

# tema celeste

contemporaryart

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## Miranda Lichtenstein

Goldman Tevis, Los Angeles

As a photographer who uses a conceptual framework to treat romantic subjects, Miranda Lichtenstein illuminates a contemporary paradox. In her "Wild Child" series, Lichtenstein climbs the high mountain of aesthetic abandon, but she does it with the tools of rational analysis, ultimately insisting that this enchanting peak, boundless as it may appear at first glance, is nothing more than the product of a culturally conditioned gaze, artificial through and through. In her Los Angeles show, which ran concurrently with her exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Phillip Morris in New York, Lichtenstein further elaborates her earlier appropriations of wild child legends, those fictive accounts of human children raised by feral beasts. The exhibition presents an animated menagerie in a series of color photographs: nesting geese squawking at an unseen menace, an angry wolf snarling at a sprig of holly, a prancing shadow of a horse. At first glance, these works seem to closely follow Lichtenstein's previous explorations of dark and eerie natural settings, but upon closer inspection the animal subjects reveal themselves as fakes. The feathers are a bit too perfect, the sky is too consistent, the proportions are all askew. A ten-foot vinyl tarp obstructing the doorway of the gallery has been screen-printed with a giant collage of running hens, a steadfast ram, a maternally indignant bear, an agile gazelle, and other creatures drawn from the wild child mythologies of multiple cultures. The collage looks like something a child might make to plot her own social system, yet its sheer scale and presence bestow an iconic authority upon the dubious narrative. As is clear in the example of Romulus and Remus, who were said to have founded Rome after a childhood of suckling a she-wolf, we humans often claim ultranatural origins for our most contrived structures. Lichtenstein delves into the dynamics of this impulse to bury the conceptual within the earthy—a valiant but ultimately impossible attempt to represent body as dominant over mind. The symbiotic relationship of fantasy and history, of natural bounty and manufactured product, suggests that we who consider ourselves civilized have gone too far to return to the succor of our fierce mother, the animal.

Malik Gaines

