

Wollongong gallery shows the bravery now necessary

By John McDonald

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EXTRACT

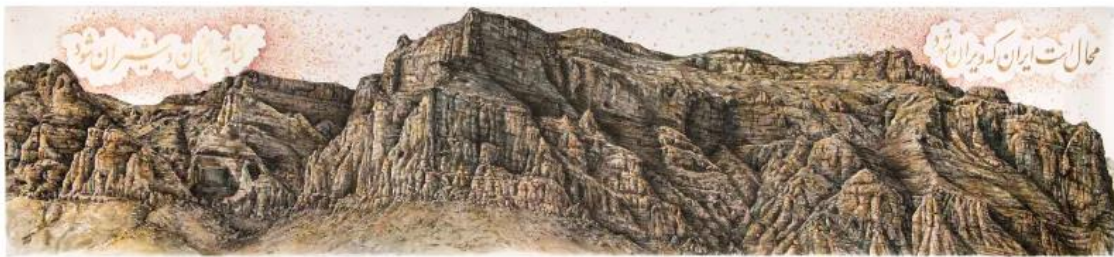
With funds in short supply and the usual movement of artworks curtailed, institutions are depending heavily on permanent collections and small-scale projects.

The Wollongong Art Gallery has suffered the added complication of having to close a show by Anthony Lister two months early, due to the artist's arrest on sexual assault charges.

Nevertheless, echoing Scott Morrison's sage-like proscription during his arts package launch, the gallery has managed "to keep the show on the road" with three separate exhibitions by eX de Medici, Halinka Orszulok and Pamela Griffith.

The most eye-catching display is eX de Medici's *From the Room of Dorian Gray*, featuring large watercolours that explode conventional expectations of the medium. A hundred years ago, an Australian watercolour was a nice bit of bush scenery by JJ Hilder or JW Tristram, but de Medici creates hyperdecorative pictures of deadly weapons, overt political statements, and, in *Real Estate* (2012-13), a panorama of the rocky Shir-Kuh mountain in Iran, complete with a calligraphic inscription from Persia's national epic, the *Shahnameh*.

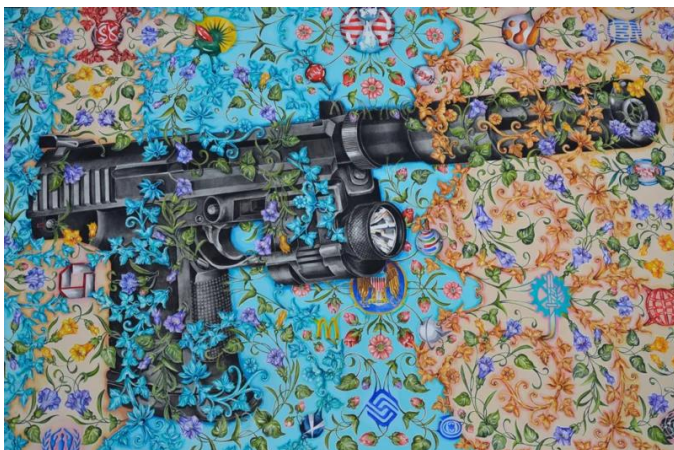
That inscription reads: "Count Persia as a ruin, as the lair of lions and leopards, look now and despair." These are sentiments that might touch anybody who has been to this extraordinary country, so constantly vilified in US propaganda. Surely the Iranians have suffered enough at the hands of their own government without being treated as global pariahs.



eX de Medici's *Real Estate* 2012-2013, water colour and gold leaf on paper. *CREDIT: ROB LITTLE*

Real Estate is a phenomenal feat of perseverance for an artist not known as a landscapist. The motivation remains oblique, but presumably de Medici wants to convey a sense of Iran's antiquity and its stony resilience. Two pictures of guns, *Cleavin' Clint Eastwood* (2014) and *The Law (Heckler and Koch)* (2013-14), are typically obsessive images that satirise the unending appeal of violence for those who consider themselves the guardians of civilisation.

De Medici's guns are fetish objects in which aesthetic appeal is inseparable from their efficiency as killing machines. They are also metaphors for political power that offers visions of freedom backed up with dire threats. They are images that have grown in relevance in recent years as politics, particularly in America, has become more tolerant of extreme and dangerous positions. At the heart of the law, there is always violence, but we're digging a little deeper every day.



eX de Medici's, *The Law (Heckler and Koch)*, 2013-14, watercolour on paper. *CREDIT: ROB LITTLE*