

December 10, 2016 – January 28

MONICA COOK

Milk

Postmasters Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new video *Milk Tooth* and sculpture *The Receiver* by Monica Cook. This will be the artist's third show with Postmasters.

The fantastical world of *Milk* builds on Monica Cook's long practice of intimacy and reverence for the broken, the exposed, and the vulnerable. Many artists are fascinated with bodies that are malformed or unacceptable under the aesthetic regimes of conventional beauty. Many artists portray wounds, or disease, the ruin and profusion of physical excess and dysfunction. Very few are called to do so by such a pure note of reverence and love. There is no whiff of salaciousness, no suggestion of titillation, in Cook's treatment of her creatures. She simply loves them and reverences them by her acts of creation and display.



Handmaking is essential to Cook's practice. Cook's hands touch every piece of every creature, building them from the inside to the outside, from the smallest fingernails to the expanses of skin that cover them. Touch is the education of the lover, the vocabulary of love is generated in sightless groping, in stroking and pinching – as Cook caresses her creatures into being, she is gaining knowledge of their every crevice and wrinkle, and learning to love them, simply, with a pure affection that could be childlike if it wasn't so wise.

Cook scours the streets, the trash, the networks of global commercial distribution, for pieces that become her work. Feathers, latex, glass grapes, dishsoap bottles, industrial molds, pantyhose, glitter, rubber nipples, fur, the treasured and the overlooked and the discarded, mix in a sublime jumble that reveals the omnivorous imagination of the artist. The colors are dreamy pastels, arctic whites, fleshy petal-tones, glossy intestinal shades. Everything that enters the work is recognizable – mundane products or biological materials – estranged from familiarity by the breath of life that inhabits the finished forms. Like hyperreal golems, their clay is magically occupied, inhabited, animated.

The theme of this work is sacrifice: The implicitly feminine sacrifice of one's own body, not on a field of battle or a punishing cross, but in the work of nurturing, nourishment, and love. Milk is the guiding image: Milk is the concentrated essence of all that is nutritive and fortifying, produced from the materiel of one's own body, one's own life, in order to foster the body and the life of a beloved other. The image recalls potlatch, the wealth that can only be demonstrated by giving it away, the surrender that strengthens and multiplies as it radiates outward.

Milk Tooth

Happy families, Tolstoy claims, are all alike. Love stories and happy endings can be just as repetitive – it is the rare artist who can express true love in a way that transcends trite formulas. Here, Monica Cook presents a simple love story – one with a happy ending, no less – in a wholly original form.

Tish and Valentino exist in different worlds, possibly even different dimensions. Cook utilizes a split screen to evince the simultaneity of interlocking yet separate events, and to show the isolation of each individual being in incommensurable solitary experience. The lovers unite briefly, poignantly, at times, but they never merge. Each is complete and lives in his or her own world. The miracle of love is that any two beings can communicate at all. In this work, communion is expressed as physical transmission: Bodily fluids and fleeting physical contact achingly traversing impossible distances.



Tish senses something is missing. There is a gap in her lover Valentino's mouth, an empty space where he once had a tooth – a milk tooth – which has fallen away. She heroically sacrifices a beloved pig to replace that tooth, and the procedure throws her into a coma-like slumber from which, like a fairy tale princess, she is suspended and cannot be awakened. Valentino's faithful but independent phallus becomes an emissary on a rescue mission to revive Tish. Animal companions are the guides that bring to fruition scenes of redemption, resurrection, and revivification – Tish is loved back to consciousness, a carcass is reborn as a living cow, and the beautiful slime of the whole natural world – sweat,

sap, semen, tears – become the lovers' ablutions. Valentino washes the feet of his darling in a gesture both ancient and profound. The film concludes with a pregnant image: That of a fertilized egg, quietly humming with new life.

In this wordless, richly elaborated world, the biological processes of birthing and killing, feeding, reproduction and generation, are holy. Sacrifice, redemption, and love itself are approached from a profoundly visceral physicality that undoes the damage of rational thinking and allows us to live a moment in wonder and delight.

The Receiver

This craft is a hybrid of whale and boat, a craft that holds and protects. Zayin, the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet, connotes both nourishment and weapon. Here, Cook fuses the function of nurturing with the form of a battle-ready vessel, imagining nipple-harpoons that carry payloads of milk. These are weapons made not to destroy life, but to sustain it. Evoking the quixotic mission of the mad sea captain who pursued Moby Dick, Cook recognizes that the precarious project of nourishing another being is just as difficult as any quest to slay a great beast. Masculinist and warlike ideals of honor and heroism are entirely subverted – here, the impossible mission is to sustain, to feed, to nourish.

-Written by Sarah Lippek