



Flesh, Animals, and Allegory in Erik Thor Sandberg's New Paintings at VOLTA NY

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Erik Thor Sandberg, *Mask - Sweet*, 2015

In a modern world whose pace quickens each year, it can sometimes seem that time and space for contemplation and looking inward are in short supply. Art fairs, with their bustle and buzz, are not necessarily places to seek such things—unless visitors make their way to contemporary artist Erik Thor Sandberg's allegorical paintings at VOLTA NY 2015, where the complexity of the human condition, and the brevity of life, are on full display.

Celebrated abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning once famously said that “flesh is the reason oil paint was invented.” It would seem that Sandberg agrees—but visitors to CONNERSMITH.'s presentation at VOLTA NY will have the opportunity to judge for themselves. At this year's fair, the gallery is featuring a new series of the artist's fantastical oil-on-panel paintings, centered—like all of his work—upon the expressive, allegorical power of the nude. “I use the human form as a metaphor,” he has explained.

The complexity of human nature has long fascinated Sandberg. His art is driven by his

meditations on our propensity for both stunning kindness and barbarity, our vices and follies, and our remarkable capacity for perseverance and hope. As he once defined his influences: “I find the fallibility of man to be the subject that I connect with the most in most artwork.” Not least of all his own.



Erik Thor Sandberg, *Shepherd*, 2015

Among the paintings on show is *Shepherd* (2015), a small-scale composition packed with imagery and detail. At its center is a nude woman, overburdened by her flock. A menagerie of birds rings her head and torso, practically engulfing her entire upper half in a fury of fluttering wings. She is uncovered from the waist down, save for the two garters that tightly encircle her thighs, each one outfitted with hooks holding children’s objects, including a pacifier, a toy block, a tiny stuffed pink bunny, and a spoon. She is flanked by the children for whom these objects are intended, each remarkably unchildlike. One holds a martini, the other a human skull. As if to complicate her burden yet further, a black cat lies in wait in the background, menacingly eyeing her avian swarm.

At once finely rendered and grotesque, *Shepherd* exemplifies Sandberg’s vision. In his work, human beings clash and interact with each other and with nature, while reminders of death and decay mar otherwise lush compositions—memento mori for our modern age.