

MARGAUX CRUMP

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*THE LURE*



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WOMEN & THEIR WORK

JUNE 16 - JULY 26, 2018

AUSTIN, TEXAS



## THE LURE

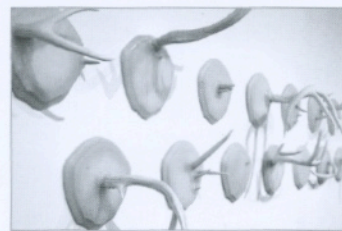
In *The Lure*, Margaux Crump builds a powerful grouping of objects and images that in their gestalt serve as a treatise on the root sources of aesthetic attraction and repulsion. Furthermore, she traces these sources from their basis in evolutionary sex-drive and reproductive selection straight through to forms of low and high taste, even laying bare the secret foundations of conservative and prim visual sensibilities as little more than dressed up animal desire. Crump navigates this minefield with particular grace, pulling the thematic line through works ranging from coyly provocative still lifes to overtly phallic silicone sculptures. Though there is a certain cool academic formal logic to the exhibition, the true strength of Crump's work is its ability to stir in its viewer something primordial, something further back in the brain or in the spine or in the gut or in the loins, while still speaking quite clearly to higher level functions. The magic of the work is this dichotomy between feeling simultaneously enlightened and utterly mammalian.

Serving as the gatekeeper of the exhibition, the greeter and the well wisher, hangs *The Weight of Desire*, a rocky chunk of wet, ruddy-pink deer attractant salt suspended from a brass hanging scale directly over a brass bowl filled with red liquid, presumably from the slow drips of the stone above. The sculpture primes its viewers, reminding them of their own bodies through multiple sense routes. The work ignites all avenues of the somatosensory system as the viewer imagines the feel of the rough wet mineral, and becomes hyper-aware of their own body position and weight through the visual reminder of the suspension and scale. The smell of iron and moisture permeate the air—it's hard not to think of blood, and it may not be too far off to think that just a pinch of adrenaline gets dumped into the body as a response to the scent's combination with the sight of a bowl full of red. The barely audible sound of the drips from the

rock into the bowl pricks the ears and the mouth begins to water as the mind invokes the phantom taste of salt on the tongue.

This sensory cueing is essential for taking in the rest of the exhibition, but perhaps most poignant is its ostensible contrast with the series of works most likely to be seen next by the viewer. *Stilled Chimeras* is a series of curious photographs, each of still life arrangements in the Dutch and Flemish Pronkstilleven style. Gorgeous bouquets of flowers, fruits, and the occasional accompanying pollinators presented in glossy ceramics, glass, and silver are dramatically lit in front of deep velvety black backgrounds. But there are mysteries that present themselves in these works, and one can't help but wonder if the sense-sharpening magic of *The Weight of Desire* were not in play the viewer might not even notice the peculiar glossy phallic, yonic, and nipple-like forms placed among the bouquets, ranging in hue from milky-white to a blush not so different from the salty *Weight*. These silicone sculptures hidden among the roses and peonies and fungi play a new irony on the once morally didactic Pronkstilleven style. Instead of preaching to the viewers the moral depravity of excess and the temporariness of the mortal world, it takes these pious symbols and demonstrates that each of them are no more than flora sex organs and their products. The butterflies atop the cut blooms are literally plant sex in action. The vibrancy of the petals is an evolutionary invention to seduce, and it is impossible to know if it is any less powerful on the human circuitry than it is on the pollinating insects it pulls to its pollen filled loci.

Just as one realizes that one is looking at such a still life, and that these and most other still lifes are essentially plant porn, the question arises of how it came to be that this was acceptable in polite society. Then, as the viewer begins to think of just how much of appropriate etiquette and high taste is a sort of formalized voyeuristic act, one notices another peculiarity within the



*Mount (detail)*, 2017, antlers, sex-safe silicone, makeup pigments, 45" x 65" x 14"

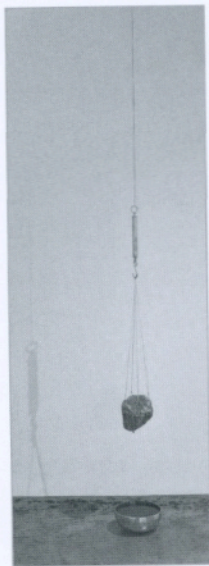
frame. In each of Crump's *Chimeras*, one insect or another can be spotted crawling over the mat, clinging to the frame, or otherwise positioning itself to have a good hard look at these (to a pollinator, if not wholly to us) illicit images. The first appears as a framer's oversight but after the third there is no debating the intention of the artist. Here we become the voyeur spying the voyeur and both looking at the same cornucopia. The viewer is filled with all the trappings of the most conservative and the most Bacchanalian art consumption at once.

