

ARCANA IN SATIN PAJAMAS:
A RICHARD ORJIS LEXICON

Written by Tessa Laird

So Give Me The Night at Papakura Art Gallery in 2012 was significant for being the first survey of Richard Orjis's work, exhibiting a selection of photographs and drawings from the past six years. This show performed the same function as Orjis's spectacular monograph *Park*, also released in 2012, and both publication and exhibition enfolded innumerable narratives. Bifurcations of thought, motif and media make up this protean practice, but somehow they all share the logic of a particular sensibility – an *Orjis* sensibility. Jumping from candle encrusted barbells, to triangular swatches of the Milky Way, to a field of blooming weeds, all seems perfectly *natural* (a very charged word for Orjis, as we shall see).

The survey show played a different role to *Park*, saying more with less, but nevertheless encoding eclectic messages via the constant refrain of certain themes, including the natural and the artificial, sexuality, beauty and mortality. These seemingly oppositional concepts are intertwined like rapacious vines in Orjis's practice, and he returns to them like a hummingbird to a flower.

So here is a first attempt at a Richard Orjis lexicon – a record of some of the images and ideas that pop up with the regularity of spring bulbs in his complex and varied oeuvre.

— BLING

Jewels, like Orjis's visual lexicon, are multi-faceted. In *Bed In* (2010) two tinsel-n-foil bots sit bolt upright in bed, swathed in Swarovski, dripping with diamonds. *Hope It's Not Too Late* (2010) features a bot made of the golden links of watch straps (Rolex, of course), expiring in a field of amethyst irises; costume jewellery by Chanel or Versace.

These are not the dusty heirlooms of a fading aristocracy, they are sharp and shiny blood diamonds dug up in war-torn Africa and worn on the gleaming grills of American rappers. They are the chintzy baubles of legions of new Russian millionaires. They are synthetic gems, made in the hyper-sterile environment of the lab rather than the bowels of the earth. They are the piercing, glistening light of Captial, of 'success', exemplified by excess. They are beauty at its most cruel and merciless. See also GOLD and SHEEN.

