



destroy a Ukrainian passenger jet carrying 176 civilians, including 82 Iranians, having mistaken the plane for a 'hostile target.'⁴

In *Real Estate* de Medici imagines the vast and culturally significant mountains of Shir-Kuh in central Iran as the prize in a global grab for land and resources. She made the work after having visited the region several times, seeking to challenge accepted Western views of the country and its people. Breath-taking in scale, the watercolour captures the grandeur of this ancient land and alludes to the tensions that have played out there over centuries. De Medici has described the artwork and others from the series to which it belongs as 'expositions of political environments; landscapes of the machinery of power.'⁵ She painted the gilded script that adorns the scene with authority from the Iranian master calligrapher Mahmoud Rahbaran, who chose the text. Drawn from the 11th-century epic poem *Shahnameh* (*The Persian Book of Kings*) by Ferdowsi (c.940-1020), which is synonymous with Greater Iran, the words translate as 'Count Persia as a ruin, as the lair of lions and leopards, look now and despair.'⁶

The duplicitous intrigues that inform *Real Estate* are just some of the games of political one-upmanship upon which de Medici has trained her scathing gaze. Other works see her locking her sights on the oil companies themselves. *Eat Me* 2014, which stands in contrast to the visual restraint of the larger artwork but is in many ways its flipside, is a case in point. While the watercolour glistens with the jewel-like colours of an oversized gum drop, a closer look reveals it is a bitter pill, comprised of the logos of the corporate giants

Amoco, Caltex, and Australia's own petroleum company Golden Fleece, which traded until 1981. Piled one atop the other, the emblems serve as a litany of capitalist greed, cloaked under the guise of economic growth and all that it is touted to offer.

What is alarming, in looking back over works that eX de Medici has made over the past decade, is their continued relevance to contemporary life. World conflicts rage on, while governmental neglect of the crises affecting our environment have seen it go up in flames. While she reproaches us for turning a blind eye to, or being complicit in, these power struggles and their global machinations, it is with the admonishment of a parent censuring their offspring's myopic self-interest. In amongst her meticulously realised artworks there is a silent yet persistent plea: for us to recognise the insidious nature of the systems that control us, to wake from our collective stupor, and to demand change. To refrain from doing so would be to risk condemning ourselves to the fate of Dorian Gray, deferring our confrontation with the reality of our lives until such time as the sad and sorry picture takes its own retributive revenge.

Samantha Littley
Curator, Australian Art
Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

- 1 eX de medici, conversation with the author, 13 January 2020.
- 2 Jenny McFarlane, "Relaxed and Comfortable," in *Cold Blooded: eX de Medici* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 2013), 27.
- 3 Harmeet Kaur, Allen Kim and Ivory Sherman, "The US-Iran Conflict: A Timeline of How We Got Here," *CNN*, January 11, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/01/world/us-iran-conflict-timeline-trnd/>.
- 4 Iranian Armed Forces cited in Lauren Frias, "Iran's Military Says it Thought the Ukrainian Passenger Plane it Shot Down Was an Enemy Missile," *Business Insider Australia*, January 11, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/iran-military-passenger-plane-was-hostile-target-us-military-planes-2020-1>.
- 5 eX de Medici cited in Nicholas Forrest, "Violent Beauty: Controversial Australian Artist eX de Medici Talks War, Politics and Painting," *Blouin Artinfo*, July 23, 2012, <https://www.sullivanstrumpf.com/assets/Uploads/Forrest-Nicholas-Violent-Beauty-Controversial-Australian-Artist-eX-de-Medici-Talks-War-Politics-and-Painting-ARTINFO-July-23-2012.pdf>.
- 6 Ferdowsi cited in McFarlane, "Relaxed and Comfortable," in *Cold Blooded*, 32.

images:

cover: *Proximity to Authority (Isfahan)*, 2012, watercolour and gold leaf on paper, 114 x 136cm

inside left top: *Cleavin' Clint Eastwood*, 2014, watercolour and gouache on paper, 114 x 254cm (unframed)

inside left bottom: *Real Estate*, 2012-2013, watercolour and gold leaf on paper, 113.5 x 204.5cm

inside right: *The Law (Heckler and Koch)*, 2013-2014, watercolour and white gouache on paper, 114 x 212.5cm

above: *Eat Me*, 2014, watercolour on paper, 58 x 58cm, photograph by Rob Little RLDI, collection of the Artist

eX de Medici: From the Room of Dorian Gray, 7 March - 17 May 2020, Wollongong Art Gallery

eX de Medici is represented by Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney

