

TRISH CLARK GALLERY PRESS RELEASE:

For Immediate Release

HEATHER STRAKA| *Somebodies Eyes*

Exhibition 1 April – 15 May 2015

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Trish Clark Gallery is delighted to present Heather Straka's first major exhibition in Auckland in some years. With a practice spanning two decades, Straka's insightful explorations into perceptions of socio-political and cultural lives have created a significant body of compelling and controversial work. Straka deftly questions tradition, challenges the politically correct, and subverts expectations.

The foundation of her exhibition at Trish Clark Gallery is a suite of 21 new portraits from the back that play upon military tropes to present the truth of the vulnerable human components at the center of every war machine. This series, *Somebodies Eyes*, brings together a group of anonymous and androgynous individuals, united by generic military dress. The way that uniforms attempt to render diverse subjects as uniform themselves is betrayed by the clusters of bull clips, duct tape and pins we see at the subjects' backs as the same large jacket is adapted to each figure.

These new works are accompanied by a re-installation of Straka's epic *The Asian* project from 2009. Inspired by ephemera discovered during her Frances Hodgkins residency at the Hocken Library in Otago, Straka created a body of oil paintings that respond to cross continental exchanges of culture and commerce, as well as the recurrent xenophobia that accompanies popular discourse around Chinese immigration to New Zealand. Rooted in the poll tax and 'Yellow Peril' of the late 19th century and reborn on Winston Peters' 'Asian Invasion' speech of 1996, this cultural anxiety persists in a new explosion of news stories aimed at generating controversy around the issue of Chinese property ownership in New Zealand.

Revisiting the iconic figure of the 'Shanghai girl,' a stylized woman used on advertising posters that sold Western products in China, Straka created a body of paintings that play upon the contemporary exchange of goods between New Zealand and China. Bounding out of this series, *The Asian* is a body of work executed in collaboration with a team of copy artists in Dafen, a village whose industry is based heavily in the manual reproduction of old masters. Located in Shenzhen, the locus of China's counterfeiting industry, Dafen's artists made unique works copied from digital images of Straka's painting, itself a copy of a historic poster. Straka's brilliant conceptual conceit is to present her own painting integrated into the series of replicas, effacing the

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hierarchical relationship of 'original' to 'copy.' Posing provocative questions about production, copyright protection, progress and the intricacies of the globalised subject, a section of this 51-piece work is presented on the walls of Trish Clark Gallery, while the remaining canvases are seen in their crates.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND QUERIES
PLEASE CONTACT THE GALLERY

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