

# FlashArt

## BONNIE CAMPLIN

“Bonnie Camplin is a musician, artist, DJ and club organizer from London,” reads a short blurb accompanying Camplin’s first solo LP from 2005. Titled *Heavy Epic*, with its broken sounds at times melancholic, melodic, neurotic, ironic or distressing, it recalls the experience of walking through “SAS” — her first U.S. solo show at L.A.’s Michael Benevento gallery.



BONNIE CAMPLIN, *Keeping Warm*, 2009.  
Watercolour and gouache, 44 x 35 cm.  
Courtesy Michael Benevento, Los Angeles

“SAS,” as Camplin explains, is titled after an old survival handbook written by a special air serviceman from the British Army. Camplin, who grew up in the shadow of M.A.D., the Mutual Assured Destruction doctrine with which her dad was preoccupied, is now sourcing from that booklet themes of survival strategy to investigate her selfhood and her core fears. Like the electronic sounds in her music album, this show is infused with an uncanny feeling. Eight small watercolors — each realized in a different style as if made by a different hand — reveal images of epic nature and mythological subjects, each conveying subtle irony and an awkward spirit of discomfort. Although the narrative flow linking them is broken, syncopated, there’s a clear red thread connecting them. *All You Will Need*, *Le Shelter*, *Rules for Traps* and *Finding Food* all illustrate what their titles suggest: they describe Camplin’s interpretation of several survival situations. In the sound piece *Get me a Mirror* on the LP, a creepy voice from nowhere gives instructions: “Keep calm / Try to avoid as much movement as possible / Stay inside/ Stay close to wall / Make sure you understand what you need to do in an emergency...” This sense of paralysis, almost agoraphobic, is the central vein of the show, established in the sequence of watercolors and heightened in a separate room with a survival kit relic under a glass box and a large graphite drawing of a daily scene — a woman leaning over cherries at a fruit shop while two Victorian figures hug in the background (a motif shared by the watercolor *All You Will Need*.) The show is compelling without being overwhelming. It instills a desire to interpret the evidence, as if a hidden message is waiting to be revealed.