And so it is with this strange beginning that the viewer finds themselves in the midst of the gallery, a veritable Wunderkammer full of oddities of plant, animal, and mineral source. The viewer finds *In Bloom*, an elongated bell jar full of natural splendor but obscured by a dark gradient approaching its peak, making the jar simultaneously more solid, more phallic, more universe-like in its glinty glossy surface, and with greater implication of death or suffocation. They see *Rock Hard*, the strange safe-sex silicone forms found in *Chimeras* scattered about in three dimensions. They encounter *You Excite Me*, phosphorescent minerals with light sensitive secret messages encoded in their cases. The viewer finds other suspended forms like cave growth of stalactite and stalagmite of smooth black and milky pink just shy of touching each other — and with such picqued socio-sense nerves, it is hard not to feel the implied anticipation between the two forms. The viewer finds themselves empathizing with rocks!



This melee of sculptural forms is buttressed by a larger wall based series *Blushing Bruising*, *Mount*, and *Preserving My Desire* each fortifying the exhibition in a physical design sense on each of the remaining walls of the gallery, but more importantly, in their conceptual underpinnings. They each act as a container, clarifying the exhibition's intent, and as a window, a small portal into its further implications — a “see here for further reading” on the visual thesis of *The Lure*.

The most direct perhaps is *Blushing Bruising*, a series of works that the artist considers as drawing. Here, salt crystals are grown into silk and combined with makeup to make crusted over fields of skin color. The works connect the mineral growth elements of the rest of the exhibition back to the body, and reinforce the odd importance of color, texture, and blemish in human mate-finding. The subtle differences in hue trigger deep seated neural circuitry. The viewer reads these as they do the people they encounter (are they excited? are they hurt? are they ill or well? like us, or different than us?



*The Weight of Desire*, 2018, artificial deer attractant rock, brass scale, intestine, brass bowl, liquid deer attractant, height variable x 10" x 10"

older or younger than us?), and in this way the work opens the door for the exhibition to not only address the link between evolutionary sexual drive and high aesthetics, but also to mirror neurons, eusocial behavior in humans, and empathy itself.

Opposite *Blushing Bruising* is *Mount*, a set of peculiar antlers each arising from a shield-mount in the style of a game hunter's trophy. Again, the viewer is given another example of how strange the most conservative visual traditions really are. Yes, antlers are defensive in nature, but their primary purpose is one of sexual attraction — even in their purpose as weapons they are chiefly used in defending harems from would-be usurpers. But *Mount* goes further than resounding other work in the exhibition. These shield bases are coated in the same sex-safe silicone as the pseudo-sex objects dotting the room, and dusted with the same soft rouge. The antlers in question are of a great variety, twisting every which way, without symmetry, and in general breaking every rule of being antlers. There is something decidedly queer — in every sense — about these trophies on their triangle-ish supports, and are the clearest case of Crump wading into more unsanctioned territory. The implications of genetic variance, the outsider, and queerness as important bastions for herd/society health and diversity act as another extension of the show's myriad meanings. One must not forget that the Irish giant deer became extinct because their antlers were overly large, showy, and of a narrow variety.

Finally, *Preserving my Desire*, dominates the far wall of the exhibition and serves as a natural focal point for the show. The installation is comprised of hand sewn panties preserved in salt, splayed open, and pinned like giant entomological specimen. The work is an ongoing project, and like any good collection, will grow in number and variety. The work hammers home the importance of visual ploy in private life, reiterates the sense



*Blushing Bruising IV*, 2015, salt crystals grown into silk with makeup pigments, oil bar, prisma color, 11.5" x 8.25"

of adaptation found in other works, but extends the conceptual weight of the show by combining the idea of trophy with the bizarrely ubiquitous connection between sex and death. Like the blackened bell jar and the mounted antlers, and the cut blooms, and even the dripping mineral formations, the work opens up the possibility that positive physical connection is indeed a close neighbor to violence. These panties have been cut or untied at the hip and crucified to the wall for the viewer's enjoyment. Even without such active violence, the thought of the body as fleeting is palpable in the air from the other works. The very title of the work relates a quintessentially human impulse to push against that mortality, and if not escape the clutches of age through such physical preservations and disguises, then at least escape it through lurid generative ecstasies, as temporarily as they may be.

