A solo show by Canberra-based artist Ex De Medici shows the arresting dialogue between art and activism.

Oil, that slippery substance that fuels the cars we buy and the wars we fight, plays an unseen role in our lives. For eX de Medici, the Canberra-based artist who’s spent the past three decades making impossibly intricate paintings that explode the power structures that hold us captive, it’s also a metaphor for her newest body of work. It is called *Sour Crude*, and it’s currently showing at Sullivan+Strumpf.
“eX is one of the most important contemporary artists working at the moment, and every exhibition is quite a special thing,” says Joanna Strumpf, the co-founder of Sullivan+Strumpf. “This exhibition includes work from 2013 to right now, so it’s quite a long gestation period. I think eX is so politically focused – more than any other individual I’ve ever met.”

*Sour Crude* is eX de Medici’s first solo show in three years. It combines swirling, psychedelic colours and delicate brushstrokes – the legacy of the artist’s acclaimed tattooing practice – to expose modern-day forces such as corruption, consumerism and corporate greed.

*Small Oil Shell Oil Death Comes Coming* a work that features the Shell logo painted in blood red and plastic yellow, highlights the ways in which capitalist symbols seep into our consciousness. *Big Fantasy (M16)* depicts a machine gun wound up in clouds of candy-coloured foliage. It explores the sinister connections between destruction and beauty.
“Big Fantasy, which is the hero image of the exhibition, is such an incredible piece of work,” says Strumpf. “It’s fairy floss, lollipops, dolphins and unicorns wrapped around this weapon. It’s also worth looking out for a piece called Big Coal and Gas, in which she uses the Eureka Stockade flag and juxtaposes that with all kinds of mining logos.”

For Strumpf, part of eX de Medici’s brilliance is her mastery of watercolour, a technically demanding medium rooted in domestic traditions.

“eX is able to use this incredibly conservative medium of watercolour, this thing that is the domain of lady painters and painters of botanical specimens and other such delicate things, but she’s making these big, powerful paintings,” says Strumpf.

“Watercolours are so difficult to make that you’d only dare make them on a small scale, but her technique is so incredible that some of her paintings are seven metres long! She lures you in because they’re so pretty and the colours are so lovely, but when you get closer you start to see that there’s something dark going on. It’s this...
notion of the delicate lady painter with these big ideas. That’s her real magic.”

*Sour Crude* runs until July 18 at Sullivan+Strumpf, 799 Elizabeth Street, Zetland

eX de Medici, *Sour Crude*, Installation View, Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney