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An unseen collection

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Matthew Chambers' circles

THE GREAT POTTERY THROW DOWN

Our interview with 2015 winner Matthew Wilcock



Under the gaze of beasts

A new body of work by Kerry Jameson went on display at London's Marsden Woo Gallery over the summer. It was an exhibition, says *Charlotte Dew*, that made one ponder the world and our part in it

'... we say the eye is the window of the soul, but what if there is no soul behind the eye? What if the eye is a crack through which we can perceive just the abyss of a netherworld?'

This question – posed by psychoanalytic philosopher Slavoj Žižek in his film *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, in relation to the film *Psycho* – resonates and finds new relevance when asked in the context of Kerry Jameson's latest body of work, as presented at Marsden Woo Gallery over the summer, under the title *Alchemy*. The viewer was confronted by an assembly of 'beasts', who looked out through painted eyes of pebbles, shells and bottle-tops, applied to ceramic forms. The eyes were all important, giving her creations a semblance of life, but in their static and unblinking state, they issued cavernous, soulless stares; a rendering of Žižek's abyss or a Boschian netherworld made real.

Andy Christian's text, accompanying *Alchemy*, cites the Lascaux caves as Jameson's starting point for this body of work; caves that in themselves form a chasm or abyss through which another, past world can be viewed. The 21 drawings presented in the exhibition – some clearly recognisable animals, such as the owl in *Work on Paper 3* (2016), others, including *Work on Paper 19* (2016), an amalgam of animal and human elements – offered an insight into Jameson's creative process. Through the employ of black ink on paper they created the strongest link to Lascaux's extraordinary prehistoric representations. By contrast, when Jameson's characters are rendered in clay, they leap forward in time to the present day. Rather than interpretations of the world's earliest artistic representations, they seem to embody the subsequent evil and destructive capacity of human nature since this starting point; far from early innocence, they suggest that this could be our future.

Close examination showed the 'beasts' to be made from merged and reanimated artistic forms, drawn from a broad span of time and cultures. References to a range of artistic languages and styles abounded, concealed beneath the mask-

like faces of each creature. *Crocodile-string* (2016) had a bird-like head with crocodile jaws, atop a cross-legged Buddha-type figure. The lower quarters of *Pirate Horse* (2016) resembled a sphinx, with the disproportionately small head of a Lascaux cave horse, awkwardly inverted to look back on itself. *Coral Clown* (2016) took a statuesque lion's form, beneath a heavy and arresting mask with penetrating eyes, an acorn nose, coral mouth and bristly spikes of hair.

Jameson makes clear that these creatures have been made, not born, through the inclusion of *Eyes* (2016): an arranged group of thirty or more eyes, painted or found by Jameson, presented on a shelf. This work, made from unused or not-yet-used parts, tells us about her making process, providing a glimpse into the studio – her cave – where the 'alchemy' takes place. The preparation and application of eyes enables this strange illusion of life. There is, however, no sense of Frankenstein kitsch in this menagerie of Jameson's; these forms appear in earnest.

The unnerving nature of the artist's characters can be related, in part, to her choice of materials and the material construction of the forms. Each piece is first made in clay and fired. Subsequent work to the surface, through the application of paint, gesso, textiles, coral and other materials, ensures they are removed from the comfortable realm of figurative ceramic representations. In this group, the use of string around the neck of each 'beast' is particularly ambiguous; sometimes loosely tied, on other occasions, such as on *Green Zebra* (2016), tightly bound, multiple times. It hints at a broken tether, or a noose not yet tightened. The discomfort also comes from each creature's stance; *Black Ram* (2016) – pictured above – and *Alligator* (2016) cower, and *Shadow-Cat* (2016) appears rendered immobile by bent legs and other appendages that appear too slight to support the heavy weight of its head. Jameson's *Alchemy* offered pause to ponder the world we have and are creating, and her provocations were uncomfortable. But her 'beasts' were also otherworldly and had a literary quality, leading one to the bookshelf to draw down Aesop's *Fables*, Grimm's *Fairy Tales* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The experience of being in their presence was both unsettling and stimulating. CR

Kerry Jameson, *Alchemy* was at Marsden Woo Gallery, London. Charlotte Dew is a freelance curator