This photograph was taken on the road heading north in the ancient city of Meybod, in the desert region of Central Iran, and depicts an avenue of young 'martyrs' from the Iran/Iraq war. These photographic memorials positioned in stylised tulips are ubiquitous throughout the entire country... every city, town and village. The tulip construction differs from district to district. More than 2 million Iranians were destroyed during the war.
(Photo by eX)

The Australian artist known as eX de Medici is somewhat of an enigma. An artistic career forged in the tattoo industry, which is synonymous with the underbelly of society, meant that the creation of an alter ego was required when she entered the more mainstream art world in order to distance herself from her former "less salubrious" clientelle.
Sydney based gallery Sullivan + Strumpf will present a solo show of new work by de Medici during the 2012 Melbourne Art Fair from the 1st to the 5th of August. The exhibition, titled Ton of Bricks, consists of 12 new elaborate and highly detailed paintings by the artist that stem from her recent travels in the Middle East combined with an ongoing interest in natural history.

Focusing on a series of gas masks in various states of use and disuse, the deeply political "documents" present hazardous environments, as in You Can tell by the smell, that there`s nothing going on round here (Herd), whereby the air surrounding the masks is filled with highly decorative visual representations of pollens, gasses, viruses and other "irritants".

In part two of this exclusive interview with Artinfo Australia Executive Editor Nic Forrest, de Medici discusses how her travels to the Middle East influenced her current body of work.

**How do you want viewers to read these works?**
With ease. I always attempt to make entry into the pictorial space easy for viewers. I do consider the viewer when I make work. I always hope that the easy entry compensates for the content and complexities therein. As a young artist, I experienced numerous failures in my delivery and therefore audience interpretation. Since these failures took place, I make serious attempt at precision with content. I recall delivering an artist talk at the National Gallery of Australia
some years ago, at question time an audience member asked what the meaning of a picture of an automatic rifle (titled 'Yellow Bellied Black', a black carbine with a yellow underside) was. I asked that person what they thought it might mean. It was obvious. The same person asked if I understood that guns were phallic. I replied that I made the picture with the full comprehension of the phallic nature of weapons. I always hope that the obvious easy entry is exactly that.

**Should these paintings be viewed as references to specific events/situations or as a general comment on war and violence?**

Both. The Iran/Iraq war provides a base for a number of works, and ties to constructs of power via violence and complicity, the long term concerns in my work. For example, the picture 'You can tell from the smell that there's nothing going on round here' (a quote from The Herd) again, references some of the Kerman War Museum's collection of gas masks and land mines, but also the 'stick and ball' or molecular models of various chemical weapons (3 QuinuclidinylBenzilate, Cyclosarin, Phenyldichloroarsine, Sarin, Soman, Sulphur Mustard, Tabun and VE gases) employed by the Iraqi regime on Iran during the Imposed War, one year after the ’79 Revolution and expulsion of the US-backed dictator Muhammad Reza Shah. Much of the science, materials, logistics and funding required to build and deliver these post World War II internationally outlawed weapons upon the Iranian population were provided to Saddam Hossein's regime by Germany, U.S.A. and England.
What prompted your travels through Iran and the resulting body of work?

It took many years to find a travelling companion willing to visit Iran, and I found that companion for my first trip in taxonomist Dr. Marianne Horak, who has mentored my work at the CSIRO Entomology Division's A.N.I.C. (Australian National Insect Collection) for the last 12 years. I am no longer nervous about travelling to Iran on my own. My fascination began in my late teens, when I read a description of the last Pahlavi Shah's Tehran as one of the most sophisticated cities on earth (in revision, yet another propagandic construct) ever since I have been intrigued, and although that picture is a very different one to Modern I.R.I., it is no less intriguing.

I work all the time, literally. Travelling presents no barrier to working, the work is always at the front of my mind. As ever, many people are involved in my work, and it is proper their contribution be acknowledged. My Iranian guides, Mohsen Hajisaeid and Pegah Latifi (and their extended families), young and erstwhile, provide introduction and facilitate my odd requests; no shopping, war sites, remote desert regions, stone mountain chains etc. Dr. Donat Agost (mentioned above) makes all impossible things possible. My Iran family exemplifies historic Persian hospitality and companionship, and in many ways this body of work could not exist without them.

I fund all my own projects.