

ISOLATION INTERVIEWS  
STEPHANIE TEMMA HIER





## ISSUE 8

Continuing the Isolation Interviews: a new series of weekly artist profiles highlighting current concerns, accompanied by a selection of available works.

We know that these are precarious and uncertain times for everyone and with so many people staying at home, self-isolating or social distancing, we want to be able to continue sharing some of our favourite art and artists with you. The Isolation Interviews are a weekly series of conversations with artists that will explore how these new circumstances are affecting their practices and productivity. We'll hear how they are finding solutions - and even opportunities - and what their plans and hopes are for the future.

Brooke Benington is committed to supporting and creating opportunities for artists. We believe that this is needed now more than ever. Most artists are self-employed, often supplementing their income by working as technicians, fabricators, assistants, teachers and a whole host of other jobs. Now, many have very suddenly lost a vital source of income. With this in mind, we are accompanying each Isolation Interview with a curated selection of work by that artist, available for purchase.

Thank you for your continued support. Stay safe and look after one another.

Lily & George  
Directors, Brooke Benington



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**You are currently in lockdown in New York, one of the parts of the world worst affected by coronavirus. How have you coped during this time, have you had to adapt your practice or your way of working at all or are you fairly self-sufficient?**

Yep, I'm locked-down in NYC and have been for almost two months now. This whole experience has felt like an exercise in flexibility and it's been interesting to see how we can, both personally

and as a society, be so adaptable. Luckily my studio is a short bike ride from my apartment so I'm still able to be in there full time. I've taken some time to experiment with my materials and re-examine methodologies in my practice. It feels like an appropriate time to work this way given how in flux our realities have become.

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**You have previously said: "One way I've spoken about my work is in terms of speed, and the speed at which we consume and view [images]". Over the last few weeks, our relationship with and perception of time feels like it has shifted and through necessity screens have become even more embedded in our daily lives. Have these changes affected the way you think about your work and your work going forward?**

In a world over saturated by images consumed digitally in hyper-speed, my work offers a chance to slow down and digest the images we encounter from a more considered place. I'm really interested in what happens when digitally influenced images are transcribed in paint and clay, which are painstakingly slow processes. My work thus embraces the digital while remaining firmly rooted in the tangible, examining the tradition of painting in new ways informed by the contemporary world. It's true that the current circumstances have forced us to interact with the world from behind a computer or phone screen. This feels like an acceleration of a process which has been unfolding over the last decade or so. Personally, I feel an increased need to ground my work in it's materiality. Going to my studio and putting my hands into lumps of wet clay and endlessly mixing oil paints on my palette feel so much more necessary.

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**Could you talk about about the layering of imagery within your work - between the ceramic frames and the paintings, or the use of cartoons and graphics overlaying the paintings - and the relationship between these images?**

There are two aspects of my work which are sort of compulsive obsessions. The first is mining the internet for content and collecting hard drives full of stock



imagery, screen caps, images from library archives, images of canonical paintings and the list goes on. The second is my obsession with materials. There is a huge emphasis in my studio practice on experimenting with ceramic forms, techniques and glazes. I have a meticulous process of oil painting and care deeply about my materials and their histories. These passions have led me to examine the relationship between content and

form and between the sculptural and the painterly. I'm really interested in creating tension between the manifestations of my work. So the sculptural frames contrast the oil paint in both their material processes and their content. I sometimes layer imagery to a similar end. The result is a series of invented relationships, new narratives arise from found imagery when they enter the lexicon of my work and have been transcribed by my hand.



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Your paintings appear influenced by, or routed in, an art historical context - be that the Dutch Masters, Arts & Crafts, or Minton Majolica ceramics - but all viewed through a contemporary lens. Is this balance or tension between past and present something you actively pursue in your practice?

My interest in historical techniques comes from the same place as my interest in digital imagery. Scrolling through the rabbit hole that is the internet, one can come across an 19th century painting next to a meme or a stock image. I like to think of this as a democratization of images. Despite all the deeply troubling ways in which the internet operates, I really do believe that images no longer have a hierarchy online and I like to mirror that in my work. The tension that I'm often after in my work can definitely be found in pairing art historical reference with lumpy ceramic or cartoon imagery. Although this feels like a sort of tongue-in-cheek reason to include reference to the Old Masters, I am also sincerely paying homage to their work. As I mentioned, I'm a lover of materials and I find a lot of meaning and merit in the work of the artists that came before us.

