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# Picture This

BY ANDREA DINOTO

Chris Antemann: Battle of the Britches  
Jason Walker: Human Made Wild  
**Ferrin Gallery**  
Pittsfield, Massachusetts  
August 1 – September 12, 2009

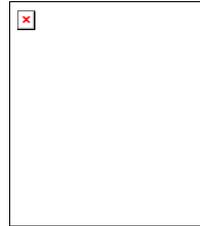
Both of these concurrent shows of surface-decorated ceramic sculpture present startling, witty and subversive works by a second-generation artist of the genre.

Are we having fun yet? might be what Chris Antemann's playfully erotic porcelain figurines are wondering as, in her words, they investigate "the struggle for dominance within the domestic experience." If this phrase sounds dryly academic, imagine instead Meissen figural groups unleashed, performing in their own reality show in which twosomes, threesomes, foursomes, and even sixsomes engage in—or contemplate—tea-time sex in various rococo settings. Antemann's finely modeled large-scale (10- to 12-inch) figurines retain an 18th-century stylistic sensibility through the use of original Meissen floral decals meticulously applied to suggest flimsy garments that barely conceal youthful, eroticized bodies. But unlike their coy historical antecedents, Antemann's groups trade sidelong glances of curiosity and suspicion that befit our own age of sexual anxiety and domestic stress. In one of the more amusing groups, *Wardrobe*, two males in floral dresses enjoy tea while casting wary eyes beyond their closet-like enclosure. Kevin Moholt's detailed color photos hanging in the gallery further reveal Antemann's uncanny ability to render facial expression in freeze-frame moments of near-cinematic power. However, it's odd that the faces of both male and female figures often appear to be identical and, to this viewer at least, bear an inexplicable resemblance to the doe-eyed actress Cate Blanchett.

In his Human Made Wild series, Jason Walker's does are real ones, as are his squirrels, bears, pigeons and frogs, all of which he decorates with finely rendered monochrome brushwork paintings of idealized/despoiled landscapes and cityscapes. This surreal concept is Walker's attempt to express what he sees as the interface between nature and culture, specifically the ways in which animals and humans are dealing with mutual encroachment of their habitats. Each of his large, totemic figures serves as a vector for a visual narrative that is on one level deeply pessimistic. And yet each animal retains its dignity as an impassive force of nature, often despite Walker's perverse morphological embellishments—carburetor hoses protruding from a deer's rear end, an oil can cap or a lead pipe where a tail should be. One of the more commanding pieces is the deliberately redundantly titled *Wild Savage*, a 22-inch-high standing bear holding a weapon and a tool, its face suggestive of Northwest Coast Indian masks. The animal's front torso is painted with a broken tree in an arid landscape, while its back depicts a deer in a peaceful valley, both scenes drawn in deep perspective so that the effect visually is one of adaptation and embodiment—the wild animal made savage by his human attributes; or is it the other way around? In Walker's world, evolution works both ways.

Andrea DiNoto is a New York-based writer on art, craft and design.

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[1/4] [Chris Antemann, Wardrobe, 2009, porcelain, decals, luster, 18 x 12 x 8 inches.](#)

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| **Contact** | 72 Spring St, 6th Flr, New York, New York 10012 | 212.274.0630 | [letters@craftcouncil.org](mailto:letters@craftcouncil.org) | **Customer Service** |