

GUEST BLOG: Merrily Kerr - New York Art Tours

Perfect Strangers – Man or Beast?

December 9th, 2008 by Merrily Kerr

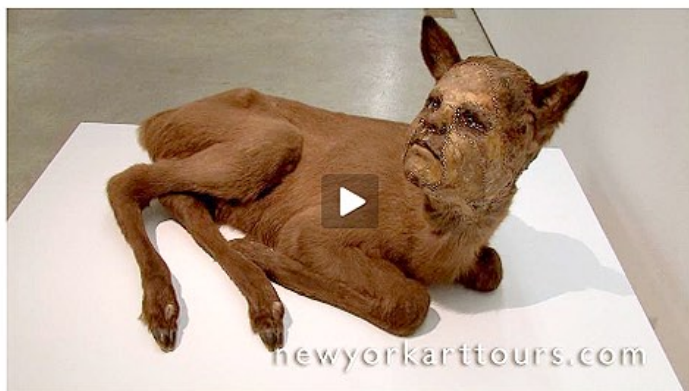


Surely one of the stranger sights in the Chelsea galleries this month is the running coyote pack in the window of [Claire Oliver Gallery](#). In sculptor [Kate Clark](#)'s first New York solo show, she debuts animal portraits with an unnerving twist; her taxidermy bear, cougar, fawn and gazelles have human faces. Sounds like a recipe for kitsch, but the presence of the bizarre man-beast creatures is arresting.

Clark explains that her work is the opposite of trophy presentations made after a hunt. Rather than man conquering nature, the two have merged. The work has none of the humor of, say, [Maurizio Cattelan](#)'s recent untitled sculpture in the [New Museum](#)'s show *After Nature*, for which he mounted the rear end of a horse high up on the wall. But it's precisely the complexity of each face that saves the work from ending up as a one-liner.

"So many people know so little about the natural world," Clark says, "that the animals are a symbol of a wild creature and not necessarily a cougar, for example." Titriling the show *Perfect Strangers*, Clark underlines the alienation between mankind and wild creatures as people and animals increasingly encroach on each other's territory. The best pieces have an Aslan-like benevolence and restrained power that make it easy to imagine a folklore in which man saves beast or vice versa. But high on their pedestals, Clark keeps them splendidly aloof, all the better to savor their nuanced characters.

Check out my video interview with Clark, in which she explains the pieces' symbolic content and goes into the nitty gritty of working with such unusual materials.


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