1964 and was extensively a purported attack on US warships patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam. This event then triggered the passing of the 'Gulf of Tonkin resolution' setting the stage for the Vietnam war. The official narrative now acknowledges that this event never happened and the Resolution was pre drafted as an excuse to escalate the War.

In his book 'Weird Scenes Inside the Canyon' David McGowan elucidates the strange formation of the Laurel Canyon music scene and investigates the Military, Intelligence and European banking ties to those central in the movement. Jim Morrison, Frank Zappa, David Crosby, Stephen Stills, Gram Parsons, John Phillips and others have their familial backgrounds interrogated and the strange occurrences of their personal biographies analysed. McGowan argues that their musical output was signal boosted and their popularity constructed to push rampant individualism the purpose of which was to curtail the anti war and civil rights movements of the 1960s. The lyrical content strayed away from politics and LSD was used as a tool for social control all whilst co-opting the visual language of the peace movement. The book is more about coincidence, serendipity and the spiritual vacancy and dark undercurrents of the Hippy movement than it is a verifiable historical analysis. It is an indictment of a generational myth; a small example of the inauthentic nature of cultural movements and artistic production. What McGowan does bring to light is that cultural Icon and frontman of The Doors Jim Morrison's father was Admiral

George Stephen Morrison commander of the US Naval forces at the center of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

The use of the peace sign (painted on helmets, worn around necks et al) wasn't just a symbolic gesture, it was a negotiated treaty between the Vietcong and US soldiers. It meant that US soldiers wouldn't shoot first and was extensively a private ceasefire negotiated in POW camps.

Soft power is an imperial arm of Empire and is intrinsic in building the myth of a free society. a society in which freedom hinges on infinite economic growth and the spread of Liberal Democracy and global extractivism. Culture becomes the arm in which individual competition and success is equated most closely with the functioning capitalist state. Artistic freedom of speech and the ability to succeed in the cultural class is attributed to western democracy and its ideals of personal freedom. Women, Artists and the Professional classes of Kabul can not be free under the taliban, yet the loss of civilian life (200,000 as a conservative estimate) the carving up of the resources of the country not to mention that the US originally put the Taliban in power to crush the (actually) progressive socialist Afghan government is deemed as acceptable by the cynical and self serving liberal media and professional art classes and institutions of the West.

Obviously 60s music and hippy culture (in a popular sense) was Controlled Opposition. A co-opted movement that used shallow opposition to the Vietnam War as a cover for a broader more apolitical operation. Fine arts and American post Ab Ex (CIA signal boosted) artistic movements, although seldom discussed is part of this



lineage too. Take for example Jasper Johns Flag (Moratorium) one of, if not, the most famous American Anti Vietnam protest works. A work that says nothing, has no information imparted in its structure, it laments the War (only contextually) while simultaneously promoting American exceptionalism. During the Vietnam war America was on the brink of a Revolution, the whole state apparatus was in danger, it was Cultures job to simultaneously legitimise anti war sentiment and de-escalate this swell in social unrest. America and by virtue Capitalism may be flawed but the flag and it's symbolic hubris is still the legitimizing force in the world. Artistic tactics of hollow opposition and personal exceptionalism find their way through the channels of free trade and become imbibed by the outposts of US empire. Australia and Europe are still dealing with repercussions of American post war music, culture and art and the deconstruction of form and meaning. The American (and in effect Australian, European, etc) artist becomes an analogy for the position in Empire they occupy.

The influence of culture that was signal boosted during the cold war has created a generational intensifying effect. Even though it may not be writ large or cemented by policy every cultural movement has been mastacised by the state and fed back into itself. Each subsequent generation expands the gap between form and meaning and erodes political context. Now that we are in the midst of another Cold War, the cultural arm of Imperial soft power needs to be more closely scrutinized. One of the more cogent examples of this is the weaponization of Kpop, Jpop and Tik Tok's hyperactive teenage individualism against the children of the emerging Chinese

Middle class. As China lifts its population out of poverty a cultural war will be waged analogous to that waged on Soviet Russia and East Berlin during the first cold war.

One of the most dangerous operations of Imperial Soft Power was to remove Art History from Political History. This has meant that culture extensively astroturfs itself and internalises the propaganda and mythology of empire's self aggrandizement. By engaging uncritically in artistic or cultural forms, especially movements that 'organically' formed during the 1960s (for example rock music, contemporary art or post structuralism and speculative economics) you are essentially doing the footwork of the monolithic state security apparatus and function as a destabilizing force in class consciousness and a tool of foreign policy. Imperialism only functions when soft power and militarism align and relies on artistic subjectivity as a driving force of 'nation building' and 'liberal democracy'; destabilizing the world and piling bodies.

