

MAT COLLISHAW
Vitacide

January 12 - February 18, 2012
Gallery Two

For immediate release

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery is pleased to present the sixth solo exhibition of work by British artist Mat Collishaw. Collishaw creates sculpture, installation and photo-based works that confront issues of moral ambiguity with formally stunning and alluring imagery, and often re-contextualize the impact of more disturbing or sinister subject matter. Mining the fertile ground between seduction and repulsion, reality and artifice, the works captivate the viewer with their compelling incorporation of beauty and horror in equal measure.

A Gothic style is reflected more in the subject matter than in the actual presentation, as the artist seeks to embody elements of this tradition in a contemporary context. Collishaw's work often provokes an emotional reaction, simultaneously induced by fear and wonder. Upon further contemplation however, the viewer encounters ideas that underlie both the immediate beauty and the initial darkness - additional layers that provide a depth of understanding and elevate our emotional connection to the work.

Last Meal on Death Row, Texas, a photographic still life series in dramatic Baroque lighting, depicts the last meals requested by Texas inmates on death row. Based on 17th century Dutch still life paintings, or "nature morte" works, these humble photographs in simple wood frames elicit profound human connections. Sad vignettes presented with dignity, they present a cruel irony - meals offered as sustenance at the moment of extinction. Within each of these memorials for the incarcerated, we glimpse, without judgment, the man within the monster.

These thirteen photographs are arranged near *The Corporeal Audit*, a sculpture in negative relief depicting the deceased body of Christ. A horizontal rod of light placed behind the work, which is based on a Renaissance sculpture, vertically traverses and illuminates its shallow image to create a spectrally enlivening effect. The light, moving in a cold, mechanical manner like an MRI or CAT scan, provides an odd contrast to Christ's luminous being, which seems to drift between heaven and earth.

In addition to art historical references, Collishaw's work also refers to literature - J.G. Ballard, Jean Genet, and J.K. Huysmans are among the influences at play here. In the main gallery, eight resin sculptures entitled *The Venal Muses*, pay tribute to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, 1857, a book of poetry focused on the themes of decadence and eroticism. The flowers appear to be genetically altered, the delicate petals infected with human scars and sores. Housed in antique-style vitrines, the collection resembles a cabinet of curiosities, the contents of which are both viscerally provocative and transcendent. These works display the dark side of humanity, presenting an interest in the corruption of nature without being critical of it. Like Huysmans' *Against Nature*, Collishaw's flower works are reflections of the depraved state of self and society, exacerbated by our modern, media-saturated culture. As the venal nature of the mainstream media is engineered to entice with fear, the artist also incites our polar attractions to beauty and corruption.

The *Gomoria* video sculpture, which also employs flowers, incorporates six LED monitors housed in an 18th century Gothic church altarpiece. The piece evokes beautiful images in a theatrical setting, turning the gallery into a chapel - and with *The Venal Muses*, a nod to Grünewald's *Ienbeim Altarpiece*. Images depicting the cycle of life and death offer symbolism within the abominations of nature. The ecclesiastic origins of the shrine and the apocalyptic interests of the Gothic style question the traditional idea that nature was created to be beautiful.

Lastly, Collishaw's ongoing *Insecticide* series of crushed insects documents the metamorphosis of a 3-dimensional being into a 2-dimensional image, while reminding us of our own vulnerability. Although the artist uses digital photographic means, the works were inspired by Victorian magic lantern slides, which were designed to kindle and capture the imagination. Velvety bodies and delicate wings display a world of rich, lucid colors, evoking the opulent, detailed embroidery of Elizabethan portrait paintings. Dust of disintegration against rich, black backgrounds transforms the bodily powder into celestial scenes of great beauty and awe, as if offering a glimpse into the infinite nature of the universe. An image of death and destruction is preserved here as an elegant keepsake.

Mat Collishaw's work was recently exhibited in the 12th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, curated by Adriano Pedrosa and Jens Hoffmann, 2011 (group), as well as *Magic Lantern*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2010-11 (solo exhibition); *Otherworldly: Optical Delusions and Small Realities*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York, 2011 (group); *Phantoms Shadows and Phenomena*, Kennedy Museum of Art, Ohio State University, Athens, Ohio, 2011 (group); *La Forêt de mon rêve*, Galerie d'Art du Conseil Général de Bouches-du-Rhône, Aix-en-Provence, France (2011) and *Retrospectre*, a special installation at the British Film Institute, Southbank, London (2010). His work can currently be seen in *Memories of the future*, at The Olbricht Collection, Paris.