

# Catarina Leitão

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Born in Stuttgart, Germany, 1970, raised in Portugal. Lives and works in New York.

Catarina Leitão has devised her own conceptual catalogue of fictional products for braving the dangers that ostensibly lurk outside. *Survival Systems, Urban Action Catalogue* (2003) is a series of large-scale watercolors that advertise products like the AKA X99 PROMASK, which “embodies the highest levels of efficiency and comfort in modern nbc protection,” for a mere \$199.99, and the Survival Pack, which “can accept removable pockets for the Rifleman, Pistol, Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) Gunner, and Grenadier configurations,” only \$159.99 with instruction booklet. Leitão’s motivations stem from a belief that the city dweller’s relationship to nature is artificial and that only through the purchase of consumable goods can the urban denizen overcome his or her alienation. Hence, the acquisition of “gear,” which helps to assuage these fears.

Inspired by the post-9/11 condition in which we live today, Leitão has created a slew of new products under the auspices of the series *Survival Systems 2004*, including those advertised in (and sharing the same names as) *Freedom Mask* (2004) and *Helicopter III* (2004). These formidable items guarantee protection against enemy attack. Leitão finds inspiration in mail-order catalogues as well as military and hunting magazines. She uses a refined palette of greens, blues, browns, and grays, imitating the colors of nature. Her latest body of work is a series of three nearly life-size watercolors. Entitled *One with Nature* (2005), it depicts three soldiers outfitted in military garb, camouflage, and combat boots. Here, Leitão reveals the commodification of the military; armed and ready, the soldier battles the specious forces of evil. These guerrilla forces use the landscape for combat and shelter. Leitão tracks our relationship to nature and how we have been culturally conditioned to experience the outdoors.

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Catarina Leitão in “Greater New York Book”, 2005, P.S.1/Moma, New York, 2005.