

RODNEY GLICK
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Lismore Regional Gallery exhibition
30 May – 11 July 2015



images:
above: Rodney Glick, Project team: Made Leno, Wayan Darmadi
Everyone No. 100 2012, carved and painted wood, 210 x 50 x 50 cm
courtesy the artist

cover: Rodney Glick, Project team: Made Leno, Wayan Darmadi
Everyone No. 177 2012, carved and painted wood, 120 x 60 x 60 cm
courtesy Murdoch University Art Collection,
donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift Program by
Mary Hill and family in memory of Christopher Hill

P6: Rodney Glick, Project team: Made Leno, Claire Evans, Chris Hill, Sohan Ariel Hayes
Everyone No. 9 2006-08, carved and painted wood, 75 x 40 x 40 cm
courtesy Private Collection Perth. Photograph: Tony Nathan



LISMORE
REGIONAL
GALLERY

RODNEY GLICK

Hi, I'm Everyone...

essay, Kezia Geddes
Curator, Lismore Regional Gallery



The people in Rodney Glick's sculptures are people he knows, but he calls them 'everyone', and then assigns a number for the practical purpose of distinguishing the works from one another. Dressed in contemporary clothing and with physiques that align them with people in our own lives, Glick's subjects are like anyone we might pass in the street or sit next to on a plane. They are anonymous, ordinary people, not above us in any social or spiritual sphere, and not below either. They are simultaneously familiar and foreign. This gap between the known and the unknown is increased by the way Glick has depicted his *Everyones* with reference to Hindu iconography. His use of Eastern religious art in a Western contemporary context pushes the work into a contentious space of questioning around what is sacred, and what is right for use. Glick hereby incites a response that leaves us both uncertain and amused, confusing us into thinking further.

The deities of Hindu statues represent spiritual entities that worshippers can admire and even identify with. But unlike the figures represented in Glick's sculptures, they are not based on real people. In order to attain veneration they (the traditional figures) are idealized into the form of an ultimate being. The gods are represented as partly human, but their proportions are impossibly ideal. Lifted above the earth they are depicted astride animals, or standing on top of fellow deities, and other fantastical pedestals. The lotus blossom, which grows from the mud and muck to emerge as a pristine, symmetrical

flower, is a common icon and an emblem of enlightenment. Symbolism aside, the reverence inspired by these statues is embedded in the reading of them, an automatic human response. By casting everyday people as idols, Glick collapses this separation between the gods and us.

Glick knows the symbolism he is applying well. Hindu art gives form to intangible divinity, creating a bridge from the physical world (Maya) towards the transcendental reality. The Hindu quest is to discard the impermanent elements of life that lead to suffering, and to find the ultimate self. Accordingly, the human being must realize that one's true self is not individual, but identical to the ideal self, as expressed through the deities. In other words, the deities represent everyone. This brings us to the title of Glick's exhibition at Lismore Regional Gallery, which casually announces, *Hi, I'm Everyone....* His nameless models form a mirror, and a more truthful one than any deity could provide.

The artist's pun of depicting Western individuals as Eastern gods turns the traditional form he references on its head. His subjects' appearances connect them to the here and now, so they refer to time differently from the ancient statues that inspired them. We see instinctively that Glick has captured his subjects at a moment in their lives, highlighting mortality. They appear awkward and inadequate in their god-like stances, handicapped by human frailties.



Everyone No. 9 (2008) depicts the artist himself as an idol, sitting quietly in lotus position. Multiple arms emphasize power and the ability to perform several feats at the same time. As ludicrous as this comparison seems, it is fitting for an artist and modern man. Meanwhile, his extra flesh draws him closer to fellow Westerners who flock to Ubud yoga retreats in search of health and happiness, once their lives are half spent among the pressures of capitalism. Behind closed eyelids could be a peaceful mind, or one battling to quiet a relentless cycle of thoughts and doubts about small problems we know all too well.

