

Anton Kern Gallery

Lin May Saeed

May 12 — July 2, 2026

“Animals are my friends, and I don’t eat my friends.”

—George Bernard Shaw

Among the less obnoxious ways to express a dietary preference, Shaw’s aphorism is my go-to. While I didn’t learn it from Lin, I might not have learned it without her. It also has her spirit, even if it’s not something she’d say (she was fairly quiet, and not prone to sloganeering for her cause).

Shaw’s words share some of Lin’s playfulness and lightness of touch, with both her polemics and her materials (she sculpted mainly from Styrofoam). They also extend an earnest—if fanciful, unilateral, and anthropomorphic—hand of friendship to the nonhuman other, friendship being the durable alloy of solidarity and love.

The Irish playwright (Shaw), ever the showman, was a type recognizable to Lin, who designed stage sets before going to art school. In theatre she honed an anti-academic scrappiness, in addition to the *mise-en-scène* sensibility by which she disposed figures across the surface of her sculptural reliefs. Part-image, part-object, these painted foam panels follow no rules.

Lin also made works to be seen in the round, like the menagerie of bronzes on view here. She often named her figures (*Peri*), though not always (*Spotted Hyena*); her animals are usually based on actual species, though not always (*Kofi*). And yet it is only from our interspecies ignorance that actual creatures (*Anteater*) might seem improbable. Lin was suspicious of cuteness.

Any of these animals could generate its own scene and we might picture it listed in a *dramatis personae*: the big cat who is slightly off-kilter; the big-eared prey on high alert; the docile *Kofi* and its mace-like horn (strictly for self-defense, of course). Each of them is curious, in the sense both of being strange and of exhibiting curiosity, another word for intelligence.

Early on, Lin’s animals sat atop crates, as *Kofi* does, to narrativize animal liberation (where rights, as such, remain abstract). In a series of welded steel gates, she showed animals breaking free, whether with their claws (*Lobster*) or, in earlier works, with the help of humans wielding bolt cutters. Simple but not naïve, Lin’s works open onto other ways of living, the kind children demand and adults deny.

Thinking with Lin, reading from her bookshelf, made me a vegetarian (she changed my mind, then my body). She knew what comes from might-makes-right logic and from animalizing humans; she knew this, epigenetically and actually, as a Jew and an Iraqi in Germany. She did not conflate the suffering of humans and other animals, but made art against the casual violence we do daily.

To speak of Lin’s lightness and play is to speak of her irreverence. In many works, she depicted human folly and animal revenge with a dark sense of humor, a corrective to human hubris. But it is also to speak of her freedom. When she loved another artist’s work, she would say how free they are, unencumbered in thinking and making. She wanted the same for her friends.

—Robert Wiesenberger



Lin May Saeed, *Ghazal Relief*, 2022, Styrofoam, acrylic paint, plaster, ceramics, plastic net, cotton balls, 57 1/8 x 78 3/4 x 9 7/8 inches (145 x 200 x 25 cm)

Lin May Saeed (1973–2023) was a German-Iraqi artist and animal rights activist. The question of coexistence between humans and animals also found its way into Saeed's artistic practice. She worked primarily with sculptures, often made from simple materials such as Styrofoam, and developed a visual language that intertwined mythological, religious, and activist narratives. Her works and writings proposed a compassionate reconception of the relationships between species and depicted liberation and reconciliation as sculptural and social acts.

In 2023, the artist passed away shortly before the opening of her solo exhibition *The Snow Falls Slowly in Paradise* at the Georg Kolbe Museum in Berlin. Posthumously, her work was presented in solo exhibitions at GAMeC (Bergamo, 2024), Sapieha Palace in Vilnius (2025), and Buitenplaats Kasteel Wijlre (2025). Her work was also on view at Manifesta 15 (Barcelona, 2024), Biennale Gherdëina 9 (Ortisei, 2024), and the 9th Berlin Biennale (Berlin, 2016). Her group exhibitions include presentations at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2018), Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (2021), and Museo Castello di Rivoli (2018). Her works are included in major collections, including the Centre Pompidou Paris, the National Museum of Art in Oslo, the Museum Folkwang in Essen, the Westfälisches Landesmuseum, and the Collection of Contemporary Art of the Federal Republic of Germany.