

my pet ram

Sarah Moran

Thirst Trap

February 23 - March 24, 2024

My Pet Ram is pleased to present *Thirst Trap*, the first New York solo exhibition for Brooklyn-based artist **Sarah Alice Moran**.

Moran specializes in an atmospheric dreaminess situated somewhere between the allegorically sophisticated paintings of the Florentine Mannerists and a macabre version of Saturday morning cartoons. Her paintings have always been personal: the female figures in them tend to resemble her, and their sweetness often belies an achingly melancholic subtext. The speed and confidence with which she works would not seem to lend itself to quiet moments like the dazed expression on the face of a milk-drunk hare, or the twinkle of a small star conveyed in mottled shadows under a figure's chin. But look closely, and Moran's paintings are spilling over with care.

Moran works directly on unprimed stretched canvases that she lays flat on the ground. Creating mixtures in different viscosities of acrylic paint, matte medium and water, she then paints, pours, and spreads the pigment in multiple layers of semi-transparent paint, sometimes drawing into them with jets of thinned-out paint directly from the tip of a squeeze bottle. Later, she adds opaque, textural strokes with a dry brush.

The subject matter is a provocation, isn't it? Were we prepared to be so drawn to depictions of woodland creatures nursing at a human (a monstrous woman?) with multiple nipples, an adult woman suckling from a tiger, a zebra, a snake with seemingly human anatomy? Improbably, given the broader cultural narrative around breasts, Moran has imbued these images with tenderness and mysticism. Speaking of this body of work, she has said, "There can be this mystical piercing of veils between different worlds that can be accessed through this feminine power. Within these scenes there's something that feels forbidden and mythic, like an ancient spell, but also natural and beautiful."

Still, they are unsettling. Julia Kristeva famously linked the maternal body and the experience of abjection in her 1982 essay *Powers of Horror*. For Kristeva, milk belongs to the abject because of its other-bodiedness, or inter-bodiedness: when the boundaries of what is body and not-body become mutable, a state of abjection collects, she imagines, miasmically around the action of leaking and oozing—something that the maternal body does with great skill and frequency. "Food," she writes, "becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories: a boundary between nature and culture, between the human and the non-human."¹ If we are unsettled at the sight of a breastfeeding woman, perhaps it is because she reminds us that we are animals.

¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York: Columbia University Press, p.75

For her part, Moran is as preoccupied with composition as she is with allegory. She admires Édouard Vuillard's 1893 *Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist*, the way one figure appears to bend under the weight of the outside edge of the canvas; it inspired her framing of human subjects inside windows created by animals' legs and bellies. Working on *Waxing Gibbous*, she studied Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, aiming to capture a similar attitude of grim determination in her subject.

It's the expression on the face of the woman in *Waxing Gibbous* that signals that the subject is conscious of the viewer's gaze. Ushered as she is into a visual culture in which the female nude is for easy consumption and hardly ever for confronting the primal conditions of maternal care, the woman seems to grasp what we feel as we look at her. Half-enchanted, half-abject, her presence here in public is a kind of trap: a reminder that we were all born thirsty.

Thirst Trap will be on view beginning Friday, February 23 through Sunday, March 24, 2024. The gallery is located at 48 Hester Street in the Lower East Side. Gallery hours are Thursday-Sunday from 12-6pm and by appointment. For more information about this exhibition, please email info@mypetram.com.