

John Jones Gallery: Chimera

John Kavanagh reviews "Chimera" at John Jones Gallery

The name John Jones needs no introduction to practising artists and gallery owners – since the 1960's the company has become famous for its stretchers, panels, framing and printing services, among many others. What is probably less known is that the company also runs a not-for-profit gallery space to showcase art by emerging and established artists working in a wide variety of media and also to show pieces from the John Jones collection.

I visited the John Jones Gallery space in Finsbury Park for the private view of their latest exhibition, *Chimera*, curated by Annika Erikson and featuring works by Lela Shields, Juliette Losq, Lightning and Kinglyface and Axel Forrester.

In Greek mythology, the Chimera was a monstrous hybrid beast. According to Homer's *Iliad*, "...she was of divine stock, not of men, in the fore part a lion, in the hinder a serpent, and in the midst a goat, breathing forth in terrible wise the might of blazing fire".

Most of the works in this exhibition are images of similarly fantastical creatures by the American artist, Lela Shields. Shields says that she draws her inspiration in part from 17th century “cabinets of curiosity”. The works on display here certainly live up to the theme of the exhibition; in pen and ink, gouache and glitter, her drawings are disturbing, arresting and surprisingly delicate. Her 2004 drawing, *From the Void*, is particularly striking - what seems to be a human female torso with the head of a wolf has both an arm and a bird’s wing, flowers and petals issuing from its abdomen in the place of the expected entrails. These creatures are not mere monsters – they have a mystery and sadness about them which is strangely touching.

There are also two large scale works on display by London-based artist, Juliette Losq. Her drawing skills are exceptional as one would expect from a past winner of the Jerwood Drawing Prize. Her complete mastery of the medium is particularly evident and impressive in *Hexenring*; the light and shade and the use of colour are subtle but exceptionally atmospheric. She depicts a scene so forensically rich in detail that one imagines that something significant must have happened here, although what that might have been remains a mystery.

Also on view at the exhibition is a short video, *Severance*, by Axel Forrester, an American artist currently living in London. It follows a string of commuters travelling on the Paris Métro, with eyes closed or staring into space. It is an interesting and visually appealing study of the phenomenon of moving alone in and through public places, being surrounded by people but remaining disconnected.

This is a fascinating and unusual exhibition and there are some fine works to see here, most of which happen also to be on sale at extremely realistic and affordable prices, with Lela Shields’ limited edition prints costing only £100 each. In my opinion, they certainly deserve to find a home in some discerning current day buyers’ “cabinets of curiosity”.

John Kavanagh