

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE



Haiku Reviews

Emilie Clark would seem to have bitten off more than she could chew. But she's not serving herself, she's serving us lessons about ecology, about composting, about recycling as nature's entropic state, and, most important here, about turning all this thinking and doing into visual art. It would perhaps have sufficed had Clark simply presented her tables and shelves laden with edible discards rescued from her own kitchen over the course of a year, as she does at the center of this exhibition. But (at least until pressed into performative service) that strategy would only have built, rather weakly, on decades of post-hippie earth art. Instead, Clark has amplified her installation crucially, festooning the walls with small, energy-packed drawings and larger, magnificent paintings whose formal language clearly derives from the tendrillous, decaying things she has been wrestling with. Also delightfully augmenting Clark's funky laboratory is her documentary text, *The Art of Right Living*, interjected as audio recitation and limited-edition chapbook. The writing, at least as literary as it is diaristic, accounts for the method to Clark's gentle madness. But it's in the most traditional elements of this exhibition, its paintings and drawings, that that madness comes rushing fully to the fore. The drawings seem to be growing their own plant life even as they observe plant life a-growing; they seem to begin as clinical descriptions of smaller botanical forms and then get infected by natural process, burgeoning organically into fantastical vines and entrails. The tumultuous forms and colors that have taken over Clark's canvases seem even more unleashed, swelling and proliferating less like plants than like the clouds of a gathering storm. These paintings, gravid with energy and irrepressible drive, manifest a kind of Kantian sublime: they allow us to observe from afar a force of nature that would surely engulf us were we near enough. (Morgan Lehman, 535 West 22nd St., NY; thru Oct. 20. www.morganlehmangallery.com)

– Peter Frank