

## Robert Pulie, reveals some thoughts & ideas on the art for the Holy Balm album 'Activity'

Emma Ramsay in conversation with Robert Pulie



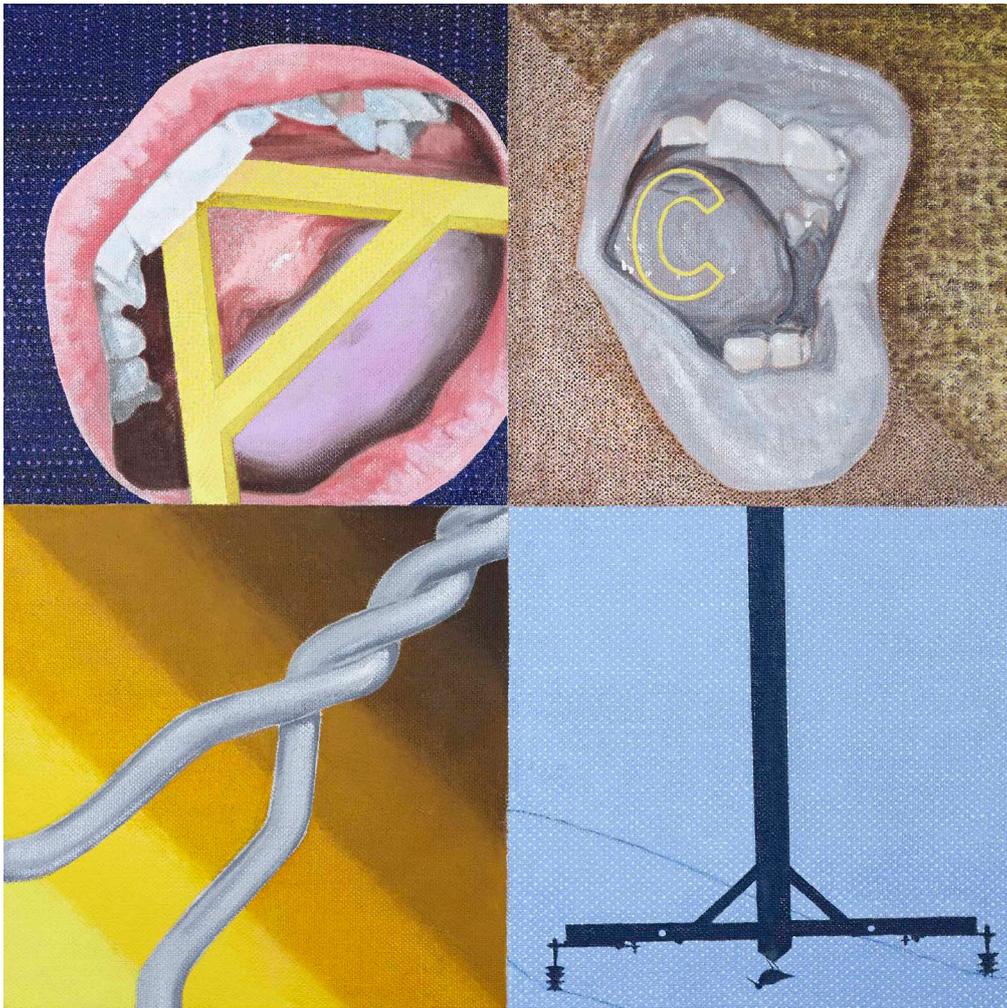
Robert Pulie, *Voiceless Velar Plosive*, 2014 oil, alkyd and enamel on cotton, 45.5 x 35.5 cm, image courtesy The Commercial Gallery, Sydney

**Emma Ramsay:** *The Voiceless Velar Plosive* painting - it spoke to the naming of the album 'Activity', the 'k' sound. There was the performative action in the work, the illustration of the sound being made that felt like a starting point into art for the LP. How did this painting initially come into being - rather what seeded it inception?

