One day when eX de Medici was watching the news, she saw then-politician Peter Garrett hand over the keys for a West Australian gas project to a triumvirate of three mining corporations. It got her thinking about the evolution of corporate business models and “their ever-increasing global control”.

For an artist fascinated by the human desire for power, it seems a logical next step and it plays out in her latest exhibition, *Sour Crude*, at Sullivan+Strumpf.

“My ongoing work with weapons as signifier of absolute control extends here to the fingers by the triggers, the hands which pull the pins that make grenades live, the means (and extensions) of production,” she explains. Corporate logos are everywhere. They grow as part of the foliage in the floral patterning around a handgun. Or they’re given the same bombastic pomp as heraldic devices or placed like electrons into orbits around other insignia. De Medici is developing a new set of codes here to discuss the complex interrelationships and decidedly obtuse structures that underpin power in the modern day. If she ever gets sued for defamation, at least she’s been liberal in her attentions.

A major concern is the insidious way corporates, lobbying and acting together as “wolfpacks”, have wormed into structures of government, from mining to taxation, defence, trade and the law. “Everywhere it seems,” she says.
Big Fantasy (M16), 2015, melds this new line of interest with her ongoing examination of weaponry “species groups”. The work is an assault of colour, wrapping an M16 rifle in technicolour swirls. Take a closer look at this sparkle dust and you’ll find tiny logos side by side with cartoon animals.

“The magic unicorns, ponies and dolphins arise from two sources: the encyclopaedia of emblems in the trade of the tattoo (of which I have been a practitioner for 25 years) and two friends, Magdalene Keaney and Irfan Master, with whom I consulted whilst making the picture. I asked them what I could do to make the M16 less... dogmatic. They jokingly suggested to make it fluffy, tinkling in pastel rainbow colours. They were horrified when I took on their instruction,” she says. “It operates to magnify the fantasy of the American barbarian.”

Another key work is Big Coal and Gas, 2014–2015, which reworks the Eureka flag of the Victorian goldfields. This, as de Medici explains, was originally a symbol galvanising mine workers in their fight for improved taxation and human rights. But in more recent times it has been coopted for other purposes, including by neo-con politicians in the 1980s and during the Cronulla and Lakemba riots in Sydney.

“In the late 2000s, it fluttered above the heads of unionised mine workers in Western Australia and Queensland, as mining magnates Gina Rinehart, Andrew Forrest and Clive Palmer (dressed up as fake shop-steward types) defied paying a proposed Federal Super Profits mining tax. The union workers cheered for their boss-masters, one of whom proposed importing African workers for $2 a day... The irony is staggering. The Eureka flag has over time, like the swastika, become its abject other.”

Logos are posted on each of the stars on the flag and, to drive home the point about insidious relationships, their outer edges dissolve into liquid – blood, water or oil – that spreads outwards to mingle with rivulets from the others. There’s no doubt this is work of our day, speaking to the particular political and economic structures that define our era. These are, as the curse goes, interesting times. As for de Medici’s will to engage with this dark subject matter, she says she is “driven by demons to say it by making it”.

“My incredulity over the rise of corporate appetite and relentless determinism, armed with squads of Queen’s Council barristers, burrowing and lobbying inside our legislation, law, public policies, tax revenues, war policy [and] vast inside-trade with our political representation and legal system far outweighs getting eaten up on a personal level,” she says. “All of my work makes me both existentially nauseous and endlessly interested.”

Sour Crude
eX de Medici
Sullivan+Strumpf
27 June to 18 July 2015

eX de Medici, Big Fantasy (M16), 2015, watercolour on paper, 114 x 214 cm.
eX de Medici, *Big Money*, 2015, watercolour on paper, 114 x 108 cm.

eX de Medici, *Uzi*, 2014–2015, watercolour on paper, 114 x 141 cm.