Everyone No. 168 (2013) equally edges into kitch, with a woman positioned underneath brightly painted elephants that pour water over her. Traditionally, elephants are symbols of strength, success and perfect wisdom, but it is difficult not to see the circus of tourism that places people in absurd situations for a photo opportunity. Just as with these everyday situations there is, in this sculpture, a joyous – if not embarrassed woman (Glick's wife) captured in wood.

Despite the judgment that feeling so close to these works affords us, spending time with them we see that spiritual presence and a dignity are there as well, springing from the subjects' humanity and the lineage of the sculptures. The deities represent our capacity to love, create, have courage, and take vengeance. Glick's sculptures highlight the god-

likeness of human beings. His use of this ancient iconography could be perceived as sarcastic, even inappropriate. However, by crossing into this sensitive territory, Glick provokes questions, irking us with political incorrectness. Wading into deep water he then asks, 'what's this judgment made of?'. Our discomfort comes partially from Glick's borrowing from traditions of other cultures. It also responds to his process, which equally highlights cultural gaps between East and West, but slams them together anyway.

One way in which he does this is through his questioning of what an artist is. The *Everyone Series* highlights differing concepts of what this means. The Western idea of creativity casts the artist as a trailblazer and non-conformist, and then just as quickly switches this around to judge them a misfit and dropout. By contrast the tightrope of newness, rebelliousness and individualism is unimportant in Hindu art. The traditional sculptor is not motivated by innovation. They are part of a longer history and driven by a role to give expression to the metaphysical. Their craft, passed on through generations, provides a modest income. Fame and ego are at odds with the cultural and religious messages idol makers are charged with relaying. When the work is finished, the artists usually go unnamed and have done for centuries. Glick's works are not an opinion of West bad East good or visa versa. They simply highlight contradictions.



P3: Rodney Glick, Project team: Made Leno, Wayan Darmadi
Everyone No. 177 2012, (detail), carved and painted wood, 120 x 60 x 60 cm
 courtesy Murdoch University Art Collection, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift Program by Mary Hill and family in memory of Christopher Hill

P4: Rodney Glick, Project team: Made Putra Edy, Wayan Darmadi
Everyone No. 168 2013, carved and painted wood, 125 x 160 x 60 cm
 courtesy the artist

P5: Rodney Glick, Project team: Made Leno, Wayan Darmadi
Everyone No. 100 2012, (detail), carved and painted wood, 210 x 50 x 50 cm
 courtesy the artist

The reality of these differences is made clearer by the fact that Glick is working in them. His process consists of different steps and modes of production, in Australia and Bali. Throughout his process he works with an evolving list of artists to arrive at his finished work. The source material for Glick's sculptures consists of digitally manipulated photographs, which he works on with Perth-based artists, Sohan Ariel Hayes and Tony Nathan, and the friends and family who model for him. Here Photoshop becomes an ideal tool to materialize multiple limbs and mythical scenarios as depicted in the ancient works. Once he has an image, Glick takes it to one of the woodcarvers he works with in Bali, Made Leno or Made Putra Edy, asking them to work to his specifications under an agreed contract. The works are then painted, either in Bali by Wayan Darmadi or Dewa Tirtayasa, or back in Australia by Claire Evans.

Glick is entirely transparent about this process, naming his fellow makers at every opportunity, but he is the director and the work is his. The Western art market requires this branding and Glick's provision of this 'art by Rodney Glick' highlights his understanding of the art world. This is equally tongue in cheek, as he knows it challenges some ideas of what an artist is. What we don't necessarily see are the subtleties behind this process of exchange: what is learnt, what is paid, and what is animated for the future, directly and divergently, for Glick and his co-workers. Glick now lives in Bali highlighting his genuine connection to this place and its people.

Rodney Glick is not new to art. For over twenty-five years he has been creating ambitious and diverse projects that wryly question the art world's operating systems. With his *Everyone Series* he has made use of an art form that was designed to speak to people, and relay messages to the masses. By piercing holes in the sacred he steps into a truly complex and perplexing space, shining light onto contemporary life. As is often the case in Glick's work, the holy and the profane are seen side by side, and they are immediately interchangeable. His humour leverages off our judgment, exposing how thin it often is.

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