

Anton Kern Gallery

Stephanie Temma Hier *Swan Song*

January 14 - February 21, 2026

Anton Kern Gallery presents Stephanie Temma Hier's *Swan Song*, the artist's first exhibition with the gallery. The show features ten new oil paintings each set within a hand-sculpted ceramic frame, three ceramic and resin-encased drawings, and a surreal tableau of maquettes and preparatory sketches. Evoking household objects like chairs and place settings, shoes and coats, the works form a whimsical and otherworldly feeling of home on the gallery's third floor.

In its mischievous and often uncanny sense of play, *Swan Song* challenges our assumptions about the boundaries between subject and object, between form and function, and between two and three dimensional states of being. Paintings press outward, refusing to remain flat as their ceramic settings create unexpected depth. The artist's drawings appear held in place by their clear resin frames, as if to keep them from coming to life. Small sculptures and preparatory fragments cluster together on a wooden table carved with watchful eyes, suggesting a site of rehearsal, accumulation, and obsessive iteration.

Hier's process embodies the same dynamic tensions that are captured in her finished works. Before creating a painting, she starts by creating its ceramic frame by hand—carefully shaping it before firing it multiple times to achieve richly layered surfaces. Using a variety of both handmade and commercial glazes, she is drawn to the surprises and discoveries that are revealed to her when she places her pieces in the kiln. Once the frame is finished, Hier starts to imagine the oil painting that will fit within it. Drawing from personal photographs, vintage print materials, and images sourced online, she allows the work's themes to surface through free associations. The many oppositions in her work—animal/object, domestic/fantastic, commonplace/absurd—are held in tension until they give rise to a Jungian “third thing”: an uncanny form that does not resolve contradiction but embodies it and links the raised ceramic body and flat painted interior in a new hybrid life.

The show's centerpiece is a sculpture titled *She Has Good Bones*, a thronelike chair formed from the white-and-gray body of a ceramic swan. Its neck arcs gracefully into an O, constituting the back of the chair and discreetly cradling a tiny oil painting, within which forks and champagne glasses dance. The swan is covered with hundreds of beautiful diamond-shaped feathers and rests on four sturdy webbed feet. The work announces the swan, a creature at once delicate and commanding, as the exhibition's guiding motif—and as a figure of unexpected power and solidity. Across the additional works in the exhibition, swans migrate and re-appear. They are featured in paintings (*Hold This Position (Left)* and *Hold This Position (Right)*), in sculptures (*We Slept with the Lights On* and a *She Has Good Bones* maquette), and in smaller objects, such as a swan-shaped shoehorn. In *Swan Song*, the swan lives in a state of continual transformation.



Stephanie Temma Hier, *Hold this position (right)*, 2025, Oil on linen with glazed stoneware sculpture, 60 x 48 x 10 inches (152.4 x 121.9 x 25.4 cm)

The exhibition's three largest paintings—*Hold This Position (Left)*, *Hold This Position (Right)*, and *Not What I Ordered*—are connected by a shared formal language: each is framed by sculpted women's shoes (including high heels, Mary Janes, velcro sneakers, and roller skates) and features the same swan-and-silverware motif as *She Has Good Bones*. In the *Hold This Position* paintings, swans are poised with dramatic, sinuous necks, similar to the form of the sculpted chair. *Not What I Ordered* presents a layered image that juxtaposes an eccentric item of ladies footwear with a formal place setting. A single open toed sandal with a tomato for a heel is superimposed on a quartet of tortoiseshell utensils—a fork, a knife, a carving utensil, and a spoon—each standing erect.

The exhibition's motifs create a sense of compulsive return, as if they are rehearsing their roles for a drama that is still to come. This repetition continues through images of food, hands, and the tactile insistence of calf-hair textures. Within a single work, this repetition is most exemplified by *Something Sweet for Afterwards 1–3*, a three-part piece depicting cakes and coffee at different stages of consumption, paired with flowers in varying states of bloom. On the surface, the sweets recall the soft, indulgent confections of Claes Oldenburg, perfectly delectable and inviting. Yet this familiarity is quietly destabilized by signs of use: bitten edges, partial servings, and remnants left behind. These signs of decay evoke Jan Švankmajer's film *Food*, in which everyday acts of eating are transformed into absurd and destructive rituals. Consumption in *Something Sweet* is not so much about the pleasure of enjoying a nice dessert but about the passage of time and the disorder we leave behind.

Within Hier's meticulously constructed world, viewers enter into a domestic space that feels restlessly active and unresolvable. *Swan Song* allows familiar objects to shift away from their expected functions and meanings. The work *Don't bite til you know if it's bread or stone* elegantly captures this: silverware stands upright within a ceramic frame, itself overtaken by climbing roses. The tools of our ordinary, everyday lives are suspended, waiting for a function that may never fully arrive. And the floral lattice, typically a decoration, has become both our protection and our enclosure.

Stephanie Temma Hier lives and works in Brooklyn, United States. 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 presented solo exhibitions at Bradley Ertaskiran (Montreal), Gallery Vacancy (Shanghai), Massimo de Carlo Pièce Unique (Paris), Nino Mier (Los Angeles & Brussels), David Dale (Glasgow), Downs and Ross (New York), and Neochrome Gallery (Turin). Notable group exhibitions have been staged at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery (Toronto), the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), Anat Ebgi (New York), Kotaro Nukaga (Tokyo), Jeffrey Deitch (Los Angeles), Rodolphe Janssen (Brussels), Galerie Hussonot (Paris), Kasmin Gallery (New York), and Friends Indeed Gallery (San Francisco), among others. Stephanie Temma Hier's work is held in the permanent collections of the X Museum (Beijing), The Contemporary Art Foundation (Tokyo), the Longlati Foundation (Shanghai), ICA Miami, and the Mint Museum (Charlotte).