

And Digestion detail

Katya Tepper • b is for backwards b (d)

The Hand • September 30 – October 23, 2016

Opening reception: Friday, September 30, 6–9 pm

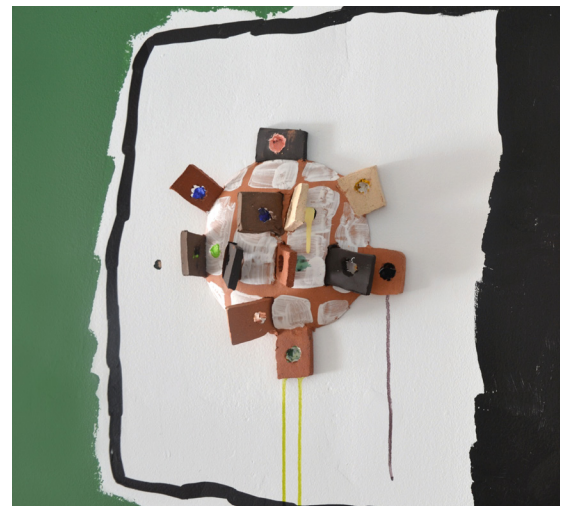
The Hand is proud to present **b is for backwards b (d)**, an installation of new work by Katya Tepper.

Taking spatial cues from the layout of the gallery, clay sculptures are grouped and then painted over to form murals. These murals—**Start**, **Green Column**, **Double Stripe**, **And Digestion**, **Fat Stripe**, and **Window Wall**—form the larger installation that is **b is for backwards b (d)**. The sculptures, or **Wall Bowls**, are the building blocks; the wall-painting the connective tissue. Painted shapes link the bowls as if, hung together, they grew an apparatus with which to communicate. An aesthetic field leaches out, spreading and speaking across the wall.

Like the words in a sentence, the **Wall Bowls** are the loci of power. They pulse at the center of their color fields, or along their tracks, dominating the space, reaching out with their feelers, tugging at the base of our brains with undeniable familiarity. Not in the sense that a clock or a telephone is familiar, but rather in the way that any rounded, distended forms are familiar to all humans. We all have heads, and we all have bellies. And the bowl itself is undoubtedly one of the earliest human tools, coded into our brains alongside the wedge, the club, the pointed stick.

The repeated specter of the bowl becomes a baseline. From the safety of the familiar shape we can traverse the irrational, the horrifying, the hilarious.

Wall Bowl (Good Game) reads like a helmet knocked from a wounded warrior. It is the deflated soccer ball that's been punctured and ripped and violated, but also deified. It is a trophy. Paint drips from the



Window Wall detail, featuring Wall Bowl (Good Game)

sculpture, fluids streaming from the shrunken head. The team has lost the game of *ullamaliztli*, and the coach has been freshly decapitated, ready for sacrifice.

The wall mural **And Digestion** gives us a vision of the body that is neither healthy nor sick, alive nor dead. The body—the bowl—at once consumes and produces. The actions of expelling, stabbing, penetrating, slicing in half—in other words, the breaking down of the sanctity of the body as a single unit—are portrayed with the loving but amoral hand of a curious child. We have sex, we take shits, we grow, we break down.

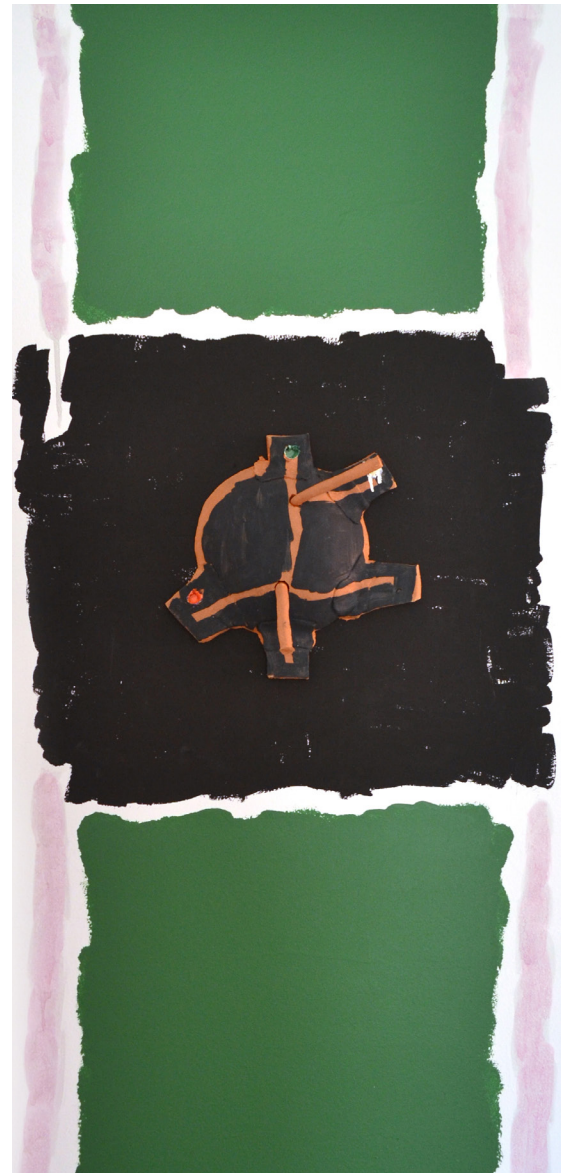
Wall Bowl (Black Stick) evokes illuminated cave paintings of animals in flight. As you move closer, the bowl itself, black and red, becomes itself the flayed animal: the hide stretched on the wall, the body bloated with worms and decay. But the larger mural, **Green Column**, sandwiches **Wall Bowl (Black Stick)** between two benign slabs of green, a pink outline solidifying the connection. What reads as horror in language becomes ridiculous in the object. Jokes crafted in darkness are always the ones that hit the most pleasurable, mirrored nerves of desolation and the absurd. As Mel Brooks explains, “Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall into an open sewer and die.”

This work welcomes us into such an intuitive place that the fantastical readings it provokes—sentimental projections, irrational fears, vague similarities—only magnify its power.

b is for backwards b (d) creates a circular language that speaks in contradictions, but without confusion. A bowl feeds a body feels like a bowl is a body is a bowl. The most simple inversions reveal how strangely rigid our relationship to the world can become.

Text by Maren Miller

Katya Tepper (b. 1987, Lake Worth, FL) is an artist based in Athens, GA. She earned her BFA from The Cooper Union in 2010. **b is for backwards b (d)** is her first solo show in New York.



Green Column detail, featuring Wall Bowl (Black Stick)