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Could you tell us how you developed your unique hybrid style of using sculpted ceramic frames for your paintings? And could you talk us through your process? Are the frames a reaction to the paintings or vice versa?

So, I like to think of myself as a painter first and foremost. But the process of making these "sculptural paintings" (as I like to refer to them) really came about naturally and is something I've been developing for a while now. Several years ago, I picked up a glass of water. Taking a drink, I began to think about the relationship between the water and its



vessel and in what ways my consumption of the water was like the apprehension of painting. I couldn't drink the water without its container, and thus I thought to contextualize my painting within it's own framework. My experience of the water also changed based on the glass which carried it to my lips, and so I wanted to similarly change the experience of painting with it's own contextualizing vessel.

I'd be happy to go into the details of the process as well. The work begins as raw clay. I use simple wooden tools and my fingers to sculpt myriad forms which twist around rectangular clay frames. I allow these sculptures to slowly dry before their first firing in my ceramic kiln. The kiln fires for twelve hours and reaches temperatures over 1000 degrees celsius. After the first firing I glaze the pieces in my own hand-made glazes. My glazes are made with earthly minerals and oxides and I spend a fair amount of time in the studio testing and experimenting with various glaze recipes. The frames, ceramic sculptures in their own right, act as vessels for the paintings which come next. Once my sculptural frames are completed, I custom-build stretcher

bars to fit snugly inside the undulating confines of the ceramic. Reacting to the frames, I begin playing with images until a fitting relationship emerges. These images become paintings through a fairly precise process where oil is laid down in multiple layers and finished off with a low-gloss varnishing resin.

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In this time of isolation and social distancing we are starting to see people find new ways of coming together apart; of sharing ideas and creating, of caring and communicating. Has anything in particular stood out to you? Are there changes you think could or should be made while the world pauses and waits to see what happens next?

It's been great to see how resilient the art world is. There have been a lot of

interesting online initiatives and I've been enjoying seeing an increase in online art content to wile away my hours. I've also loved seeing what everyone has been cooking on Instagram! That said, I know I'm not alone in anxiously awaiting a return to the life we knew before COVID, but I have a lot of fears about what world we will even find there when we leave our houses. Times of crisis are often times of dramatic political change. It's important not to let this moment go to waste and to come together and demand things like universal health care (here in the US) and expanded social programs especially given the economic collapse we are witnessing. While I believe in these things deeply, political action will have to take different forms under our new circumstances. For now, like everyone else, I'm just waiting and watching while the tectonic plates of history shift beneath us.





