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Error and Judgement

Curated by Mark Feary

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ARTS PROJECT AUSTRALIA

Error and Judgement

The great and prolific film theorist Kim Jong-il made many inscrutable pronouncements during his long tenure as a tyrannical dictator, but on some occasions he managed to encapsulate a wisdom that is difficult to falter. At the core of what I interpret the Dear Leader's motivational utterance to be is the necessity of perseverance in the struggle toward success. Implicit within this statement is the compulsion to regard difficulties as merely challenges, and in turn to overcome these adversities through a commitment to alternative solutions.

Error and Judgement embeds a pun on the notion of making an error of judgement, wherein a decision or behaviour is consequently regarded as, and acknowledged as, being erroneous. It is an admission of mistake or miscalculation that had been based upon an opinion or understanding that is later revealed to be incorrect or ill conceived. Departing from this, *Error and Judgement* leans toward the possibilities that emerge out of deviating from the path of technical proficiency and constraining frameworks of correctness. Art is one of the few realms in which the outcome emerges out of a process that privileges risk-taking. Nobody would celebrate a neurosurgeon for his or her propensity for consistent risk-taking, for the optimal end result is predetermined; the operating table is not the arena in which one wishes someone to be playing around and trying new things out. Artists, on the other hand, are encouraged to experiment, to chart new territories and lobotomise their works at will.

There are no mistakes within a subjective consideration of art, but rather things that work and things that don't, it is by measure that works are deemed effective, accomplished or successful. In the studio many things

might be tested out, worked through, messed up and reconfigured. There may a plethora of potential mistakes and failures in the process of making art – drawing outside of the line, sculptures that break, incorrect proportions, precarious stability – yet the canon of art history is abundant with works that feature many of these characteristics. Would Alberto Giacometti's sculptures been so revered if he had a disposition toward rendering figures to obese proportions? Would Pablo Picasso be regarded as such an innovator if he had continued to paint in a realist mode? Or for that matter, would Chris Burden have become such a visionary artist had he not first worked a summer job as a gun target? It is in this realm that *Error and Judgement* is situated, at this juncture between failure and success, wherein works exist at the precipice of 'not working' before they tilt toward serendipitous resolution. This possibility is succinctly encapsulated by a comment made by the late Austrian artist Franz West: "I try to make something euphoric, even if that fails."

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea there are a number of important artist studios, notably the Mansudae Art Studio, that are responsible for the production of almost all official art within the nation. It is in response and as a rebuttal to the tightly controlled conditions within which North Korean artists produce their work that I extended the invitation to the artists at Arts Project Australia to create portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. Portraits of the two leaders feature prominently in every building in North Korea, father and son standing side by side offering inspiration to the people. Within the context of *Error and Judgement* the leaders are presented in a greater breadth of artistic styles, elaborating upon the social realism mode within which they are consistently

"A man who dreads trials and difficulties cannot become a revolutionary. If he is to become a revolutionary with an indomitable fighting spirit, he must be tempered in the arduous struggle from his youth." Kim Jong-il

depicted. No one would suggest that these much-maligned political figures have not made their fair share of erroneous decisions for their people, they are perhaps an ideal embodiment of a system of governance that could be characterised by its abundance of errors in judgement.

The ominous backdrop of the portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il drawn and painted by Michael Camakaris, Peter Cave, Alan Constable, Anthony Romagnano, Cathy Staughton and Fiona Taylor encapsulate some of the infinite possibilities that might emerge from the interpretation of existing images. From the brooding graphite renderings of Mr Camakaris, to the Lucien Freud reminiscent works of Mr Cave, the compellingly charged intensity of Mr Constable's paintings, to the reductionist workings by Mr Romagnano, and the Frida Kahlo-esque emotionality of Ms Staughton's portraits, to the sincere and humane simplicity of Ms Taylor's works, all evince and extrapolate a particular connection between artist and subject matter.

