

HESSE FLATOW

Emily Harter: *Eager for the Wound*

September 6 – October 5, 2024

Opening reception: September 6, 6-8pm

“For there is no respite without shadows, no husbandry without grief, no queen without her bees eager for the wound.” - *Jocelyn Saidenberg, On Recipe*



HESSE FLATOW is pleased to announce *Eager for the Wound*, an exhibition of paintings and ceramics by Bay Area artist Emily Harter, marking her first solo presentation with the gallery as well as in New York.

Working in the tradition of genre painting, with an emphasis on hunting scenes as a narrative framework to represent desire, Harter creates dream-like, alluring compositions featuring a disjointed cast of characters consumed by hedonistic pursuits. Amidst the backdrop of a tangled thicket, figures accompanied by ferocious hounds chase after fowl and hare, while others merely indulge in an afternoon nap or an intimate coital embrace. Unlike portraiture, Harter’s subjects lack outward singularities; rather, they embody particular personas and tropes within art history, literature, and comic strips that appeal to a collective cultural memory. Striking a balance between specificity and the archetypal, Harter engenders familiar scenes that simultaneously encourage open-ended speculation.

At the root of her practice is a question of identity— a yearning for self-determination whose complicated entanglements with cruelty are personified through Harter’s hunts. As a queer artist, her experiences in articulating her individuality, while also recognizing the need for others to help construct it, inform the muddled actions of her characters as they variably conform to a playbook of expectations. Humor vies with inherent violences. Amidst the kerfuffle, figures set dubious booby traps, swipe with busted butterfly catchers, and trigger rifles that misfire in clumsy puffs of smoke. In the way that cartoon characters hover after running off the edge of a cliff, falling only when their mind catches up to the position of their body, Harter’s subjects exist in an anarchic relationship to reality, made possible as long as they believe in its possibility. Equipped with this form of agency, others disengage from the prescribed narrative; their unwillingness to participate creates a tension between the individual and the group.

In an adjacent scene entitled *Battle for the Boxer-Briefs*, a jumble of figures clash over a prized undergarment dotted with red hearts. While many don clothing from an eclectic array of cultural references within Harter’s works, the occasional nudity bears crucial significance. Appearing across scenes and bodies (proverbially caught with pants down), this particular pair of boxers signals embarrassment and vulnerability, yet is that which all covet. This inextricable link between desire and destruction is summed up by the exhibition’s title, *Eager for the Wound*. The recurring motif of the bumblebee symbolizes this want both for the sweetness of honey and the pain of the sting.

Emily Harter received her BA from Oberlin College and is currently pursuing an MFA in Art Practice at Stanford University. Her work has been exhibited throughout the United States, including Ochi Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Bread and Salt, San Diego, CA; and Cleaner Gallery, Chicago, IL. She was the recipient of the 2020 MAPC Travel Grant and has been a resident artist at Lighthouse Works, Fishers Island, NY; Arts, Letters, and Numbers, Averill Park, NY, and After 1920, San Diego, CA. She is a co-founder of Pigeon Hole Press in Chicago, IL, which produces and publishes fine art intaglio prints.