

## ARTS

# Mesmerising moths, weapons and gold

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Sasha Grishin

**EX DE Medici: Double Crossed. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Closes May 30, Tues-Sun 10am-5pm.**

At just a tad over 60, the Canberra-based artist eX de Medici is hot property in the Australian art scene. With significant commissions from the National Gallery of Australia and the National Portrait Gallery and a memorable show at the Drill Hall in 2013, she has not been completely absent from the Canberra art scene, but shows in commercial art galleries in Canberra have been few and far between.

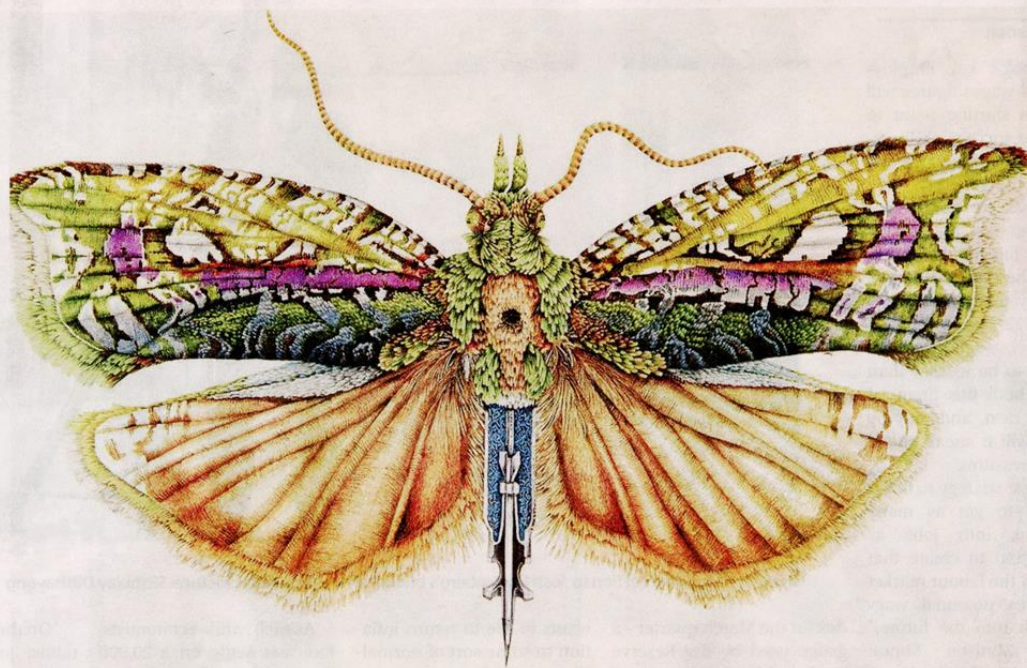
If I recall correctly, her last commercial art gallery exhibition in Canberra was in 2003, the 'Gals with Guns' show at Helen Maxwell's gallery. Some would argue that when an artist commands for her work high prices and has a national and international reputation, she has outgrown the modest size of the Canberra commercial art scene.

The exhibition at the Beaver Galleries has put end to these assumption when her dazzling exhibition of 13 large-scale watercolour and gold leaf drawings (each about 114 by 127 centimetres and priced at \$36,000 per drawing) opened in Canberra. Twelve of the drawings promptly sold in the opening few days and virtually all to local Canberra art collectors.

What's the magic of eX de Medici's art? There is an eccentricity in her choice of subject matter - in the case of this exhibition, microscopic New Guinean moths and guns.

In terms of her technique, there is a mesmerising exactitude of detail (on each drawing there is a notation of the number of hours it has taken her to make it) and painstaking attention to detail, textures, surfaces and vivid colours. Detail has been picked out in gold leaf making the drawings sparkle and appear slightly in relief.

They are convincing to the eye and possess a high degree of tactility. The moths appear as if sitting on the surface of the paper asking us to touch them, while the guns,



A microscopic New Guinean moth.

**They are convincing to the eye and possess a high degree of tactility.**

such as Entangling Ground, are covered by a fluffy and unlikely veneer.

Once we have been seduced by this eye candy, the second part of the artist's strategy is to introduce a disturbing and subversive 'inner content'. It may not be particularly subtle and may not be immediately appar-

ent to those who look at the work or even own it, but it is nevertheless powerfully present. Some of the titles of the moth drawings - Tear Gas, Covid's Eyes, Mustard Cyanide, Flash Bang and VE Gas - all hint at this other reality that lies beyond the immaculate surface. On one of the weapon drawings, Entangling Ground, her friend and fellow artist Wei Rong Wu has provided calligraphic inscriptions that are a Chinese translation of Machiavelli's musings on the threat to good governance from falsehoods and conspiracy theories.

In all of eX de Medici's recent art there is a desire to dazzle the eye and engage the intellect. In her philosophy, in all of humankind

as well as the natural and the built world there is a struggle going on between those who have succumbed to greed, violence and avarice and those struggling to maintain the dignity of life, to save the planet from destruction and who have devoted their lives to resist violence and all forms of coercion.

*Double crossed* is an exhibition of illuminated visual parables where beyond the glittering facade there lies a profound reality. Once each individual drawing has been entered by the intellect, a challenging world is encountered where our assumptions about global security and endless economic prosperity appear as illusory as the flapping wings of these tiny moths.