



## BEHIND THE CAMOUFLAGE **BELINDA FOX**

**It is no wonder that in 2007 Belinda Fox** found inspiration in the layers of camouflage that both reveal and conceal our world in conflict. Once again it has been a year when states both large and small have seemed impelled to violate the human rights of others. The image of a battered Burmese monk floating lifeless in dirty water, circulating in the press in early October, seems to have been foreseen by Belinda's dark but hopeful works on paper and prints produced in the past three years. The ghastly sight of this bloated port wine and orange mottled holy man surrounded by plant life is a jarring illustration of both inhumanity and human spirit — an example of one who died for his beliefs — fostering an enduring hope in others and possibly change for the better.

Loose parallels can be made between the camouflaging of cultural symbols inherent within Indigenous Australian dot work and the hidden nature of the religious and cultural symbols inscribed on the camouflaged figures within Belinda's work. Frank Hinder produced a tank covering called a 'spider' during World War II, Sidney Nolan depicted camouflaged animals in PVA, and William Dobell designed fake cows as camouflage for airstrips, recently appropriated by John Kelly. Ian Howard internationalised his depictions of war machinery through his camouflage collaborations with Xing Jin Quin in 2005 at Waters Gallery.

In linking Belinda's imagery with camouflage, I instinctively thought of Gordon Bennett's camouflaged portraits of Saddam Hussein (c.2003), which speak of duplicity in international politics. The former

Iraqi regime's ubiquitous propaganda imagery, seen through a pop art lens, highlights the masked reasons for US aggression and, by extension, the xenophobic attitude of Australia. The works are stark, overt mirrors of reality. However, Belinda's botanically influenced, camouflage depictions also have a visual affinity with eX de Medici's bullet moths, flowers and intricately painted monikers of death. They hijack the viewer with a technical virtuosity and enveloping beauty to deliver a violent payload. This form of camouflage is akin to that used by plants and animals to protect their progeny.

In 2005 Belinda Fox decided to concentrate full time on art. Since then she has held two Sydney exhibitions: *Balancing Act* (2006) and *Camouflage* (2007). The exhibitions reveal stunningly beautiful, unique work, on a large scale with unifying themes. Since 2005 she has imagined the foundations of war and hope through the symbols of the Bodhi tree, lotus flowers, weapons, games, and children. Images of children in Tiananmen Square are particularly powerful: *Lie Low* and *Pull Me Up II* connect memories of childhood frivolity and innocence that featured heavily in the 2006 exhibition with the internationally known site of bloody protest and political unrest, the personal constantly entwined with the political. Belinda's imagery has commonly included mud-rooted plants producing floral depictions of the divine, faceless figures hidden by overprinting, complex watercolour patterning inscribed on the body like bruising, and blood-like drips floating in complex backgrounds of natural hued foliage or picturesque mountainous settings.





Belinda Fox *Lie Low* 2007  
drawing and painting on paper, 150 x 120 cm



Belinda Fox *Ruse II* 2007  
painting, drawing and cut-out on paper, 150 x 120 cm

Belinda Fox is an inveterate traveller. In 2006 she received an Australia Council for the Arts and Ian Potter Cultural Trust Grant that allowed her to spend one month studying in China and Tibet followed by a further month-long residency at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute. Within her studio there are numerous photographs and drawings of Mt. Kailas in west Tibet. Her wall pieces conjure up the violence and beauty, art and artifice of the eastern cultures she visits. One discovers images of the life and politics of Afghanistan, China, and Tibet as reflected in their carpets, scrolls and iconic landscapes. The fecund flourish of humanity in all its ignorance, beauty and diabolical violence is appropriated, enlarged, and displayed by the artist as an offering of hope.

Within the 2007 Sydney exhibition traditional symbols of hope like lotus flowers are camouflaged in a colourful Warholesque manipulation of the natural. Warhol's use of camouflage is appropriated here not to adorn celebrity but rather as a stark reminder of those who need to hide. The titles of Belinda's works — *Gone to Ground*, *Take it Back* and *Lie Low* — sum up her advice to the powerless.

In 2007 Belinda's art practice has not remained camouflaged; in fact she has retained a high degree of public visibility. Early in the year she undertook a Hunter Island Press residency in Hobart and participated in the CAST touring exhibition *This Is Not A Print Show*, curated by Dr Karen Lunn and Milan Milojevic; she won the Burnie Print Prize; her work was acquired by the Gold Coast City Gallery, Art Bank, and the National Gallery of Australia; she was commissioned by the Crown Casino Macau, and selected for numerous awards.

Belinda's huge watercolour and unique printmaking are this year joined by MDF constructions or screens — happily still using printmaking techniques — that contain stylised helicopters and bombs, appropriated from contemporary Persian war rugs. Now artist-in-residence at the Fremantle Art Centre, she is currently producing an installation entitled *Backwards/Forwards*.

**Thomas A. Middlemost**, Art Curator, Charles Sturt University Art Collection, NSW, and PhD candidate at the Australian National University, researching Australian monotypes

*Belinda Fox graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1996 and finished a Grad. Dip. in Education at Melbourne University in 1999, worked as a printmaker at Port Jackson Press from 1999-2005, won the 2004 Silk Cut award for linocut prints, and is represented by Art House Gallery, Sydney; Christine Abrahams, Melbourne; and Beaver Galleries, Canberra.*

*Belinda Fox was a Print Council commissioned artist in 2002.*

For more information about the artist go to:  
**[www.belindafox.com.au](http://www.belindafox.com.au)**

Belinda Fox's installation *Backwards/Forwards* will be shown at the Fremantle Arts Centre, WA, from 8 December 2007 – 20 January 2008.

Recent works by Belinda Fox can be seen in a group exhibition, *A view from here*, with Phil Hunter, Sue Lovegrove, Guy Maestri and Richard Wastell at Christine Abrahams Gallery in Melbourne from 12 February to 1 March 2008.