

## VISUAL ARTS

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# Language of the heart

A lushly provocative exhibition raises some deep issues about living with HIV/AIDS

**K**im Stanley Medlen's *Haart*, currently running at Galerie Dusseldorf, is a lush show full of gloss, bling and sumptuous red and white wall pieces laden with gold.

The title works on a double meaning, *Haart* being the acronym for "highly active antiretroviral treatment", the drug combination most commonly prescribed for HIV, but in Medlen's work it also takes on a symbolic form referencing the inner body's workings.

Medlen's first solo, an exhibition based on HIV/AIDS and its association with body image, is a clean but far from sterile affair. Rage underpins quite beautiful works while the association of the text and object components of the wall works makes for biting analogy.

But it's the use of material that gets closest to the core of Medlen's work; slick automotive paint covers balsa wood and 22 and 23-carat gold covers copper. This is about putting the best facade on and here Medlen references body building and surgery as it used by HIV-positive gay men to allay stigmatisation.

Words and symbols are also to be found across the works, some derogatory slang, others listing the drugs, like D4T and 3TC, associated with this illness. Medlen's *Haart* collides all the public notions of the gay community and throws it all at us, coated in a beautiful sugary finish that leaves you thinking of the real physical impact both internally and externally of living with HIV/AIDS today. A skilled technician, the artist ventures into subtle territory and asks some serious questions of our collective expectations and perceptions.

Also at Galerie Dusseldorf, Janis Nedela has taken Sarah Waters' novel *The Night Watch* and created a series of 53 stations, each with particular reference to the book through objects related to a moment or character. The result is 53 *Stations of the Night Watch*, a tableau of cut and pasted books, each book in essence a small grotto, or shrine, if you like, to small found objects too numerous to mention which sit both within and on the book cover.

The novel has a few discernible characteristics; it is narrated backwards through time, it interlocks five people in a sometimes scandalous lesbian story and it is set after and during World War II. Regardless of knowing the story, the



Behind the facade: Kim Stanley Medlen's *Fag* from his solo exhibition *Haart*.

series of stations works; it is humorous and wry but also personal and intimate at a perusal level. The associations are for you to make and the outcome is probably secondary to the process that Nedela has undertaken in procuring 84 copies of *Night Watch* (there are 31 studies as well) and collecting this myriad of objects and knick-knacks.

The inter-textual interplay of 53 *Stations of the Night Watch* is continued in Nedela's large suite of simulated documents. Thirty mixed media works hang three high, all of which combine material, pages from books and a variety of ways of concealing the text by rubbing, scratching or blocking out. This is a playful exhibition.

But underlying the enjoyment of process is a considered approach to how we read text and associate meaning.

**Kim Stanley Medlen and Janis Nedela are showing at Galerie Dusseldorf until December 13.**

I recommend taking a look at *Built*, an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia principally formed



Novel approach: Janis Nedela's 53 *Stations of the Night Watch*, *Studies and Documents* is based on Sarah Waters' novel *The Night Watch*.



Imposing: Callum Morton's *Monument #23: Slump*.

around two works — Narelle Jubelin's elegant *Soft Shoulder* and the gallery's recent acquisition, Callum Morton's *Monument #23 Slump*.

Morton's work is a theatrical version of Richard Serra's steel giants. A rigger was killed attempting to install a Serra sculpture in the early 1970s. Morton's wall leans precariously over, hinting that it might collapse on you, but is held up by sandbagged supports. It's an imposing piece and its painted construction reminded me of Serra's

*Tilted Arc* sitting within the blocked architecture of Federal Plaza in New York before it was removed after an infamous court case in the 1980s.

As can be seen in this and the other works in the show — particularly the photography — other signifiers of our recent history are brought to bear through a modernist attitude which is more cynical and watchful and incorporates aesthetic symmetry and strength into notions of order and collapse.

Kate MacMillan's series of photographs of clean and ordered Japanese temporary dwellings around Ueno Park and Ueno train station in Tokyo illustrates this well, as do the impressive photos of Lucas Jodogne.

His *Bodiless Dragon* series, shot around Singapore, captures beautifully the underlying tension in this interesting show of the built environment as it converses with what we may consider un-built (or un-done).

Built can mean plenty of things, and indeed all artworks are built.

But if built means the production of contained meaning, then Jodogne's work, *Bishan Junction 8*, is the standout piece in the show for me.

This is a large photo of the end of the development line in Singapore.

The road ends where simulation begins and a fake animal farm integrates countryside and city — this is beyond surreal, this actually makes everything make complete sense.

**Built is at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.**