

Jenine Marsh

*always with*

Text for solo exhibition at Stride Gallery 2017.

It stands in the way, the creature, a familiar sight. Beyond reliable, it is always there, in the way. It is a nearly-constant companion, in a nearly-constant state of apprehension. It looks back at me with mild astonishment, for it is as different to me as I am to it. But its strangeness is unlesened by looking.

I am fascinated by its body, which, being so like mine, elicits my shame and pride, attraction and repulsion, and always some amount of surprise. It never looks how I expect, how I remember or imagine it. Its body forms and deforms, from blueish watery formlessness, to blackish erect rigidity. Muscle and fat ripple, and the bones move right below a skin of transparent rubber and scaled leather. Its unseen anatomy bewilders, known only through assumption and rumor. I know that its liver is in the wrong place, on the other side. I wonder if this effects intoxication.

Our eyes meet with hesitation, so I let my gaze be medical, to analyze the way the eyes are different at each meeting, the way they spark like static, like hate, like love. It has the eyes of a child that hasn't learned not to stare. I can't meet its eyes like those of a friend or even of a stranger of my own species, into which I'm quickly absorbed, and which seem to disappear like words on a page when the text engrosses. The creature's eyes do not vanish. Instead of being absorbed in them, they reflect like glass, returning my stare from some uncrossable distance.

Does anyone notice us? Is the drama of our insecure relationship on anyone's minds but ours? If we are noticed, we must appear to be friends or lovers, and yet in the next moment we'd seem to be enemies. We flirt, strut, preen and show off for each other. We turn our backs, we glare, shooting accusing and wounded glances. We accompany, we shadow, we hound, we mock, we impersonate, we emulate; we try to be alike, we try to be different, we try to change. But most often, and especially in public, we behave like strangers, or like acquaintances who pretend to not see or recognize each other. Or, we remain silent like an old married couple, who do not speak, do not need to. They act alone together. I suppose this is all true with us.

Maybe it is loneliness that makes me think these things, these things we'll never speak about. This is an intimacy I should be used to by now.