

Does our hair keep growing after we die?

Time slowed in the spring of 2020. Life took on a different and unpredictable pace. Nancy Lu Rosenheim spent a majority of that strange, suspended stretch with her family in Steuben, WI, located in the mythical Driftless Region of the Midwest. Areas of the valley where the property sits, which had previously been used for grazing livestock, were re-wilded over the course of quarantine. On her daily walks, Rosenheim observed the natural ecosystem restoring itself as beavers built dams, and long-dormant native prairie vegetation thrived. Moving through the seasons in this cyclical, subtle way restored some of the artist's own organic and circadian rhythms. During this realignment, her artistic impulses, already distinctly attuned to the rhythms of the natural world, took on a primal and desperate instinct. Rosenheim has long been fascinated by the cycles of aging and death, and with this exhibition sits comfortably with her own mortality - inviting the viewer to do the same.

Rosenheim has always found beauty in what she deems the “unspectacular.” But there is nothing mundane or predictable in these prolific bodies of work. In her abundant prints, sculptures, and drawings, Rosenheim features and often deifies creatures she calls grovelers: homely, lowly beasts. They may be prey on the food chain, but are valiant and valuable parts of a verdant ecosystem nonetheless. As we perambulate this exhibition we encounter worms (not relegated to the realm of the underground, but ambling among us), beavers (their spectacular architecture as well as the rodents themselves), birds (unremarkable varieties here: the common pigeon, an occasional owl), and assorted para-humans.

These organic forms invert traditional assignments of value: what was grotesque becomes beautiful, the consumed become the consumers, imperfections and deviations from the norm are now the norm. These untamed beings beg the question: what is more primal and inevitable than death? Many of the nature studies in this exhibition portray the most feral side of the human psyche via a cast of characters all anthropomorphized to some degree. Base instincts are indulged and exalted. The viewer is encouraged to explore impulses hidden in the collective subconscious. There is no place for shame in this brave new world. We are, at our core, animals. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the assemblage *Porous*. The artist states: “Porous is how you want to consider your body in relation to the universe – no separation. Porous.”

Another spectacularly large work, *I have said to the Worm, Thou art my mother and my sister. (worm)*, references a bleak biblical parable, Job 17:14, wherein Job threatens to surrender to death. This and other renderings evoke a distinct sadness as Rosenheim hyperfixates on particular subjects and/or features, obsessively creating study after study. Creatures gaze upwards, their gnarled hands grasped in prayer. What few unkempt teeth remain jut out at irregular angles. Engorged nipples belie the burdens of the birthing body. Whom do these beings beseech? For what do they plead? Animism attributes a soul, and free will, to all beings. It is natural to project our own desires, grief, and pain onto these companions as they remind us of our porousness; our inextricability from nature; the inevitability of aging, decay, and death: the apex predator.