Robert Pulie: The title, *Voiceless Velar Plosive* is the phonetic term for the 'k' sound. I was trying to illustrate a connection between the shape of the letter 'k' and the shape ones mouth makes to produce the sound that letter designates. The way the bend in the tongue kicks away from the roof of the mouth/back of the throat corresponds to the connection of the letter's bent leg to its straight leg. I planned to make more paintings for all the letters of the English alphabet, but the correspondences are a longer bow to draw, or entirely absent for some of the letters.

**ER:** We asked you to create a work for the LP, I guess riffing off this painting, but also because we love the playfulness of wit & language in your work. Did making the Activity art offer an extension on some of the themes from the *Voiceless* painting?

RP: When Anna told me that seeing *Voiceless Velar Plosive* is what prompted you to ask me to consider making the cover art for the album, and that the working title was *Activity*, I did see it as an opportunity to explore these correspondences with more letters. The act of pronunciation is what I was seeking to articulate, so it seemed appropriate. Where some of the letters lacked any easy relationship to the shapes made by the mouth in sounding them out (the short 'i' sounds of 'i' and 'y') I looked to other, aesthetic correspondences/associations.



Robert Pulie, *Activity Fliptych (A)*, 2015, oil, alkyd and enamel on linen, 87 x 86.5 x 2.5 cm  
 (photo: Yanni Kroneberg)

**ER: We love where this exploration ended up! I think the play of direct representation of the title and then with more cryptic parts of the art - upon initial glance - really lines up with the way we as a band, approach aesthetic and correspondences in our music making. It really sat so instantly with the music when you first showed us the working paintings in your studio all those months ago. Can you tell us about the colour palette you chose for the works?**

RP: The palette changed a bit in the process of painting, as I attempted to balance the panels, so it was pretty intuitive. Only the colours of the semi-silhouetted, upside-down telegraph pole 'T' remain true to the print-out from an image I found online.

**ER: And how did that idea evolve with the order of the letters forming a 'ip' cycle of the font & back cover of the LP?**

RP: Because *Activity* is on vinyl, I thought the cover art could refer to the activity of handling a record. Records need to be flipped..! Eight letters divide equally into four quarters for each side, but inside the square cover is a round disc, so rather than divide the title into 'acti' and 'vity' I decided to arrange it as a single circle dancing across both sides and returning to the start. That's why the left-hand panels on the front cover and the right-hand panels on the back cover orient diagonally towards the centre.



Robert Pulie, *Activity Fliptych (B)*, 2015, oil, alkyd and enamel on linen, 87 x 86 x 2.5 cm  
(photo: Yanni Kroneberg)

**ER: It was really clever and moving for us, that you engaged so much with the material and function of the LP art in this way. Is there some existing LP art you are particularly fond of - either on-going inspiration for your art or something newly acquired?**

RP: There is so much great cover art out there..just recently I was admiring the cover of Manuel Göttsching's beautiful album, E2-E4 that has recently been reissued. It's simply a brown and cream chess board!

**ER: Divine. I like how album art can kind of go both ways - stand out from time specific design aesthetic - or become a classic representation of that trend at the time. To riff off ideas about design... would you like to create a stage set design for us in the future if we got an opportunity to do so? If so could you imagine what some of elements might be?**

RP: I would love to create a set design for Holy Balm! But maybe I could first get a copy of the lyrics to some of your songs..? Until I could read your lips when I saw the video for Fashion, I thought you were singing 'colours and letter...s', which further cemented my decision to focus on the title for the cover art. But it's leather! Perhaps a coloured leather set..?

**ER: Oh wow, I think I like 'letter...s' better as a lyric actually! That is so funny because some folk have said many interpretations of Holy Balm lyrics. A good one from *Balm Theme* was '..I'll be your dag, I'll be your door stop..' not a very nice sentiment hehe! A coloured leather set sounds luxurious and strange, perhaps we can get sponsored by Brescia Furniture.**

*Robert Pulie is represented by The Commercial Gallery, Sydney. "Activity" photographs of original artworks by Yanni Kronenberg, 2016.*

*The album 'Activity' is available through Chapter Music, available both on vinyl and digital.*