

Doing Time in the Age of Terror

The obsessive labour that went into creating eX de Medici's intensely beautiful water colour drawings remains visible, it lingers and resonates. Her drawings are a performance with no audience; a kind of time-based art, a way of marking time. Or maybe 'doing time' is more accurate, for like a cast away or prisoner, de Medici literally inscribes time onto the page, one line for each day spent on a drawing. These crosshatched clusters accumulate, indicating weeks and months: evidence of her patient hard labour.

In her exhibition *Black Flag*, the irrefutable physical proof of de Medici's passion and dedication is arresting. Clearly this is an artist with something to say. And while the old adage claims, "A picture is worth a thousand words", de Medici evidently still feels compelled to add a few of her own. But her lengthy titles are more cryptic than didactic. As an artist de Medici never spells things out.

de Medici's, *Mean Machine (Better than Versailles) How to Get Virgins in Paradise (Universal Mediator) Mikhail Kalashnikov AK S-740 Artomat x Unclassified Tortricidae (CSIRO Specimen)* is a highly patterned, bejewelled AK rifle. This is bling with bang, a clever nod to the fact that weapons are also accoutrements, status symbol adornments akin to a fat gold chain, a BMW or a pneumatic blonde; something potent and desirable, with a function beyond the purely utilitarian, to consume conspicuously.

And it's not just ganstas and wannabes that have been seduced by military chic. Camouflage patterned clothing has been socially acceptable civilian streetwear for decades. People seem to have forgotten what it means, anaesthetised by the numbing fumes of fashion or by information overload; images of death and destruction streaming non stop until it just seems normal. But the incongruity of de Medici's decorated guns acts like antidote, a slap in the face, a wake up call. Their glitzy, Bedazzler-ed beauty somehow reminds us that war isn't pretty, no matter how you dress it up.

In her new work, de Medici continues her obsession with moths as subject matter and metaphor. Their fluttery, fleeting existence, predilection for subterfuge and dark reputation add rich layers of meaning to her complex compositions. In *Skinny Day*

Ambush, a giant moth seems to emerge from a bullet, a miraculous metamorphosis of from such a toxic chrysalis. Here the transformation seems almost celebratory, but in most of de Medici's works the commingling of the organic with the manmade has a sinister, ambiguous edge.

Isaac and Ishmael depicts two hand guns with their muzzles fused together like conjoined twins. Even to those not overly familiar with the stories of Abraham's sons from the Torah, Bible or Koran, it is clear that this mutant gun is a symbol of the seemingly endless conflict between Jews and Arabs; pulling the trigger is fatal for either side. It's a lose/lose situation which can be extrapolated to any violent conflict, de Medici certainly isn't pointing the finger at Jews, Christians or Muslims in particular. Instead, she highlights the intrinsic failings of humanity in general.

In *Black Flag*, de Medici has morphed a feathery moth wing texture onto all of her guns. But this is not the standard nature vs culture clash. Instead of a juxtaposition of opposites, de Medici seamlessly integrates two potent symbols: the moth and the gun, life and death, acknowledging that they are inextricably linked and that man's homicidal tendencies are in fact natural, perhaps inevitable. These guns, like most of de Medici's work, operate as *memento mori* with a contemporary, current affairs savvy twist: a simple message presented beautifully, remember death. In our over hyped age of terror, de Medici seems to wonder how we could forget.

Tracey Clement 2007

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