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TODAY'S ART FROM TOMORROW'S WORLD



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HONG KONG

Sally Smart: The Exquisite Pirate

AMELIA JOHNSON CONTEMPORARY

CHANDAN DUBEY

Women's issues have long informed the work of Australian artist Sally Smart. Best known for her layered, large-scale collages, Smart, in her ongoing series "The Exquisite Pirate" (2004-), takes on the lost history of female pirates. Along the way, she addresses contemporary themes of gender, migration and the resultant cultural hybridity. Explaining the origin of the series several years ago, Smart wrote: "The project initiated from a simple question 'were there any women pirates'? Parallel to this was the seemingly huge growth in popular culture imagery connected to pirates in the media as relating to cyberspace activities."

Symbolic of the world-shaping events of migration and colonialism, Smart's



SALLY SMART — *The Exquisite Pirate (Red/Black/Flag)* (2007) Synthetic polymer paint ink and foil on canvas with collage elements, 188 x 132 cm. Courtesy Amelia Johnson Contemporary, Hong Kong.

as part of the thematic series thus far.

Nonetheless, the work resonates with visions of the hours Smart spent detailing, stitching and harmonizing different elements to create her work. "My use of materials is integral to the conceptual unfolding of my work, the process of cutting, collage, photo-montage, staining, sewing and stitching—and their association with women's practices—are refined and reassessed in the context of each installation," Smart told *ArtAsiaPacific*.

Also on show were collages on canvas presenting pirates resembling those in illustrations for children's books. Standard pirate paraphernalia such as flags, skull and crossbones, sun-bleached skeletons and parrots were cleverly woven together with broom handles, belt buckles, lace and polka-dotted skirts in a medley of disembodied limbs, faces and breasts cut from pornographic and glamour magazines.

Smart's work draws heavily on novelist Kathy Acker's book *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, in which the American author uses female pirates as a metaphor to explore feminine issues and sexuality, at the same time challenging the historic perception of piracy as a male domain. Ultimately, the works Smart exhibited in Hong Kong provided only a glimpse into the dynamism and complexity of her series. ■