*Liam Osborne 2021 (Fuck a footnote)*



## LIST OF WORKS (Starting Back wall L-R)

### *REDACTION 1*

2021

Ply, Shower Screen, Adhesive tape

### *PAPA JOHN*

2021

Blotter Paper, Offset Print, Form Ply Adhesive tape

### *STEPHEN STILLS*

2021

Blotter Paper, Offset Print, Form Ply Adhesive tape

### *FRANK ZAPPA*

2021

Blotter Paper, Offset Print, Form Ply Adhesive tape

### *SPEAKER 1*

2021

Speaker box, ply, padlock, steel, adhesive vinyl

### *SPEAKER 2*

2021

Speaker box, ply, padlock, steel, adhesive vinyl

### *2003 (ROOM ON FIRE + IRAQ)*

2021

Silk screen on Lauane, Ply

### *GULF OF TONKIN*

2021

Silk screen on Steel

### *GRAM PARSONS*

2021

Blotter Paper, Offset Print, Form Ply Adhesive tape

### *REDACTION 2*

2021

Ply, Shower Screen, Adhesive tape

### *REDACTION 3*

2021

Ply, Shower Screen, Adhesive tape

### *DAVID CROSBY*

2021

Blotter Paper, Offset Print, Form Ply Adhesive tape

### *SHELF*

2021

Laminate MDF, Various speaker cones, oil cylinder, adhesive tape

### *2001 (IS THIS IT? + AGHANISTAN)*

2021

Silk screen on Lauane, Ply

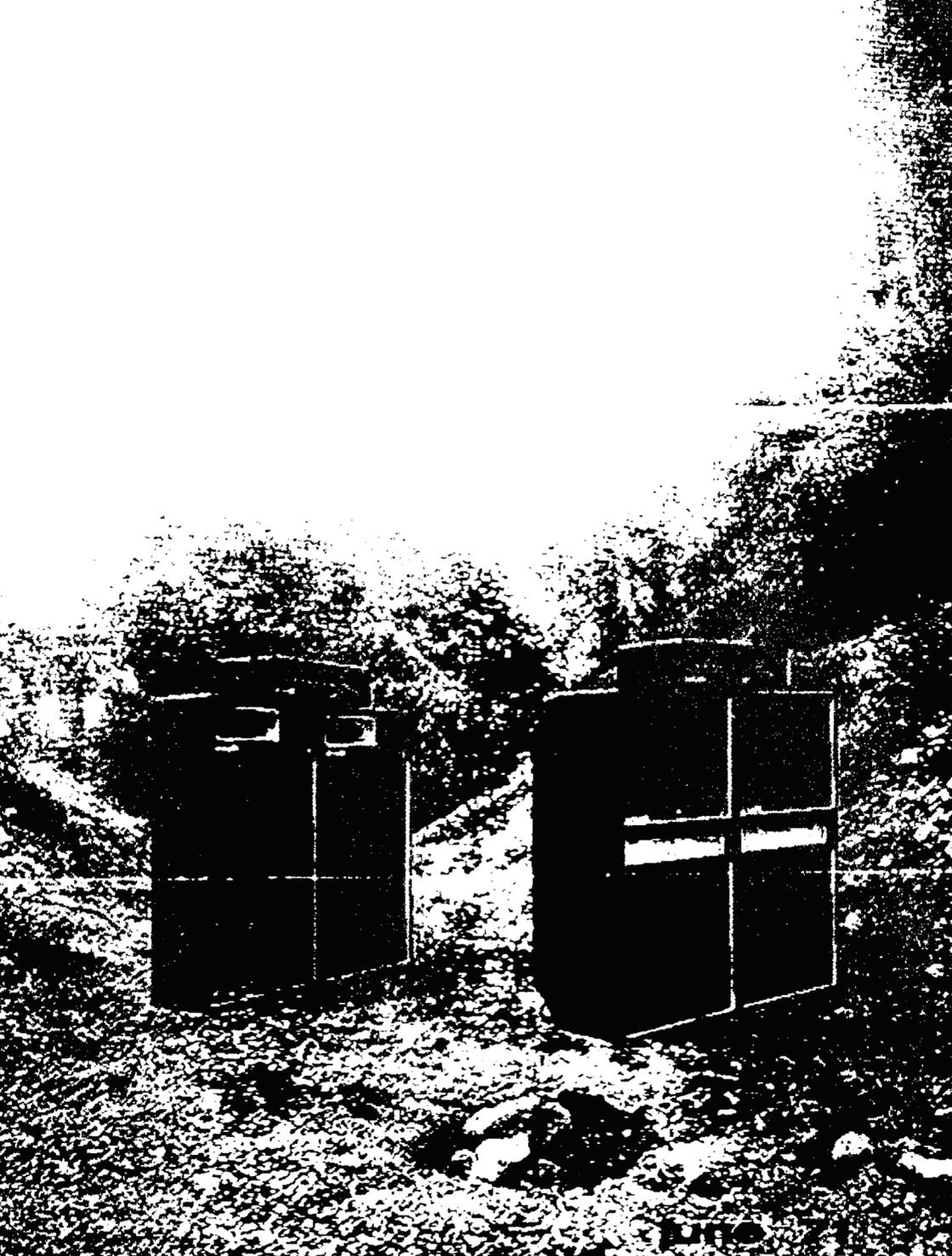
### *JIM MORRISON*

2021

Blotter Paper, Offset Print, Form Ply Adhesive tape

**MEOW II**

**16 CHETWYND S**



**WWW.MEOWGALLERY.COM**