

Art in Review

Sean Landers

'North American Mammals'

Petzel

456 West 18th Street, Chelsea
Through Saturday

Walking into Sean Landers's latest show, you might wonder whether the artist — known for his solipsistic, often verbose musings on the creative life — now aspires to the role of an upper-crust gentleman, albeit one with a sly Magrittean sense of humor. Paintings of animals with plaid-patterned coats line one room; another has been transformed into a kind of library, with trompe l'oeil bookshelves.

In fact, Mr. Landers's signature monologues are still there, embedded deep in the backgrounds of his animal paintings or hidden in the book spines of the library canvases (bodies of work linked, upon closer inspection, by subtle visual and textual clues). They're also in the titles; the image of a jaguar sipping from a stream, for instance, is called "The Urgent Necessity of Narcissism for the Artistic Mind," and relates to an inspirational narrative about



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK

Sean Landers's painting "Proximate Strangers (Coyote and Crow)" at Petzel.

the artist's grandmother (an art teacher who "believed she was a great painter and it was just a matter of time before she was discovered and triumphantly recognized.")

The cute tartan-covered creatures, it seems, are not hunting trophies; they're spirit animals, meant to guide an emotionally vulnerable artist through the sometimes ego-bruising process of making and showing his

work.

Another possibility, however, is suggested by a final group of paintings based on "Moby-Dick." Here, in a 28-foot-wide painting of Melville's white whale and two smaller scenes of wrecked ships on the ocean floor, are darker ruminations on artistic ambition (and, perhaps, a suitably complex literary model for Mr. Landers's rambling confessionals).

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