

Beth Cavener Stichter

Beth Cavener Stichter addresses controversial, potentially embarrassing subject matter head on and in direct opposition to the reputation of her chosen medium, clay. By employing this classical genre and emphasizing its primitive and raw characteristics, Cavener Stichter intentionally provokes art-world prejudices. The Artist thrives in the depiction of the provocative, blatantly contradicting the traditional and comfortable uses of her medium and imagery. Cavener Stichter explores child abuse, pornography, self loathing, and insecurity through elegantly crafted goat, hare, and hound proxy. "I select animal subjects," she says, "since the animal body is removed just enough from my own to establish a distance, yet the personal relationship is irresistible . . . Here, I become far enough away from myself to unravel questions previously tangled in a self-conscious quagmire."

Cavener Stichter cajoles the viewer into looking at the darker side of the human condition by cloaking it in animal skin. "There are primitive animal instincts lurking in our own depths, waiting for the chance to slide past a conscious moment. The sculptures I create focus on human psychology, stripped of context and rationalization, and articulated through animal forms. On the surface, these figures are simply feral and domestic individuals suspended in a moment of tension. Beneath, they embody the impacts of aggression, territorial desires, isolation, and pack mentality. I want to pry at those uncomfortable, awkward edges between animal and human."



Husk
On Tender Hooks Series
Stoneware
34 x 19 x 13 in.
2009

By manipulating the properties of clay, the Artist achieves an eloquence of form and surface unattainable through the use of other mediums. Despite the fluid, ethereal appearance of her completed works, the process of construction is painstakingly delicate and time consuming. Cavener Stichter's primary tool is her own body; she employs the human form as a scale of relative measurement, and her muscles and mass to carve and shape the colossal amounts of raw material necessary in her studio practice. Working from a maquette, she creates her sculptures from a solid block of clay, her broad, sweeping, gestural passages leaving their energetic motion behind. She then cuts the work into small sections, severing the limbs and torso at various points of motion. Each slice is hollowed out and gently reworked so that the straining of the muscle and the articulation of skin and fur are brought to life. Inch by inch this process is repeated, each section being attached to the prior; an exacting labor which takes months to complete. The Artist says that she has "learned to read meaning in the subtler signs; a look, the way one holds one's hands, the tightening of muscles in the shoulders, the incline of the head, the rhythm of a walk, and the slightest unconscious gestures. I rely on the animal's body language in my work as a metaphor for underlying consciousness, transforming the animal subjects into human psychological portraits."

Cavener Stichter creates frank discussions with her viewer through anthropomorphic sculpture and a dispassionate objectification of her subjects. She is cognizant of the danger that the realism of her creatures and her deliberate choice of a "Martha Stewart color palette" can encourage: the worst kind of sentimentality. The Artist hopes that by inducing the viewer to acknowledge their own uncomfortable darker side, she can inspire a greater understanding of those disparities that divide our societies today. "The figures are feral and uneasy," she says, "expressing frustration for the human tendency towards cruelty and lack of understanding. Entangled in their own internal and external struggles, my figures are engaged with the subjects of fear, apathy, violence and powerlessness."