

Althuis Hofland Fine Arts

A Wanting Thing

Plum Cloutman

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It is in absence or imagination that desire takes place and it is absence and imagination that desire creates. The thing wanted is not there, or not quite within reach; instead an imagined yet viscerally experienced hole or lack takes shape. “When I desire you a part of me is gone,” as Anne Carson wrote.

In her solo exhibition, *A Wanting Thing*, Plum Cloutman explores the proximity and mutual reliance of the desirer and desiree in contexts of love and greed. In each of the works the object of desire and the desiring subject are but barely touching. By visually minimizing the distance between both, the ache for the other (thing) is heightened, their broken connection emphasized.

In the triptych and titlework of the exhibition, “A Wanting Thing,” small isolated fragments in thick, soft oil hues—depicting a cat and a fish, a child and fire, hands and a torso—are placed in pairs on one paper, separated by just few centimeters of white space between them. Each fragment could be part of a larger domestic scene but instead stands on its own with only their significant other. The small size of these three works and isolated, almost cliché imagery dramatize the notion of desire into a symbol-like status, announcing the theme of this body of work.

Cloutman hones in on this relationship of co-reliance in four drawings and six more paintings. Reducing the drama in these larger works and bringing emotions of longing into familiar, everyday settings, Cloutman then finds focus in the physical care that can accompany desire. A gradual shift from acting out of greed to acting out of love takes place. In “Cream Hog” one figure seems to empty a can of cream into a swirl atop their strawberries, three others at the table watch in anticipation of their turn which likely will never come or not before the can is empty. Their desire consumed by someone else’s greed right in front of them. Meanwhile, another figure in “Pedestal” has moved down on hands and knees so that their longhaired dog can sit comfortably on their back. The human transforms into a pedestal, a showcase of an absurd expression of love.

The colors in Cloutman’s work are gentle, temporarily cloaking the at times ridiculous expressions of love, greed and desire. Combined, the palette and occasional comical scenes are reminiscent of 16th century genre painting. *A Wanting Thing* comprises technically strong works that present us with a reminder of the ways in which we stretch ourselves, physically and emotionally, to give and receive care.

Plum Cloutman is a painter and printmaker whose work has been awarded the Catriona White Prize, the Lyon and Turnbull Prize, and was featured in the 2019 Royal Society of Arts New Contemporaries exhibition. She graduated in 2018 from Edinburgh College of Art.