

Art: Preview

Dawn Mellor

Victoria Miro East End

Casting herself in the role of Madame X – ‘a vulgar, profane woman enthralled by American celebrities’ – Dawn Mellor gives herself permission to do her worst to vainglorious stars of stage and screen such as Britney, Jennifer Aniston and Gwyneth Paltrow – the blonder and more anodyne the better. But in these awkward paintings, she is neither vulgar nor profane enough. Instead of a paintbrush wielding psychopath, she comes across as an idle fan. It’s partly to do with the poses; most are instantly recognisable from publicity shots. Mellor hasn’t manhandled her celebs into the far reaches of her imagination and, despite bizarre additions – a grizzly bear nestles up to Courtney Love, Madonna has bone-gnawing dogs at her feet – their dignity remains intact.

Only in a painting of Nicole Kidman does she go beyond mere collage. Her back towards us, head held high and wearing a plunging gold evening gown, Kidman looks every inch the première-attending film star. In her right hand, however, she clasps a jewelled sword, while her left



holds by the hair the severed head of ex-hubby, Tom Cruise. To the delight of awaiting rats, blood trickles from his neck. It’s a gruesome and funny image, far closer in spirit to her earlier, more macabre paintings. Otherwise Mellor seems content simply to point out the ridiculousness of A-list celebrities. Do we really need an artist to do that for us? *Martin Coomer*