

Tim Jones: *Metropolitan phantom*

Tim Jones began the *Metropolitan phantom* series of drawings, prints and sculptures in London in 1988, following a period spent working and travelling in the United States. The figure of the phantom is based on a New Guinean sculpture Jones saw at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan when he was working as the studio assistant for English-born artist John Walker in Kingston, New York.

Jones's interest in Oceanic art developed partly through working with Walker, who had a sizeable collection of artefacts from the region. Joseph Campbell's influential book, *The power of myth*, and its accompanying television series was also published around this time. Jones was interested in Campbell's theory of global mythology, a concept which proposed that universal truths are revealed by the reappearance of themes across the mythologies of disparate cultures.

Familiar since childhood with Celtic beliefs about the power and mystery of the land, in Kingston Jones was pursuing ideas about the spirit of place in his work. The gnarled woods and unpeopled landscapes of the Welsh countryside of his youth were already a frequent subject of his detailed wood engravings.

The Sentani house-post sculpture Jones encountered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was originally used as the central post of a chief's dwelling-house built over the waters of the Sentani Lake in the north-east of West Papua. This extraordinary wooden sculpture inspired him to explore in a series of works the idea that the land's eternal energy could manifest itself across cultures. Its elaborately carved designs were uncannily similar to Celtic iconography, and in Jones's mind the potent character of the phantom emerged.

The New Guinean sculpture's anthropomorphic form—that of an upturned tree, its trunk adorned with S-shaped spirals and its plank-like roots forming two elaborately carved wing-like projections at the top—resonated with Jones and related to his long-term interest in dual concepts such as the earth and sky, places above and below ground, and dreams and reality.

Tim Jones: *Covert 7 city*

Born in Clwyd, North Wales, in 1962, Tim Jones studied painting and printmaking at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, England (1979–83), before obtaining a post-graduate diploma in sculpture at the Victorian College of the Arts (1984–85), and a masters degree at Monash University (1997–2000). Jones currently lives and works at Newham, near Hanging Rock in Victoria's Macedon Ranges.

Tim Jones first visited Australia in 1984, returning in 1989 to take up a twelve-month artist residency at the University of Melbourne. At that time the artist's studio was adjacent to this room—now the Classics and Archaeology Gallery—and this is where Jones constructed his ambitious, multi-component sculpture *Covert 7 city*. This major work was the artist's response to the increasing density of Melbourne's cityscape, which since his last visit had been transformed by the 1980s building boom into a high-rise metropolis.

While Melbourne city was the literal subject of *Covert 7 city*, the sculpture references other iconic architectures meaningful to Jones: his recent experiences of Manhattan's bustling urbanity; the medieval Tuscan town of San Gimignano; Gotham City's chaotic opacity in Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* film; and the labyrinth of buttresses, turrets and towers of Mervyn Peake's 1946 fictional castle Gormenghast.

The dreamlike, gothic character of *Covert 7 city* vacillates between fact and fiction—an ambiguity that appears in much of Jones's work. The work's fantastical quality is also characteristic, and is central to his work's capacity to engage the imagination. According to Jones, *Covert 7 city* conveys a 'dark sewer-like underbelly, but aspires to Heavenliness'.

The wall-mounted sculpture *Good afternoon at 'Levitating Phenomenon'* (1990) is one of a series of works based on Hanging Rock made directly after *Covert 7 city*. Jones found a natural metropolis of sorts in the mysterious rocky outcrop. Hanging Rock features frequently in Jones's work, and has become a key subject through which he explores the spirituality of place and the inner life of the imagination.



Sentani
Papua Province (Irian Jaya)
Indonesia
House-post 19th century

wood
330 x 160 x 80 cm approx.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
The Michael C Rockefeller Memorial
Collection, 1965

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art/
Art Resource, New York