

FEATURED

Nicholas Crombach: Trapped / Angell Gallery

Ideas centered on humankind's peculiar fascination and relationship with the animal kingdom inspires the figurative artworks on display in Nicholas Crombach's recent solo exhibition titled Trapped. Crombach's upbringing in a rural landscape and his experiences living on a local dairy farm have nurtured his interest in exploring the often paradoxical co-existence between humans and other creatures. The artist uses his impressive dexterity with his chosen media to create jarring sculptures and images infused with a psychological presence and a thematic heftiness. A nude half-bust female figure, which is cleverly placed within the front window of the gallery, immediately confronts potential gallery attendees, and the general metropolitan public at large, before entering the exhibition space. Her cheerless gaze suggests a sense of dejection and emotional defeat, and offers a curious entry-point into the show.



Nicholas Crombach, *Woman Wearing Wilting Laurels*, 2014, resin, paint, steel, 26" x 18" x 12". Courtesy of Angell Gallery

A flattened and folded bear, sculpted in clay and then cast in resin, is mounted on a wall in a manner that recalls the centuries-old tradition of taxidermy, while its mouth is filled with a bouquet of flowers that further emphasizes its decorative properties. Crombach presents a potent criticism of the immorality of trophy hunting and taxidermic practices, where an animal's vitality is overshadowed by its aesthetic presence on a mantle, manifesting the idea of humankind's emotional disconnect with other species. Suddenly, the somnolence of the bust-figure becomes juxtaposed with the psychological vacancy of the bear, creating an interesting narrative between the works presented in the gallery.



Nicholas Crombach, *Still Life*, 2015, resin, paint, wood, found vase, 66" x 62" x 10". Courtesy of Angell Gallery

Melancholy is a shared emotional state between the other sculptures within the exhibition. An almost life-size elderly male figure, clad in a pair of long johns and touting a toy bow and arrow, is stripped of any sense of wisdom and fortitude. His hunting apparatuses are replaced with harmless children's playthings; his physical appearance vulnerable in its revealing state, while his physiognomy reveals a sense of strain and uneasiness, altogether resembling a defenseless victim to a dominant predator.



Nicholas Crombach, Man with Child's Bow and Arrows, 2013, resin, paint, steel, 60" x 24" x 24". Courtesy of Angell Gallery



Nicholas Crombach, Predator, Prey & Victim, 2015, resin, paint, rabbit pelt, 26" x 26" x 12". Courtesy of Angell Gallery

The exhibition creates a discourse around the interactivity and co-existence between humans and other earthly beings. Whether he is questioning the ethics of embalmed animal carcasses as decoration, or simply visualizing universal feelings of fear and despondence, Crombach's somber artworks remain interesting aesthetic objects as well. Trapped requires a viewer's careful contemplation and interpretation in order for this mixed media offering to thematically resonate beyond its rather expansive premise.



Installation view. Courtesy of Angell Gallery

By David Saric

*Exhibition information: July 14 – August 15, 2015, Angell Gallery, 12 Ossington Avenue, Toronto. Gallery hours: Wed - Sat, 12 - 5 p.m.