## STEPHANIE TEMMA HIER

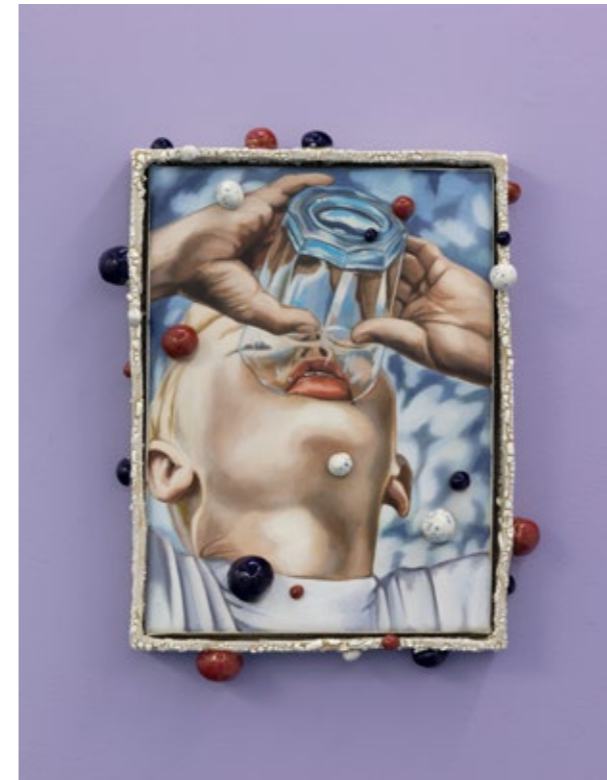
Stephanie Temma Hier (b. 1992, Toronto, Canada) lives and works in New York. She holds a BFA from the Ontario College of Art and Design University, Toronto, and studied at the Academy of Art Canada, Toronto. She has produced solo and two person shows at *Franz Kaka gallery* (Toronto), *Y2K Group* (New York), *David Dale* (Glasgow), *Downs and Ross* (New York), *Neochrome Gallery* (Turin), *Three Four Three Four* (New York), *Ed. Varie Gallery* at *NADA* (New York) and *Johannes Vogt* (New York). Hier has also exhibited internationally at venues such as *Antoine Ertaskiran* (Montreal), *Thierry Goldberg* (New York), *Plus One Gallery* (Antwerp), *Anonymous Gallery* (Mexico City), *Bureau* (New York), *The Kitchen* (New York), *Museo della Frutta* (Turin), *The Power Plant* (Toronto), *Art Gallery of Ontario* (Toronto). Hier is the recipient of multiple grants from Canada Council for the Arts, the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation and has participated in residencies at *Hospitalfield* (Scotland) and *Shandaken: Stormking* (New York) and *Salon Nino Mier* (Cologne). Hier was also a finalist for the RBC Painting competition in 2016 and 2018.



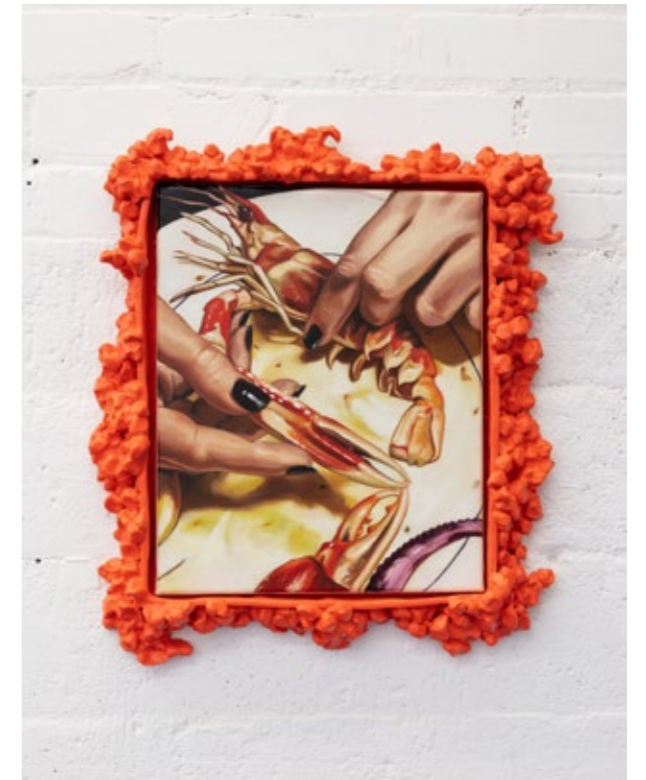
*I was Taken by a Photograph of you*, 2019  
 Oil on canvas with glazed stoneware sculpture  
 33 x 25 x 5 cm  
 13 x 10 x 2 in.



*Soft Options*, 2018  
 Oil and temporary tattoo on canvas with glazed stoneware and elk hair sculpture  
 38 x 33 x 5 cm  
 15 x 13 x 2 in.



*But a childish toy*, 2020  
 Oil and ceramic on canvas with glazed stoneware sculpture  
 36 x 28 x 31 cm  
 14 x 11 x 2 in.



*Wonderful for other people*, 2020  
 Oil on linen with glazed stoneware sculpture  
 51 x 43 x 6 cm  
 20 x 17 x 2.5 in.



*Green grass Finely shorn*, 2020  
 Oil on linen with glazed stoneware sculpture  
 76 x 66 x 15 cm  
 30 x 26 x 6 in.



*Spring now comes unheralded*, 2020  
 Oil on linen with glazed stoneware sculpture  
 51 x 40 x 8 cm  
 20 x 16 x 3 in.

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