

FORECAST EMILY HUNT

Emily Hunt’s gnarled ceramics, intricate etchings and nightmarish paintings are both an excursion into the depths of the abject and a fitting response to a world gone mad.

By Sammy Preston



Top left to right
EMILY HUNT
Relification, 2015
unique hard ground zinc
etchings on paper and
pencil on paper, framed
110.5 x 81 x 8 cm

EMILY HUNT
Objectification, 2015
unique hard ground zinc
etchings on paper and
pencil on paper, framed
110.5 x 81 x 8 cm

Opposite top to bottom
EMILY HUNT
*Floating Sorcerer's
Foot and Hand*, 2014
glazed stoneware
14 x 8.5 x 25.5 cm (each)

EMILY HUNT
Citadel Crown, 2014
glazed stoneware
17 x 29 x 29 cm

Photo: Jessica Maurer

Courtesy the artist
and The Commercial,
Sydney



Emily Hunt is interested in the abject and the grotesque, in human vices — the bad, the ugly and the degenerate. Her earliest works comprised meticulously detailed watercolour painting, printmaking and collage, but it is her fascination with ceramic materials that is exceptionally arresting. Wicked creatures, crooked statuettes and warped caricatures set in deep brown, sandy orange and vibrant jade are intriguing at a distance, but wild with intricacies upon closer inspection. For an exhibition titled *The Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence* at The Commercial gallery in Sydney last year, Hunt presented a vast diorama-style landscape. The sculpture took the form of a heaving ceramic utopia and model train set, replete with porcelain and stone grottoes, follies, towers and mounds and almost filled the front room gallery.

Hunt graduated from Sydney College of the Arts in 2011, and undertook a mentorship at Berlin’s Zentrum für Keramik (Centre for Ceramics) in 2013, where she worked with German ceramics master, Thomas Hirscher. Here, *VAULT* speaks with the artist about Mike Parr’s etchings, her fascination with imperfection and the act of making big, ugly ceramic toes.

YOUR CERAMICS AND PAINTINGS OFTEN FEATURE OTHERWORLDLY CREATURES, INTRICATE, DRENCHED WITH EMOTION, AT TIMES ALMOST MANIC. WHERE DO YOU DRAW THESE CARICATURES AND FIGURES FROM?
My work is a reaction against a prevailing moral order in contemporary culture. It is a rupturing of pious conformism and controlling attitudes. It is a satirical celebration of that rupture that uses the intemperate qualities of the grotesque — both formally and socially — as a mobilising vehicle. My work is overtly pro-smoking, pro-drinking and anti-censorship in contemporary art.

I use historical references from smaller known printmakers of the 16th century such as Hans Weiditz and Urs Graf as a beginning point. The clay work starts from looking back, but then an experience on a bus (I do not drive, so I see a lot on public transport) will interfere [with] the work.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE SOME EARLY INFLUENCES? WHICH ARTISTS, OR SPECIFIC ARTWORKS PERHAPS, REALLY STOOD OUT TO YOU, OR RESONATED WITH YOU DURING ART SCHOOL?
I knew I wanted to go to art school from the age of 12. My mother actually said that to me at that age and so I knew this in the back of my mind during all my miserable years in high school. I have always been pretty single-minded about being an artist, even when my confidence was low. My mother must have seen something in me, an unconventional way of looking at the world.

The turning point was in second year. It was an artist talk by Mike Parr, where he talked about his etchings and his process. It was the first time I had ever actually seen an etching — what madness! Straight away, after his talk I walked over to the print department to organise extra classes on top of my painting degree.

Etching — the history, the acid, the inking, and how the line work has a depth and ‘fuzzy’ imprinted nature resonated with me like no other medium ever had. I love a good foul bite and I never bother filing the edges of my plates. It is a waste of time in my opinion. I never make editions and I don’t sign my prints in the bottom corner. I would probably work with a master printer but these conditions cannot change, which would probably annoy some traditionalists.

WHEN DID YOUR INTEREST IN THE ABJECT AND GROTESQUE BEGIN?
This is the question that cuts right through, because nobody has actually asked me this before, and it’s [important] to be understood as an artist. My mother worked in child protection for 25 years. She was always quite blunt about her work. I think because she had worked in operating theatres as a nurse since the age of 19, she wasn’t emotional about telling me about her work, but it deeply affected the way I look at the human condition. I understood that people are capable of abusing and tormenting the people closest to them. I knew this from a very early age. This knowledge is where all the work is drawn from.

I’m always trying to understand the grotesque nature of man, the intemperate, the fecund, the history of carnage and continual stupidity. I can make myself very melancholy thinking about it. But making art as a response is the only way I am able to get on with daily rituals.

WHAT IS IT THAT INTRIGUES YOU ABOUT HUMAN VICICES, AND VIOLENCE?
My engagement with grotesque, exaggerated caricature attempts to satirically frame human brutality as essential to the human condition and to reconcile the self-conflicts of disgust and abhorrence with being a human being myself.

The uncontrollable nature of being owned by your own vices or acting out violence impulsively are two realities that I have experienced many times but less so now that I am getting older. I am anti-morality. I hate ‘self-development’, this idea that we should fix ourselves, as much as I hate human cruelty. I believe artists are able to live in an in-between.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON RIGHT NOW?
Experimenting and making failures, painting on fabric, making big ugly ceramic toes, new jewellery with gold kangaroo leather, a new work for a group show called *Mnemonic Mirror* at UTS in May, preparing new larger scale etchings, selling books, and a big project I can’t mention just yet — but I’m bloody excited to pull it off!



I'M ALWAYS TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE GROTESQUE NATURE OF MAN, THE INTEMPERATE, THE FECUND, THE HISTORY OF CARNAGE AND CONTINUAL STUPIDITY. I CAN MAKE MYSELF VERY MELANCHOLY THINKING ABOUT IT. BUT MAKING ART AS A RESPONSE IS THE ONLY WAY I AM ABLE TO GET ON WITH DAILY RITUALS.

EMILY HUNT
Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, 2014
glazed stoneware, glazed porcelain, lichen, enamel on miniature figures, plaster, found objects, marble, fake trees, motorised miniature train, beads, coloured Epoxycast resin, rubber, HO scale plastic homes, earrings and wig hair
211 x 240 x 240 cm
Photo: Jessica Maurer
Courtesy the artist and The Commercial, Sydney

WHAT INSPIRES YOU RIGHT NOW?
Currently, I am researching ornamental features in architecture. As of today, I am looking at Hepplewhite Furniture Design, Piero Fornasetti, books on Indian architecture and the Decorative Art pieces that were shown in the Great Exhibition of 1851. Podcasts have a huge effect on the work that I make. I know it's important for me to understand more of the history of contemporary life, however, I do not have a lot of reading time. I think a lot of artists listen to podcasts because we have to get on with repetitive tasks and it's the ultimate way to learn about history.

LOOKING BACK NOW, HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR PRACTICE HAS EVOLVED?
I've said in the past that I am quite greedy for materials and for working across many mediums at any given time. I'm now at a point where I actually understand the mediums and when I have an idea, I know which medium to go to, be it watercolours, plaster or clay. When I was younger, I was so in a hurry. I still have the same intense ambition; it's just that I now understand that good work comes from making a lot of very bad work. **V**
Emily Hunt shows as part of *Mnemonic Mirror* at the UTS Gallery, Sydney from May 10 to July 1, 2016.
Emily Hunt is represented by The Commercial, Sydney.
emilyhuntartist.com
thecommercialgallery.com