EX DE MEDICI ON SUBLIME “SOUR CRUDE” SUBVERSIONS IN SYDNEY

BY Nicholas Forrest | July 09, 2015

“There are two kinds of oil, sweet crude and sour crude. Sweet crude is ready to burn; sour crude needs a lot of refining. This work is crude and freakin’ sour,” says enigmatic Canberra-based artist eX de Medici about her first solo show in 3 years, “Sour Crude,” which is currently at Sydney gallery Sullivan+Strumpf until July 18, 2015.

“Sour Crude” continues the artist ongoing engagement with environmental issues and power representations. In these new works she subverts the logos and brands of multinational corporations and government agencies, presenting “a powerful and political reflection of the world” that puts on trial “the corruption, destruction and injustices of governments and big corporations.”

Executed in her signature watercolour, the works in “Sour Crude” testify to the genius of de Medici’s practice. Using her unique visual language and distinct vocabulary of imagery which are at once confronting, subversive, disturbing, surreal, complex, and beautiful, de Medici interrogates the state of humanity with the eloquence of a poet, the grace of a maestro, and the precision of a soldier.

To find out more about her amazing “Sour Crude” exhibition, BLOUIN ARTINFO got in touch with the artist and asked her a few questions.
“There are two kinds of oil, sweet crude and sour crude. Sweet crude is ready to burn, sour crude needs a lot of refining. This work is crude and freakin’ sour,” you have said about “Sour Crude.” What does this statement reveal about the works in the exhibition and your perspective on the world and humanity?

Predatorial Corporate interests have, by increment and evolution of business definitions, become determinants within our public policy. For example, in Australia, mega-corporations join energies to influence and seduce successive governments, The Law and legislation to enact their interests in demarked world heritage areas (Great Barrier Reef, Tasmania), and places of enduring international cultural and environmental significance (Burrup Peninsula, W.A., Kakadu National Park’s tropical savannah, Gallilee Basin etc). Could those same seductions apply to, for instance, drilling for oil under the pyramids, or bombing the Lascaux Caves for gas? Only in an Australian context can these types of strategies seem sane. My dismay at the Human Stampede (Uber alles), is at times, overwhelming.

In “Sour Crude” you have enveloped the reworked and amalgamated logos and brands of multinational corporations and government agencies within dreamscapes of bright colours and decorative motifs. What do you want to convey, express, and evoke with these works and why?

My hobby is geo-economic politics. In the evolution of entities called Corporations, the strategy of co-operative ganging of the most powerful companies on earth to achieve their desire for influence and profit has no limit. Like destructive sex or drug addiction, it can’t end well. In examination of a number of mine sites I have worked with (Ranger Uranium, Gippsland Coal) I came to consider the construct of aesthetics. What I may consider ‘beautiful’ (Kakadu National Park) diverges from what a corporation (Energy Resources Australia) considers ‘beautiful’. I have abused the Decorative for many years to enhance the divergence of reality and fantasy.
Your engagement with the logos and brands of multinational corporations and government agencies is particularly interesting. What did you learn about these logos and brands as well as the companies they represent and how did this inform the way you depict and present them in your works?

I learned from researching this work, the long, deep lines of generational complicity, corrosion, inside trading and cartel behaviours that maintain the centralization of power in the world. Not only the actual players, their antecedents and descendants, but their methodologies and apparatus as aped and developed by new players in the big game. I have placed them in their gangs, Finance, Intelligence, Weapon manufacturers, Pharmaceuticals, Mining.

A minor point in terms of ‘branding’ design, some of the most destructive companies in corporate history have the best logos. Standard Oil (a red, white and blue lamp in the darkness), Shell (a scallop shell in fetching red and yellow), (Exxon) Mobil (a flying red horse), Golden Fleece (a golden ram) Texaco/Caltex (a star in a circle), BP (a shield which became a flower).

Contemporary branding is blank and slick, clean (but dirty) and dominantly text based. It gives nothing away. Crimes against the environment and the non-human across the planet for the last century are hidden behind these cool, shiny signs. Nothing like the smell of Money in the morning. It smells like Victory (Apocalypse Now).

“Sour Crude” also features paintings depicting guns, daggers, and bombs. Is there a connection between these weapons and the logos and brands of multinational corporations and government agencies that you want to express?

The black work (Uzi, Luger, Glock, Heckler and Koch, daggers, bombs) is the story stripped bare of its colourful spin and gloss. What lies beneath is the ugly truth of the apparatus of power. The Law elasticizes itself to accommodate corporate desire.
The works in “Sour Crude” are at once confronting, subversive, disturbing, surreal, complex, and beautiful. Together, these characteristics would seem to perfectly describe today’s world and the state of contemporary society and culture. What does your world view, as depicted in “Sour Crude,” reveal about the role of art in contemporary society and culture?

I have stated before, that art and artists’ roles have little to no effect within the structures of power. We are minor irritants at best.

Considering though, the strangulation of federal funding by those with the means to do so, says something about micro management, targeting and bringing to heel, dissent within the broader culture. The ancient human technique of siege strategy. Starve them out.

Secondly, in the mass consumption of any cultural artefact within Tron (the internet), culture is speed digested with an exponentially insatiable appetite. Users demand we work for free. Gina Rhinehart (whose notorious statement that temporary workers from Africa would love a $2 dollar a day job in an iron ore mine in the Pilbara) has become a great metaphor for Users’ demands for free cultural content.

**How do you reconcile the decorative and aesthetic elements of your practice with the confronting themes and concepts that you explore in your work?**

A spoonful of sugar...the same hot mess the Corporations serve up.

eX de Medici, *Small Oil (Shell Oil) (Death Comes Coming)*, 2014-15, watercolour on paper, 50 x 50cm