

ROBILANT+VOENA

Exhibition
The Gilded Desert (And Other Allegories of the Beau-Monde)
New Drawings by Adam Dant

Conceived in collaboration with Carolyn Miner

Robilant+Voena
5th-14th September, 2018
Monday to Friday, 10am to 6pm

38 Dover Street
London W1S 4NL

LONDON - The luxurious, refined environment of the wealthy and well-capitalised provide the setting for Adam Dant's new large sepia ink drawings.

"*The Gilded Desert*" was a phrase coined by the designer May Morris to describe the newly gentrified environs of London's Chelsea. Returning to an area once lush with bohemian creativity, she found nothing more than a chic backdrop to the lives of the very comfortably well-off - much as it is today. Dant's drawings find an oasis of satire in such deserts.

Places familiar to members of the *beau-monde*, such as Saint Tropez, St Moritz and St James's are visually recreated according to the perennial cliches, oft-spoken by concerned outsiders when passing comment on money and privilege. The timeless fascination, envy, horror, opprobrium and even "codified moralising" generated by the very idea of excessive wealth underpin Dant's densely considered and highly amusing depictions of the subject.

In the drawing "Claridge's: Pianos," the *ne plus ultra* of London's luxury hotels is seen sitting atop a mountain peak as various figures struggle to lift pianos up its steep path. The scene refers both stylistically and conceptually to the print tradition of Durer, Brueghel and Frans Floris. It is an allegory of sorts, but one informed by the generalisations of a current, amorphous moral tone, rather than the visual codes of such artistic predecessors. Like the historical allegory's deployment of the ultimately burdensome trappings of wealth, in this case, a piano, the oft-touted desire of the culturally minded millionaire to master the instrument, but only after a mastery of the money markets has been affected, underpins the narrative. The effect of such visual narrative is as ridiculous as the remarks concerning camels, eyes of needles, and money not being able to facilitate the purchase of love.

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In another drawing, “Wolseley, Aviary”, a familiar hub of the refined social scene is assailed by allegory. Inexplicably or capriciously, filled with all manner of bird-life, the exquisite Grand Salon of the restaurant acts as a backdrop for a chorus of imagined twittering and tweeting: *A nest of gossip or a gilded cage?* The wildlife acts as an exotic adornment for the activities of some diners, whilst being a flapping nuisance to others, bringing to mind numerous avian/social allegories. At the extreme end of such analogies is the “*aviary of death*” represented in the 16th century by Giovanni Paolo Cimerlini, where noble ladies and gentlemen are ensnared by a net wielding skeletons. In Dant’s aviary, the moral tone and implied consequences of vain glory and gossip, like that of our own age, are more likely to lead to a surprise peck on the nose than being dragged to hell by a monstrous parrot.

Elsewhere in this recreation of the *haute-monde*, St Moritz is occupied by a massive sperm-whale; the harbour of Saint Tropez is being used for a floating, high end art fair; and Annabel’s Berkeley Square nightclub is excavated by an archaeological dig, in the style of the discovery of Nero’s Golden palace.

The Gilded Desert (And Other Allegories of the Beau-Monde) is conceived in collaboration with Carolyn Miner. This series of new drawings with their dense visual narratives, stylistic and subjective references to certain old master drawings, and their modern-day locations familiar to any self-respecting HNW (high-net-worth), capture a moment in the zeitgeist of the so called “one percent-ers”, and those who observe them, whilst also self-consciously framing said within an obvious art historical context. A group of paintings by Old and Modern Masters are on view in the adjoining gallery to emphasize and animate this context.



PRESS RELEASE

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About the artist:



Adam Dant's monumental narrative ink drawings combine depictions of familiar public spaces and architecture with various mythologies and histories. Dant was appointed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom as the 2015 official artist of the general election. Exhibited internationally, Dant's works are in the collections of the Tate Britain, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Collection of HRH Prince of Wales, Museum of London, the Deutsche Bank, UBS and various other public and private collections. Image courtesy of Dafydd Jones.

For further information please contact the gallery at art@robilantvoena.com or at +44 (0) 207 409 1540.

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