Flanked by the portraiture diptychs are a selection of new and recent projects by Christopher Hanrahan, Andrew Liversidge, Rob McLeish and Kate Mitchell. Working within the media of sculpture, installation and video, these artists evidence what Kim Jong-il noted as being a fundamental requirement within the production of art, that 'novel artistic ideas and accurate descriptions come only from intense speculation'.² Mr Hanrahan's sculptural work depicts a pigeon masquerading as a dove forlornly wandering through a landscape of muddied snow, printed upon a finely threaded piece of silk and draped upon the sculptural armature of a chromed steel clothes rack. As if to acknowledge the difficulties in attaining peace, the silk cloth sits like a flag for peace, seemingly

abandoned while the infantry conduct military exercises in preparation for the most dire of circumstances. Mr Liversidge's suite of sculptural works offers a broad range of material transformations, from the mysterious self-portrait as aspirant space man, to the smelted remnants of two thousand dollar coins and their reformation into a new form of aesthetic currency, to the inquiry as to which world music category would have been to the taste of dinosaurs. Mr McLeish's sculptural work conjures the spirit of the Arirang Mass Games in its propensity for the display of gymnastic exaltation whilst elucidating the inevitability of the demise of athletic perfection. The possibilities for physical accomplishment are also iterated within the video works of Ms Mitchell. Her demonstrable commitment to physical endurance manifests in a kind of slow ascension and dramatic demise as if to present a summation of the career trajectory of the professional athlete.

All of the artists' works presented within *Error and Judgement* oscillate between risk and chance, success and failure, intrigue and perplexity. The Japanese idea of wabi-sabi is perhaps an apt conceptual framework within which to consider this particular project, with its aesthetic appreciation and acceptance of the beauty of imperfection, impermanence and the incomplete. It is such serendipity that a young boy's full-length padded dinosaur jumpsuit should by chance be draped atop an upright sitar, or that a few delicate strips of white paint should capture the majesty of Kim Il-sung's coiffeur so perfectly. These outcomes are seemingly reached by chance, yet they eventuate as if to be guided by fate, if they had been more reputable gentlemen, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il would have been very proud.

Mark Feary



¹ Franz West cited in Adrian Searle 'Franz West: generous sculptural jester', *The Guardian*, London, 26 July 2012

² Kim Jong-il 'Let Us Prepare Ourselves to be Soldiers Unflinchingly Faithful to the Party in the Field of Art and Literature: A Talk to Graduates from the Faculty of Korean Linguistics of Kim Il Sung University', October 8, 1988, www.korea-dpr.com (accessed 26 July 2012)



Left to right: Andrew Liversidge *WHOA WHOA WHOA WHOA WHOA (jesus fuck!)* 2012 polyester, cotton, pvc resin, wood, farewell patrick foster, metal dimensions variable. *Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney*; Anthony Romagnano *Kim Il-sung* 2011 acrylic on paper 70 x 50cm;

Anthony Romagnano *Kim Jong-il* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm; Kate Mitchell *Life after Life* 2008 video. *Courtesy of the artist and Chalk Horse, Sydney*

Rob McLeish *Gravity Stole My Eyelid* 2011 steel, UV, digital print on aluminium, air dried clay, epoxy clay, cast epoxy resin and enamel 192 x 112 x 98cm *Courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne*

Alan Constable *Kim Il-sung* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm; Alan Constable *Kim Jong-il* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm;

Andrew Liversidge *Untitled torpor* 2012 92% copper, 6% aluminum, 2% nickel 31 x 16 x 10cm *Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney*



Above: Catherine Staughton *Kim Jong-il* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50 cm; Catherine Staughton *Kim Il-sung* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm

Left (left to right): Andrew Liversidge *Men in Space (blanket)* 2012, man space blanket 197 x 53 x 31cm *Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney*; Christopher Hanrahan *We'd like to arrange a meeting to talk about your position/I'd like to involve the unions (complexity in the aid of longevity in the aid of deracination in the aid of complexity (a silk, a rack, a pigeon))*. For VW 2012 dyed silk and chromed steel dimensions variable *Courtesy of the artist and Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney*

Artists: Michael Camakaris, Peter Cave, Alan Constable, Christopher Hanrahan, Andrew Liversidge, Rob McLeish, Kate Mitchell, Anthony Romagnano, Catherine Staughton and Fiona Taylor

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1. Left to right: Alan Constable *Kim Il-sung* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm; Alan Constable *Kim Jong-il* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm; Andrew Liversidge *Untitled torpor* 2012 92% copper, 6% aluminum, 2% nickel 31 x 16 x 10cm *Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney*

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Cover images: top left: Peter Cave *Kim Il-sung* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm
top right: Peter Cave *Kim Jong-il* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm
bottom left: Anthony Romagnano *Kim Jong-il* 2011 acrylic on paper 70 x 50cm
bottom right: Anthony Romagnano *Kim Jong-il* 2011 acrylic on paper 60 x 50cm

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