

-----ANTENNAE REVIEW-----

**Emilie Clark, Beth Cavener Stichter,
Kate Clark: Engaging the Wild**

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We write in order to know what we think and feel, don't we? Three artists recently on view in two galleries in Chelsea (New York City) so stirred my imagination that I wanted to tell everyone I knew about their work. The reasons why, will, I hope become clear in this short review.



Emilie Clark

Untitled, from Maxwell's Lair MM-P15 © the artist

The second meeting of the NYC Animal Studies Group was hosted by one of our founding members, Emilie Clark, at the Morgan Lehman Gallery where a show of hers, 'Maxwell's Lair,' had just opened. Ours is a group with shared interests in things human/animal from a variety of academic disciplines, and includes several visual artists who work in different media.

Clark's show is inspired by Martha Maxwell, 19th century American naturalist who lived in Colorado and owned one of the largest collection of taxidermy – done by herself; she spent two weeks living in a cave she built at the 1876 World Exposition in Philadelphia—a performance artist of an earlier era. Clark's luminous paintings and water



Beth Cavener Sticheter

A Rush of Blood to the Head, stoneware based mixed media sculpture
71 in. h x 56 in. w x 18 in. © the artist

colors render partial bodies of humans and animals, bringing inside outside and vice versa—she has the eyes of a visitor to the surgical theater, who transforms into art what most of us never get to see—internal bodily selves. Clark said her work originates in the magic of color, and her eyes are trained on cross-sections of living things: animal, vegetable and yes, even mineral—those ancient categories of the whatness of earthlife forms. She often juxtaposes numerous partial animal bodies inhabiting each other, merging and struggling to find new forms..

Beth Cavener Stichter's work came my way as a link sent by Una Chaudhuri, the convener and founder of our Animal Studies Group. The show, entitled "On Tender Hooks," has just been on view at the Claire Oliver Gallery. Opening the link, I couldn't stop pressing 'next' to see what else this artist was up to. Completely captivated by uncanny, unforgettable sculptures of rabbits, splayed and displayed; a goat trussed in ropes; two goats on their heels in a fully erotic embrace; a deer about to exhale toward a pinwheel just beyond its nose. For Cavener Stichter, genitals are among the bodily sites of the anthropo-morphic—the human animal borderlands where inside emerges and is laid bare. Cavener Stichter works in stoneware that beckons like bowls or amphorae in animal form with a quality as pristine as marble but with the fragility and porousness of ceramic.



An additional surprise at the Claire Oliver Gallery, were two works by Kate Clark, another artist who speaks to this moment of taking seriously the question of the human-animal, and what it asks us to imagine and represent in what might be called bio-art. Kate Clark takes the trophies of masculinity—hunted and mounted heads, and stitches human faces to hides of deer, cougar, wildebeests and more. These two faces (of what appear to be women) are bejeweled and stitched to the hides of head and neck, crafted in methods that evoke the medieval and the military. Perched at eye level, we encounter and engage them through the whites of their eyes (made of rubber), a contact not possible with most mammals. Their presence lords over and looks out onto a scene set in an absent but readily imagined manly home-as-castle realm.

Kate Clark

Impala hide, Antlers, Clay, and Mixed Media, 34 x 26 x 17 inches © the artist

All three of these women artists lead us to wonder about dominion and domestication. They confront us with hybrid forms and affects; we are asked to contemplate directly the evisceration required to know of what we and our animal familiars are made. Our bodies are vulnerable, permeable; bodies meet in exploration of the familiar and the unseen. The old taboos against anthropomorphizing have ceded place to appeals across the seams of species differences. Not all animals are our companions. And all eras ascribe idealizations and abjections to those others who live among us in woods or zoos. Our time seems to be one where we are struggling to hold in balance our seduction by and our destruction of lives not our own.

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All images courtesy of Morgan Lehman Gallery, Claire Oliver Gallery and the artists.