

REBECCA CAMACHO PRESENTS



Beasties

John de Fazio, Karin Gulbran, Courtney Johnson, Kyle Kilty, Jane Margarete, Maija Peeples-Bright, Nickola Pottinger, Dorian Reid, Allison Schulnik

Curated by Nick Makanna

20 July through 24 August 2024

Over the past few summers, pods of Orcas have been inexplicably linked to the destruction and sinking of boats across the Mediterranean and beyond, resulting in stories and widespread interest in this bizarre phenomenon. Perhaps this fascination stems from the unpredictability and raw defiance embodied by these aquatic mammals – baffling occurrences that stand in heavy contrast to humans’ ever-quickening technological advancements, and rapid domestication and degradation of our shared environment. Through works in painting and sculpture that are in conversation with depictions of animals throughout history, *Beasties* ruminates on artists who produce artworks mirroring the spirit of these Orcas, eschewing docile natures and tamability for wildness and unknowability. “Beasties” is borrowed from Maija Peeples-Bright, a Sacramento-based artist who has created over-the-top universes of unruly animals since the 1960s. Replete with word play, humor and a vivacious energy characteristic of Peeples-Bright herself, her unique sensibility anchors this exhibition.

Clay-based works play an integral role in *Beasties*, connecting us to distant representations of animals found in the current Czech Republic that are among the earliest ceramics ever made as well as current trends within global contemporary art. Most every ancient culture with a ceramic tradition created likenesses of the animals around them; the elaborately handled pouring vessels from the Pre-Columbian Moche culture in Peru, the intricate animal/humanoid figurative sculptures from the Jōmon people in modern day Japan, or the epic bas-relief tiled Ishtar Gate of ancient Babylon that featured 120 depictions of lions, dragons, bulls and flowers, each representing a Babylonian god. This is well-worn territory. Yet the artists within *Beasties* bring these traditions and their portrayals into the present, relating our own anxieties, priorities, and ways of seeing the world via animal surrogate.

Despite similarities in materials and subject matter, works by John de Fazio, Karin Gulbran, Jane Margarete, Peeples-Bright and Dorian Reid refer to vastly different cultures, influences, and motivations. Through an economy of gestures and splashes of experimental glazes, Gulbran’s bird forms conjure complex emotive states. Jane Margarete’s elaborate wall-based ceramic relief, *Baby Waterfall*, which features a column of butterflies clasped together, gestures towards migration and mobility, captivity and freedom, and protection and vulnerability. John de Fazio employs incredibly technical mold making, slipcasting, and glazing techniques to create conjoined animals that queer and critique high-end ceramic production while also addressing the pitfalls and hubris of human scientific experimentation. Dorian Reid, on the other hand, builds forms with an immediacy and explosive energy that express the artist’s advocacy for animal empowerment.

Painting is another vital touchstone within the exhibition that has its own distinctive lineage of representations of animalia – traditions Courtney Johnson, Kyle Kilty, Allison Schulnik and Maija Peeples-Bright all contend with in various ways. Johnson’s paintings plumb interstellar depths, introducing animalistic god-like beings into unsettling landscapes with variegated flora and undulating surfaces, introducing more questions than answers. Kilty’s richly textured paintings are made by layering modeling

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paste to the canvas and incising the surface with a screwdriver or other drawing implements, and are augmented by a layering of acrylic, oil paint and gold leaf. In *Wild, White Horses They Will Take Me Away* and *the Tenderness I Feel - Portishead*, a pair of horses quietly stand in an introspective moment against an obscured and pockmarked background with rows of lighter marks behind suggesting gravestones. Peebles-Bright's paintings share in the complex surfaces and horror vacui of Kilty's, employing nontraditional materials such as yarn and glitter into dizzying compositions that cause our eyes to bounce playfully around the canvas. In *Love Whaley Lassen*, Peebles-Bright's iconic word play and penchant for immersive patterning results in a painting in which the wild patterns coalesce into a mountain resembling the shape of Mt. Lassen. Schulnik focuses on singular animals, speaking to the precarity of our shared existence by documenting the desert-dwellers and pets that live in and amongst the artist and her family on the harsh terrain of Sky Valley, California. Schulnik's animation, *The Moth*, takes a more surreal approach, exploring transformation and life cycles in a fever dream of beautifully and painstakingly hand-painted stills.

The haunting and idiosyncratic sculptures of New York-based Nickola Pottinger refer to the artist's birthplace and ancestral homeland of Jamaica. Pottinger creates sculptural forms inspired by 'duppies,' the Jamaican Patois word for ghosts. Blending animal, figurative, and functional elements, Pottinger employs a vast range of materials into haunting works that exude a particular kind of presence. *Duppy x Redhills* is a bust with mouth agape and features hovering somewhere between a pig, a human, and a cow; inward turning hands held on either side frame another flattened face with a row of teeth connecting to a miniature body clothed in felt at the bottom. Pottinger's combination of animal, human, and otherworldly components is reminiscent of historical representations of animals such as *Lion Man*, an object carved out of mammoth tusk, and confirmed to be the oldest known sculpture dating back roughly 40,000 years. Pottinger, like each of the artists in *Beasties*, demonstrates a desire, an urgency, to make works that allow us to connect to our pasts, our histories and the world around us, and to step outside of ourselves. Doing so allows us to imagine a more equitable future for both human and animal alike.

Gallery hours: Thursday, Friday, Saturday 12noon to 5pm