Danie Mellor, one of Australia’s most unique and esteemed contemporary artists, is strongly influenced by his European and Indigenous heritage. His iconographic lexicon is erudite, complex and richly textured, and plays on historical intersections with Australia’s Indigenous people, addressing themes of colonial exploration and exploitation, Enlightenment philosophy, science and culture, and the associated disruptions, disconnections and transformations of Indigenous culture and country.

In *A Point of Order (New Worlds from Old)*, Mellor has appropriated an engraving by Johann Martin Bernigeroth (1713-1767) depicting a masonic initiation.1 Mellor’s exploration of Freemasonry symbology and ritualism exposes the historical privileging of western perception, understanding and valorisation of ‘men of high degree’2 over Indigenous people who carry the same status in their own culture.

The original exhibition title, *Non Sufficit Orbis*, which translates as ‘the world is not enough’, has links to Egyptian Atenism and Freemasonry.

Mellor’s celebrates career has been recognised by the Australia Council for the Arts, for which he is Chair of the Visual Arts Board and Governing Council member, and his prestigious exhibition profile includes: undisclosed, the second National Indigenous Art Triennial (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra 2013), the National Gallery of Canada’s contemporary art exhibition *Sokshen* (2013), and *Exotic Lies Sacred Ties* (Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane 2015) and the 2016 Adelaide Biennial.

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The present work’s title immediately conjures ideas about colonial discord, and poetically references the intersection of spear and sword between the two foregrounded figures, reinforcing the notion of a clash of cultures. Commonalities remain unseen, but not unreferenced: Freemasons once traced their designs on tavern floors in blue chalk, which were then erased to protect their secrecy, a practice similar to those employed in many Indigenous secret/sacred rituals and ceremonies.3

This commonality, albeit not a shared cultural experience, was at play in *From Rio to Ritual*, which won Mellor the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2009: ‘both cultural rituals are ways of transmitting knowledge, progressing through different levels of learning… but packaged differently according to the environments in which the initiation takes place’.4

Another device at work in *A Point of Order* is its architectural setting in perspectival space, which invites the viewer to step into the work beyond the theatrical stage and explore its narrative more deeply.

Decorative materials employed in Mellor’s oeuvre – floral motifs, crystals, glitter, mirrored surfaces and gold – are similarly designed to lure the viewer into engaging with the message. While clearly signalling the substance of the tropes, ‘all that glitters is not gold’, these embellishments have academic ties to ideas about allegory: art historian Simon Schama writes of their affectiveness as visual clues to a work’s ‘truth’ being poetic rather than literal.5

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Footnotes

1. *Galerie du Boulogne dans la légende française Assemblée de Francs-Macons pour le Reception des Maitres* (1757-1798), the obverse of which reads ‘Phillip II King of Spain and the New World’. In this context, the present work’s initiation imagery alludes to the involuntary induction of Aboriginal people to western society’s cultural practices and norms.


4. Quoted in *Non Sufficit Orbis*, op. cit., p.71


6. Quoted in *Non Sufficit Orbis*, op. cit., p.71

7. Quoted in *Non Sufficit Orbis*, op. cit., p.71


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