

STEPHEN WIRTZ GALLERY

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MELANIE PULLEN
VIOLENT TIMES

March 5-April 25, 2009
Reception for the artist, Thursday, March 5, 2009, 5:30-7:30 PM

Stephen Wirtz Gallery
49 Geary St., 3rd Fl., San Francisco, CA 94108
(415) 433-6879 tel. (415) 433-1608 fax
www.wirtzgallery.com
Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday, 9:30-5:30, Saturday 10:30-5:30.



The Jumping Soldiers, #1 (American Revolution), 2007. Dimensions: 60.5" (H) X 120.5" (W) Transparency in Lightbox, Edition of 3

Stephen Wirtz Gallery presents an installation of Melanie Pullen's photographic series *Violent Times*. Comprised of large-scale lightboxes and photographic prints, the exhibition explores the depiction of war beginning with the fantasy and glamour of historic painting, progressing toward the reality conveyed in modern photography. Pullen says, "In *Violent Times*, I dramatized the aesthetics of early portraiture and battle imagery, creating an extensive series that questions our perceptions and our ingrained desire to glamorize violence."

The historic use of imagery, style, and presentation has been modernized in *Violent Times*, with the use of saturated films, special lighting techniques, digital processes and modern printing methods. The effect is a highly stylized and cinematic representation of war that questions the accuracy and reliability of the mass media both current and historic.

The research was done partially in conjunction with the Smithsonian Institute's archives to construct a foundation of historic photographs and paintings for reference. Using this and other research, Pullen precisely recreated historic battle scenes, fashioned imaginary scenes, and finally worked with actual biochemical warfare weapons in a laboratory to produce this series.

Wirtz Gallery's presentation of *Violent Times* consists of two separate elements: the first and most complex is the elaborate set of life-size soldier portraits that span centuries. These portraits took over three years to create due to the great attention to detail in the costuming and production. They are Pullen's modern version of the stiffly posed photographs of soldiers who fought in the civil war and paintings of soldiers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She cast over one-hundred male fashion models to pose for both the

soldier portraits and the battle scenes. The use of models for painting battle scenes was employed for hundreds of years to glamorize war.

The second portion of the series is comprised of sixteen backlit life-size photographs portraying soldiers acting out their combat poses. These images individually emphasize the glorified figures and bring the stiffly posed soldiers to life, playing up the unimaginable drama that is war. The C-print portion of the series consists of twenty staged battle scenes. Pullen gathered tanks, helicopters, closed down streets in Los Angeles, and for one of the most important images in this portion of the series she worked for six months with the help of a major movie studio to build large sections of the city of Berlin. The post-production on these included several hundred hours of both painting the film by hand and digital manipulation to give them the illusion of timelessness.

Pullen's earlier photographic series *High Fashion Crimes Scenes*, which she worked on for over ten years and exhibited internationally, consists of large-scale color photographs of recreated crime scene images in which she outfitted the "victims" in haute couture. *High Fashion Crime Scenes* was published in late 2005 by Nazraeli Press and is available in bookstores worldwide.

Melanie Pullen was born in New York City in 1975. She is self-taught and was raised in a family of photojournalists, publishers and artists. Currently she lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

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