



**Dawn Mellor**  
*The Conspirators*

Galerie Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam  
10 April – 15 May

Like fellow painters John Currin, Lisa Yuskavage and Don Doe, London-based Dawn Mellor has a penchant for representing the figure in extreme and provocative situations. Mellor, however, goes for the jugular and tears apart flesh in a violent, disturbing fashion more akin to some strains of punk rock, such as the band the Misfits; the horror novels of fellow Briton Clive Barker; or much of Francis Bacon's output. For her first solo presentation in Amsterdam, she depicts female actresses from film stills in extreme states of disfigurement or with violent alterations. As in her ongoing *Vile Affections* series (1998–), where Mellor takes both popular and political icons (including Mother Teresa) and subjects them to all sorts of nasty interventions, here she uses black humour and satire like a graffiti artist who is willing to transform public figures into public property ripe for tagging.

In a show installed quite sparingly to make the imagery more jarring, it's hard not to laugh at over-the-top depictions such as *Laura Dern* (all works 2010), the image sourced from David Lynch's 1986 movie *Blue Velvet*, with a bloody eyeball dangling from the actress's eye socket. Some works go beyond mere shock value, though, such as *Hanna Schygulla*, based on a still from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979). Here Mellor portrays a severely beaten Schygulla with a swollen eye and bloody lip. On top of this disfigured visage, she uses marker pen to write a list of things to attend to in her daily life, as if the canvas is a Post-it note on a refrigerator. Phrases such as 'cancel flight' and 'send CV' float on top of Schygulla's face, questioning the power these actresses have on an audience and why they are so revered. Clearly Mellor gives her subjects little or no respect, and if painted by a male artist these works would probably cause a ruckus.

Mellor straddles the line between realism and a slightly cartoony style, forming her figures with loose brushstrokes and unfussy rendering to mixed result. Not all of the works measure up equally in terms of their execution, but some are homeruns, such as

*Mia Farrow in a view* adapted from Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), Farrow's distant gaze and blood-spattered body relating to Polanski's own wife, the actress Sharon Tate, who was murdered by Charles Manson's followers in 1969. The lyrics to the 1982 Laura Branigan song *Gloria* are written on top of Farrow's chest in marker pen, with lines like 'I think you're headed for a breakdown' having particular resonance in relation to the nightmarish plot of the film. Here and elsewhere, whether Mellor herself gets off on the savage manner with which she treats her subjects while revelling in the power of being an artist or is challenging the viewer to think about her theme in a new way by making a statement about women, society and fame is unclear. If anything, it seems like a combination of both. *Chris Bors*