

Time Out

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—Franklin Sirmans

Wendell Gladstone Kravets/Wehby, through Tue 18 (see Chelsea).

Some works of contemporary art set out to push the conceptual envelope but end up giving art a bad name with a lot of highbrow pretensions. Other work dazzles you with vacuous spectacle. Then there is art that is complex, smart and beautiful all at once. Once you've seen the work, it stays in your head, assuming new meanings as time passes—which is the kind of experience offered by the Los Angeles-based artist Wendell Gladstone.

Gladstone's four new works here, made of vibrantly colored tapestry, fiberglass and clay, feature figures that are hybrids of humans and animals, which appear within fantastic fairy-tale scenes. Titled *Gestation*, *Union*, *Sacrifice* and *Renewal*, each piece seems to take up a mythical position where genders and differences among media are in a continuous, organic process of transmutation. Known in the past for making



Wendell Gladstone, *Union*, 2001.

artworks that were hybrids of painting and sculpture, Gladstone brings the two disciplines even closer here by actually connecting—as if by umbilical cords—painterly pieces hung on the wall to more sculptural works on the floor.

In *Gestation*, for example, the sculptures of two frog-human creatures (who contain two other female frogs, plus two male octopi in their throat sacks) project their tongues out in long strands of thread that weave together to form a tapestry in the shape of a butterfly on the gallery wall. Sewn onto each wing of this butterfly are the outlines of a headless man and woman, each of whom hold their severed heads in one hand and a candle in the other. In *Sacrifice*, human-octopus sculptural figures are gutting a male and a female deer.

Altogether, the works border on the nonsensical, as their hint of an epic narrative is too deeply enmeshed in Gladstone's lush symbology to be deciphered exactly. But their graphic verve still suggests a place where imagery worthy of the latest fantasy video games can meet the spiritual naturalism of Henry David Thoreau.

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