



Australian Government



This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Produced by  
Ondarvideo, Pisa  
Supported by the  
Comune di Pisa

**GIANT STEPS**  
— SEXTON —  
YARRA VALLEY AUSTRALIA

# PETER CALLAS

## CIRCLE OF CONFUSION

### Preview

5.30 – 7.30pm Tuesday 10 July 2007

Exhibition to be opened at 6.30pm by Alessio Cavallaro

Senior Curator, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne

### Exhibition Dates

10 July – 4 August 2007

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1 *Dirty Ghost*, 2004  
digital print on photographic paper  
76 x 181cm

2 *Falconers (transmission by sight)*, 2004  
digital print on photographic paper  
167 x 121cm

reverse  
*Postscript*, 2004  
digital print on photographic paper  
261 x 86cm

1



2

Peter Callas journeyed to Italy in 2004 on the invitation of Ondavideo Pisa to undertake a critical interpretation of the *Trionfo della Morte* (Triumph of Death) fresco cycle in the Camposanto Monumentale, Pisa's medieval cemetery which was catastrophically damaged in WWII. *Circle of Confusion* is the result of that encounter.

His journey however was no ordinary homage to this extraordinary historical site. Callas is not an art tourist. His examination of what remains of the frescos is forensically intense. So little of the frescos are left, you have to look closely at the fragments in order to reconstitute or to re-imagine the narratives of the *Trionfo*, *Last Judgement*, *Inferno* and the *Lives of the Anchorite Monks*.

It is precisely via the process of digitally "restoring" the authority, authenticity and power of the frescos' history, that Callas unequivocally expresses an existential dissatisfaction by asking exactly what it is we are examining in the search for historical "truths". Do these fragments merely represent only the remains of the biggest piece of medieval Church propaganda -- proselytising and ideologically demanding Christendom's own doctrines by means of fear and eternal damnation? Callas suggests that whilst the frescos give the appearance of historical gravitas and ecclesiastical piety, these totalities, that we seem to cling to through time, are illusory.

*Circle of Confusion* is a critical mediation that deals with the representation of history. Callas' manipulation of the frescos offers a rethinking of how history functions and whose interests it serves. His images re-examine the classical vision with a degree of contemporary clarity that is enhanced by a seamless technological intervention. He reshapes the meaning of our perspectives on history by connecting it with the present. History for Callas is never fixed, neutral or inert.

In *Circle of Confusion* history encompasses a multivalent set of often repressed or invisible narratives. The hooded falconer next to the lady whose hat is emblazoned with eyes in *Falconers (Transmission by Sight)* is emblematic of this irruptive process.

In these works, his technological reconstructions enliven history, investing it with a capacity of political scepticism that is no longer constrained by the context of Catholicism or by the limits of historicism. By reinscribing or deterritorializing the narratives of the frescos, Callas transforms the "information" of history. Technological intervention radically disturbs, and alters the experience and perception of recording human behaviour by making the virtual feel and appear more real, more relevant and more engaging with the present. In this sense Callas seems to remove history from its own signifying system by disenfranchising it from its own authority and reducing it to a tool or means through which to create a contemporary dialogue with the critical issues of our time.

In this context, Callas doubles the language of the fragments. By juxtaposing contemporary references such as the politics of the Iraqi War with overtly political graffiti such as "*liberati degli oppressori*" ("liberators are oppressors") in *Liberators*, he challenges and parodies the original speculating of the godless culture of capital that we are immersed in today.

In his images Callas has created a new vernacular that undermines history, not necessarily as a post-modern notion suggesting the "end of history", but as an attempt to re-signify the authorising position of history -- a strategy that is consistently present throughout Callas' profound new media and video work.

Nicholas Tsoutas  
Artistic Director, Casula Powerhouse, NSW