

MADLINE VON FOERSTER

Unicornus, 2009

Oil and egg tempera on panel, 69 x 42 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

AUSTIN SANCHEZ-MORAN

Clara
(1741–1758)

I. As a Child Desired

Her invaluable mother was shot on a whim,
And so at three months, Clara ate from a gilded
Dutch plate.

She was raised in the wealthy household of a seaman,
named Van de Meer, who thought it right to sail her
in the cargo hold with the cigars and the Assam Tea.

The Sailors fed her hay and IPAs,
smitten with her thick skin and almost-seduction:
she was a mermaid, a sexual substitute.
And the goats grazed around Clara's legs.
Mesmerized by the tropical rocking,
the heady smell of tobacco, and the salty fish oil
on her body, continually, all the way
from Calcutta to Rotterdam, Clara was
a one-horned, odd-toed ungulate in a third-eyed trance.

II. As an Object Desired

Now on tour in a shockless stagecoach,
only the Holy Roman theologians felt comfortable
with copies of her in saintly porcelain and alabaster,
fragile, just out of the kiln. The masses wanted to
have her
and would have given her black currants for all of
her blisters.

The model for Dürer's misrepresentation, (missing
her dorsal
horn and her flowering jawbone) she showed the throngs
that she was a measure of leisure in the orangerie.
This German greenhouse is where she found love
in hands that fed her fallen citrus.
Her nostrils flared with the sweetness shown.
In a bronze cage, beneath the regal glazed
roof, the Black Forest's snowy pines
reflected back onto a rhinoceros under a cupola.

III. As a Subject Desired

She backtracked Hannibal's path through the Alps,
even though the price of her presence at Versailles
was almost
too high for the Beloved King who needed company
for his camel, his pelicans, and his seals. And the
powdered wigs
sauntered with elderflower liqueur and champagne
in a coupe.

Then, that spring, she hit the fair in Paris.
The "exotic gargantuan" even impressed the ladies.
And Casanova took note. Handing out the rococo
trinkets and bracelets made from macaw feathers
and wing bones, he hoped that some Madame
would remember
the myth of Pasiphaë. And he could be that
backdoor man
hidden behind the cardboard cutout of a rhino.
And that's what Clara felt like, after a while,
without heft and unattuned to the arias of sensation.

Austin Sanchez-Moran received his MFA in Poetry from George Mason University where he was a Laanan Fellow and then an Honors Fellow. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly*, *Fjords Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *Texas Review*, among others.