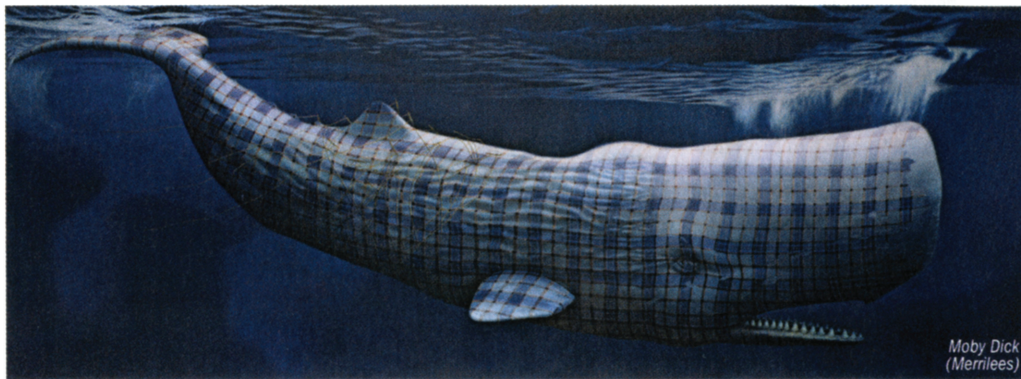


Art

Sean Landers, “North American Mammals”



*Moby Dick
(Merrilees)*



*Strange
Progeny
(Fawn)*

★★★★★

Petzel Gallery, through Sat 20
(see Chelsea)

Sean Landers emerged in the early 1990s as a sculptor, doodler and scrawler of self-deprecating stream-of-consciousness rants, but lately, he's persuasively made his mark as a painter. At the center of his latest outing, he presents nine portraits of wild animals in naturalistic habitats sporting plaid fur. They look like especially realistic plush toys or

creatures genetically engineered for human tastes.

These canvases impressively encroach the environmental territory of Alexis Rockman or Walton Ford, yet the expressive beasts seem marvelously self-aware—lumbersexuals in flannel pelts, lost somewhere between the forest and Bedford Avenue. The big-eyed young doe in *Strange Progeny (Fawn)*, for example, obviously wears her blingy gold necklace ironically.

In a side gallery, nine corresponding paintings feature

the same animals, sans plaid, seen inside snow globes sitting on well-stocked bookshelves. The titles written on the spines of the books spell out first-person musings on the fleetingness of existence and the endurance of art. The staccato reading this arrangement induces somehow gives a touching sense of real existential grappling.

In the back room, two paintings of shipwrecks flank *Moby Dick (Merrilees)*, a magnificent 28-foot-long canvas of a sperm whale, upholstered in plaid and trailing

harpoons. Inscriptions carved on rocks near the submerged schooners slyly ponder the conundrum of *ars longa, vita brevis*, making it clear that the tartan-patterned animals are Landers's harpoons, comically unlikely shots at the great white whale of artistic immortality. He knows failure is practically guaranteed as his elusive prey sinks into the soundless depths. Call him Ishmael.—*Joseph R. Wolin*

THE BOTTOM LINE Animal Planet comes to Chelsea.