



Jim Cooper, *Thank God for William Blake*, artist's page, 2006, mixed media on paper.

Sergeant P

I am currently engaged with a project entitled *Sergeant P*, which references the famous album cover of the Beatles in 1967. My large-scale ceramic figures play with the various personages on that cover.

The original concept for the cover came from the English pop artist Peter Blake who had asked the Beatles who they would have over for dinner if they could invite anybody. Their answer led to the inclusion of Alistair Crowley, Mahatma Ghandi, Aubrey Beardsley, Marilyn Monroe and Shirley Temple – amongst many other famous people – on the cover. Jesus and Hitler were considered by the Beatles, but were excluded in the interest of not offending anybody. A pull-out with freebies in the original album included sergeant's stripes and a moustache so that the buyer could dress-up like a Sergeant Pepper himself.

Since 1967, many other versions of the cover have seen the light. A grittier interpretation was created by Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention; and a Japanese electronic version showed the people from behind. The Rolling Stones' response to it was called *Satanic Majesty's Request* and featured themselves as wizards in a fantastic, psychedelic landscape with a cut-out of the Beatles' heads paying a tribute to them as rivals.

My ceramic figures build my own version of the cover with eighty personages. I want them to have a 'knocked-off' look by making them quickly and without paying attention to detail so that they 'admit' that they are not the originals. I also want to show them as a large crowd in reference to the actual cover; and I planned for them to exude a sense of abandonment, as if I were on drugs. The brightly-coloured motley crew thus plays with the rock culture of the sixties and brings many associations with the radical left of that time into the frame. My writing includes images from the project and combines these with informal text in the manner of 1960s William Burroughs' and Patti Smith's visual, cut-and-paste style. Again, my work refers to the context of the late 60s and its heady sense of experimentation; of all things being possible in an era radically critical of conventions and the authority vested in them.

Jim Cooper completed an MFA at Otago Polytechnic in 2001 and is currently a lecturer in ceramics in the School of Art. He has won major awards for his studio work, for example the Norsewear Art Award in 2005; and exhibits widely in New Zealand. *Sergeant P* will commence on an exhibition tour at the Dowse Art Gallery in Lower Hutt; a tour to be concluded at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2007-8.



Jim Cooper, ceramic figures from *Sergeant P*, 2006, a studio view, heights variable from approx. 50 to 120 cm.