*Preserving my Desire* and *The Lure* as a whole allow Crump to walk a delicate high wire with overwhelmingly cosmic forces on either side — death, entropy, darkness and violence on the one, and life, rebirth, order, color, and synchronicity on the other. Somewhere in the middle she has found treasures she offers to the viewer but the greatest of these is the connection between sex, sensory depth, and foundational interactions within and outside our species.

Seth Orion Swaiger is a writer and visual artist based in Texas and New York



# Margaux Crump

## EDUCATION

- 2015 Master of Fine Arts, Studio Art, Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri
- 2011 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Studio Arts; minor Art History, Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *The Lure, Women & Their Work*, Austin, Texas
- 2018 *Stilled Chimeras*, FLATS, Houston, Texas
- 2013 *Strange Chemistry*, Artspace, Raleigh, North Carolina

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *A Dead Dog's Eye*, Aquarius Gallery, New York, New York
- 2017 *Play It As It Lays*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, Texas
- 2016 *Our Lovely Secret Wreck*, Hume Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
- 2016 *8th National Collegiate Handmade Paper Art Triennial*, Corcoran School of the Arts and Design, Washington, DC; traveled to The Morgan Conservatory, Cleveland, Ohio
- 2016 *Play It As It Lays*, Gallery of Contemporary Art, St. Louis Community College at Forest Park, St. Louis, Missouri
- 2015 *MFA15*, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri
- 2014 *PARABOLA: COLLABORA*, Des Lee Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri
- 2014 *MFA First Year Exhibition*, Des Lee Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri
- 2013 *PARABOLA 2013: Proof that 2 = 1*, Des Lee Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri
- 2011 *Triskaidekaphilia*, Michael and Noemi Neidorff Art Gallery, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas
- 2010 *Rising Eyes of Texas*, Rockport Center for the Arts, Rockport, Texas
- 2009 *Synecdoche*, Michael and Noemi Neidorff Art Gallery, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas
- 2007 *Ohana*, HSPVA Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 2007 *Student Show*, The Jung Center, Houston, Texas
- 2006 *Open Show*, Clear Lake Art Center, Clear Lake, Texas
- 2006 *Luck of the Draw*, DiverseWorks, Houston, Texas

## SELECTED AWARDS & GRANTS

- 2017 Individual Artist Grant, Houston Arts Alliance, Houston, Texas
- 2014 The Ernestine Betsberg & Arthur Osver Scholarship, St. Louis, Missouri
- 2013 The Helen Faibish Memorial Scholarship, St. Louis, Missouri
- 2012 Trinity University Excellence in Art Award, San Antonio, Texas
- 2008 San Antonio Rotary Club Scholarship, Artistic Merit, San Antonio, Texas
- 2007 The Baker Duncan Scholarship, Studio Art, San Antonio, Texas
- 2006 Young Masters, Texas Commission on the Arts grant recipient, Austin, Texas
- 2006 The Tony Chauveaux Award in the Visual Arts, Austin, Texas

## RESIDENCIES

- 2010 The Hambidge Center, Rabun Gap, Georgia
- 2010 I-Park, East Haddam, Connecticut

## SELECTED LECTURES & PANELS

- 2017 Panelist, Material Poetics, International Sculpture Center Conference, Kansas City, Missouri

## SELECTED FEATURES, PUBLICATIONS, & REVIEWS

- 2016 Collaborative artist book, *Our Lovely Secret Wreck*. Kite Math Publishing, Chicago, Illinois
- 2016 Imrie-Situnayake, Amber. "Margaux Crump." *Venison Magazine*, Winter 2016
- 2016 Filchak, Ryan. "Desires Past and Present." *Newcity Art*, 28 July
- 2016 Fiore, Brad. "*Our Lovely Secret Wreck* at HUME." 3rd Coast Review, 2 August



Above: *Stilled Chimera XI*, 2018, digital pigment print, insect specimens, velvet, frame.  
20" x 24 11/16" x 2 1/8"

Cover Panel: *Preserving My Desire*, 2014- present, handmade panties encrusted in salt  
crystals, steel spikes, 120" x 160" x 7"





*The Lure, 2018, installation view, dimensions variable*

## Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 40th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,902 artists in 315 visual art exhibitions, 128 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 642 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, The New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work reaches over 650 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women & their work

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