eX de Medici: *Spies Like Us*

PREVIEW  7 June 2017

The defining theme in eX de Medici’s paintings is a consistent interrogation of power. The notion of ‘the personal’ doesn’t interest the artist. Instead she investigates authority and dissent through paintings of guns, surveillance devices and gas masks.

The mobile phone tower pervades eX de Medici’s upcoming show, *Spies Like Us*, at Sullivan + Strumpf. She has been photographing phone towers across Australia for the last two years. “I’ve been driving past them for so long and you don’t even notice them,” says the artist. “Despite the fact that they are so ubiquitous, they are an old military trope hiding in plain sight.”

The ambition behind *Spies Like Us* is to bring these
Drawing upon her background as a tattoo artist, eX de Medici portrays the phone towers predominantly in watercolours. She presents a contemporary take on the vanitas tradition. By adding floral accompaniments, the nine paintings in the show simultaneously invoke both pleasing and threatening imagery.

Spies Like Us deals with control, surveillance and the collection of mass personal data. For eX de Medici there is something sinister about mobile phone towers. “In my work the towers are seen as an apparatus of a predator,” she explains. “I discuss the predator because I think it’s like bell-ing the cat; you put a bell on a predator to know where it is.”

While the towers depicted in the exhibition are Australian, eX de Medici’s interest in the subject stems from her travels to Iran. During one particular visit the artist began to notice that phone towers were being camouflaged as artificial trees. “I started to really think about these towers and, more importantly, why someone was disguising them,” she says.

The political situation in Iran during 2010 had a further important impact: at this time thousands of Iranian citizens were placed under house arrest due to their political activism, which was mobilised via social media. The technology enabling both political activism and political authority was, of course, the mobile phone tower. While eX de Medici’s previous work has focussed on this Iranian context, the artist deliberately decided to work closer to home for Spies Like Us. As she says, “I feel that beyond the positive benefits of mass communication there’s a massive downside which we haven't seen in Australia yet.”

Spies Like Us
eX de Medici
Sullivan + Strumpf
10 June – 8 July