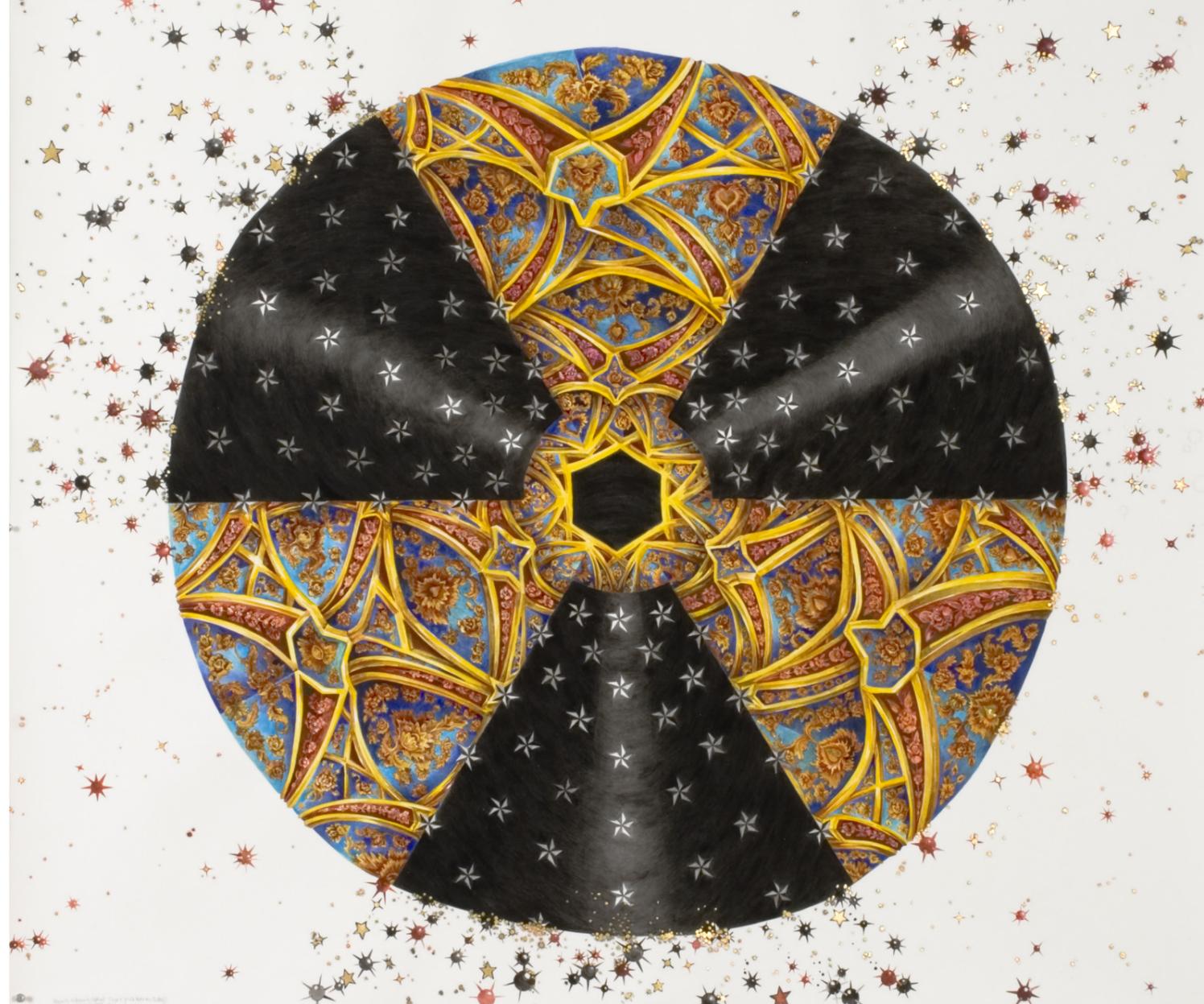
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Corner Kembla & Burelli
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EX DE MEDICI

