

## Visual Arts

### Stations of The Heart

Written by Scott-Patrick Mitchell

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Galerie Dusseldorf have a double whammy of art happening this December, with some truly amazing work on display. Both Kim Stanley Medlen and Janis Nedela present solo exhibitions brimming with stunning work and queer content.

First off is the work of Medlen, who uses jewellery to explore issues surrounding HIV/AIDS and the gay male body. Here, in HAART, Medlen creates beautiful sculptures of human hearts embellished with pearls and gold detailing.

The word 'fag' and 'poof' along with the names of HIV medicine like AZT adorn the works in gold cursive writing. The overall effect is an opulent affront.

'As a gay man who has been HIV positive more than 25 years it intrigues me how many in society feel it necessary to stigmatise those who are open with their homosexuality and how this stigmatisation was compounded with the onset of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s,' Medlen said of the heart and soul driving his current exhibition.

'In the exhibition HAART, I explore the lives of men in the gay community in a contemporary context where highly-active antiretroviral treatment (HAART) has given much hope for those who are HIV positive. The sculptural works in this exhibition reveal the social impacts and responses of those living long-term with HIV, along with the collateral effects upon gay men who are HIV negative.

'My primary interests and the concept/s behind the HAART exhibition relate to gay men who are HIV positive and the many issues that these men have to deal with on a daily basis.'

The works in effect become a metaphor of how masquerading leads to coping. They are exquisite and excessive, a detailed history of how body image is used to hide status and how a stigmatisation reinforces this, creating a vicious cycle of self image.

In Nedela's exhibition it's the work of Sarah Waters which comes into examination. The 53 Stations of the Nightwatch is a masterful play on Ando Hiroshige's The 53 Stations of The Tokaido Road and incorporates found objects into actual, physical copies of Water's book. But why Waters? Happy coincidence it seems.

'I wanted to produce a work that consisted of 100 hard covered books,' Nedela said of the process behind his exhibition. 'The books would then be cut and pasted and act as a shrine to small found objects that would sit both within and on the book cover itself.

'We knew that it was going to be an expensive exercise and decided to do an internet search looking for a hardcover book that was cheap and plentiful. This is where the novel, The Night Watch showed up, selling between US \$1 – US \$15 plus postage.'

Nedela began ordering the book in. Halfway through a different version began to appear, leading to a second section of the exhibition emerging. In the process, an appreciation for the lesbian author began to emerge.

'I don't know if I am a fan of Sarah Waters yet,' Nedela confessed. 'Until this project I had never read one of her novels. It never clicked until we received the first book that Waters was the same person who wrote Tipping the Velvet, which I saw on television and that she had been short listed for the Man Booker and Orange Prizes.

'I did not go out deliberately to look for a gay book. It just so happened that the choice was a happy accident, particularly because the other exhibition showing at Galerie Dusseldorf by Kim Stanley Medlen is directly related to gay issues, although I did not know that at the time. I see myself as a gay man who is an artist and not as a gay artist.'

The end result is a selection of 'stations' where found objects combine to create a meaning of their own, magnifying nuances of the original text to create their own story.

Together, both these exhibitions explore the sometime subtleties of just trying to exist, an existence shaped by factors and coincidences beyond one's control. Sexuality plays a part, yes, but it's the more important strengths of being an individual and finding your own voice which shines through here.

*HAART and The 53 Stations of the Nightwatch appear at Galerie Dusseldorf on Glyde Street until December 20. [www.galeriedusseldorf.com.au](http://www.galeriedusseldorf.com.au)*

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