eX de Medici's 'psychologically nauseating' works selling fast

By Jane O'Sullivan

eX de Medici's first solo show in three years is selling strongly ahead of its opening on June 27 at Sullivan+Strumpf in Sydney.

The 22 works in Crude Sour range in price from $11,000 to $140,000. Dealer Joanna Strumpf reports four of the larger watercolours and several smaller works have already sold. "This is one of the first times that eX has had some less expensive works in a show – the smaller works which are $11,000 – and I had thought they would be the first things to go but interestingly enough we've sold the more expensive things first," she says.

The sales have predominantly been to New South Wales-based collectors, as well as a regional gallery outside the state.
The exhibition includes the three works shown in Dark Heart, the Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2014. Strumpf describes them as the starting point for this new body of work, which references corporate logos. A related piece that was acquired by Artbank in 2014 has also been loaned back to the gallery for the exhibition.

de Medici's three-decade career has been well supported by both collectors and institutions – her work is in the collections of several state galleries as well as the National Gallery of Australia – but she has never produced safe work. As she describes her new exhibition: "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." Part of her strategy as an artist is to make work that is visually alluring and seductive, but also "psychologically nauseating". A set of pipes is worked into a swastika, or the logo of a big oil company bleeds out at the edges.

Her work has long fixed on social justice issues like corporate greed, war profiteering and corruption but she seems less interested in easy scapegoats than in power networks and relationships. She prompts viewers to question these connections – and their own complicity.

eX is not a shy artist. She is very upfront about her convictions and she is putting it out there with this exhibition. One curator described it as an exhibition of our times, which I would certainly agree with," says Strumpf.

There are moments of humour too. In Big Fantasy (M16), one of the major works in Crude Sour, a rifle is cocooned in technicolour swirls formed out of logos and twee characters like dolphins and unicorns – a playful reference to her time as a tattoo artist. This work also shows how de Medici co-opts and subverts expectations. The rainbow swirls are as comfortingly banal as the opening credits of a kids cartoon, but they are also so bright they could be toxic.

Strumpf says she is pleased with sales given the provocative nature of the work, though not surprised. "She's a very sought after artist and it's been a very long time between shows so of course there's going to be a good demand, and that's continuing," she says. "That's what's always enjoyable, when people take the plunge on risky work."

**Sour Crude by eX de Medici runs June 27 to July 18 at Sullivan+Strumpf in Zetland, Sydney**