FROM THE ROOM OF DORIAN GRAY

WOLLONGONG ART GALLERY



FOREWORD

There is an overwhelming quality to eX de Medici's paintings whose sheer detail, scale and beauty seductively draw the viewer inexorably into worlds created in that illusive border between art and life, art and society, death and destruction.

de Medici's work underpins a complex understanding of the dichotomies that exist in society and life. It is a celebration of the inherent beauty of living creatures thoughtfully counterposed through numerous symbols, emblems and motifs that render the degradation that exists within the midst of life.

There is a constant questioning, intelligence and subversive edge in de Medici's practice that culminates in work that is politically charged, socially engaged, and often surprising and unexpected.

de medici creates art that is united in humanity and gives voice to the unspoken and to the politically and socially disenfranchised. It shines a light on the darker

edges of society and is part of a culture of change through its capacity to build a relationship with its audience.

de medici's exhibition *From the Room of Dorian Gray* currently showing at Wollongong Art Gallery includes work from the artist's 'superannuation' collection which questions the value of institutional schemes that are the purview of salaried workers but of little value in the risky-business of art-based practice.

We would like to thank eX for her passion and commitment to this project and for giving so generously of her time. We hope that you will not only enjoy the exhibition, but that it will also give you pause to think.

John Monteleone
Gallery Program Director

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

Anyone who has had the privilege of being invited into eX de Medici's workspace will find that the experience has etched itself into their memories. Both sacred and profane, the room is crowded with bookshelves and carpeted with rugs from Persia and Afghanistan; its walls covered with news clippings, images and artworks, both those by de Medici and others she admires. The eclectic array forms the backdrop to the long days that she spends labouring over her latest aesthetic undertaking, days that she tallies in pencil on her paintings. In this visually saturated yet ordered environment she dedicates herself to the quiet and careful work of the watercolourist. She tackles her expansive works on paper section by section, unfurling them slowly until she completes each self-appointed task and the finished artwork is revealed in all its splendour. To suggest that the process is arduous is to reflect both the nature of her chosen medium, which is exacting and unforgiving, and the content of her work, which deals with some of the darkest traits of humanity.

From the Room of Dorian Gray provides us with a glimpse into the artist's realm, as she allows us to metaphorically rummage through her bottom drawer and discover works of art that she has 'held back' and sardonically describes as her 'rotting corpses'.¹ The title of the exhibition refers to de Medici's irreverent moniker for her studio, and implies the darkness of heart described above. Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) is a moral tale that dissects the life of the story's eponymous protagonist. Gray's degenerate and increasingly malevolent existence reveals itself in his painted likeness, which he secretes in his attic and visits periodically, while his face retains the bloom and innocence of youth. Links between the allegory - of an artwork that assumes the 'Sins of the Fathers', while the fathers themselves continue to transgress - and de Medici's searing indictments of the politically corrupt world that she observes around her have been made before. As curator Jenny McFarlane wrote in her catalogue essay for the 2013 survey *Cold Blooded: eX de Medici* (Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra):

*Like some horrific picture of Dorian Grey [sic] writ on a national scale, de Medici's portraits of the national psyche ... reveal the putrescence of a spirit obsessed with self-gratification, defined by an almost pathological disregard for others and consequences.*²

McFarlane is referring to the state of societal apathy that has led us to a place where we are content to allow multinational companies and global superpowers to feed our lust for the spoils of capitalism, and drawn us down the path of overproduction and fiscal excess.

These themes have recurred in de Medici's work, revealing her to be an astute political commentator committed to shining a light on hypocrisy and injustice. The centrepiece of the exhibition, *Real Estate* 2012-2013, is an example of her approach. The panorama speaks to the entrenched hostilities between Iran and the United States, which escalated in 1953 with the CIA-endorsed ousting of Iran's democratically elected prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh, who had sought to nationalise his country's oil supplies.³ Friction between the nations has simmered, and sporadically boiled over, ever since. Most recently we have witnessed the US assassination of Iranian commander Major General Qasem Soleimani and the reactive retaliatory response of Iran, which led its armed forces to

