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Arts Review

By Rachel Koper

'Tom Molloy: Lucid'

Lora Reynolds Gallery

through April 25

"Tom Molloy: Lucid" says, "Happy St. Patty's Day, warmongers!"

Tom Molloy is an Irish artist whose political art deals with universal themes but feels quite American. Apparently, our global communications have given us immediate familiarity with certain images. This solo art show appears formally tidy, petite, and well organized. It's nice to see delicate graphite drawings with the potential to give you nightmares. Molloy coaxes his audience to contemplate war, taboos, government service through marriage, and duty via military enlistment. Hard realities are reflected in this art.

The work that has an instant visceral impact is the series of six graphic drawings titled "Lucid." Each drawing uses a touchstone war photograph and a pornographic image in a double-image overlay. They are tiny reminders that sex and violence are a part of life, little pieces of collective visual memory. The first piece is photojournalist Nick Ut's iconic image of a young Vietnamese woman running naked from a napalm bomb combined with an image of some girl-on-girl kissing. It coercively makes the viewer choose a side: Either you squint and see the porn or squint and see the violence. Which do you prefer? Which is more taboo? With his appropriated images, Molloy asks, "How jaded are you?" Along with sexy images that feel unspecific, I recognize more Vietnam, "Tank Man" at Tiananmen Square, and Abu Ghraib. I've read that most Chinese haven't seen Jeff Widener's photo of a man standing in front of tanks; it's a Western news image. The use of these arresting images could be part of Molloy having grown up in Ireland, which had its share of conflicts and pipe bombs in the Seventies and Eighties. Irish artists dealing with issues of violence and human rights look a lot like American artists working with the same themes.

A nimble and versatile artist, Molloy appropriates Warhol's Brillo Pad art in one work. He's cut out his watercolor re-creations of the boxes, framed them nicely, and piled them on the gallery floor. As you try not to kick the art, you are led physically: "Don't get on that soapbox."

A more poignant piece is *Whistleblower*, which includes a transcription of the (fairly confused) speech by the military man who went public with the torture at Abu Ghraib. Molloy gave a gallery talk in which he pointed out that the Abu Ghraib photos and stories are 21st century as opposed to 20th century.

His embroidered portrait of Michelle Obama is also new. In his talk about the series "Behind Every Great Man," which features embroidered portraits of the wives of the 44 American presidents, Molloy said that he was imagining all of the presidents whispering war secrets into their wives' ears and how odd that would be to talk war over breakfast. He said he chose the series to be embroidered as a reference to feminism. In an attempt at irony, he hired a female artist friend of his to sew them. She insisted on being paid minimum wage.

Arts Reviews (do these metas for each performance)