

SIMONE EISLER PROGENY



Opening Hours
During Exhibition periods
Thursday - Friday: 11am - 5pm
Saturday: 12pm - 4pm

Back page image: *Flutter Flower*, 2015
Front page image: *Fur Tendril*, 2015

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SIMONE EISLER: TRANSMUTATIONS

By Marisa Georgiou

Simone Eisler's opulent beings unite sky, water and earth in transformative combinations. Copper, feather, scale and fur coil together and animate each other in mimicry of natural patterns of growth and evolution. *Progeny* conceptualises benevolent hybrid beings: products of an environment of unification where the fundamental biological and historical systems that we are familiar with become distorted. In this imagined world, external textures usually for beauty and armour line forms which have been spliced and inverted; blurring the line between attraction and desirability, protection and what is protected. Reminiscent of a talisman, Eisler employs her own form of visual alchemy to combine and transfigure form and surface in utopian pluralities.

Alchemy, the medieval forerunner of chemistry, is heavily concerned with the transfiguration of matter, in particular with attempts to convert base metals into gold, or to find a universal remedy. It is described by Paul-Jacques Malouin in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot* as "chemistry of the subtlest kind which allows us to understand extraordinary chemical operations executing at a more rapid pace those things that require a long time for nature to produce".¹ Similarly, Eisler has created hybrid beings whose evolution has been sped up, better suited to inhabit a mythical utopian world where humans and their environment are cohesive and gently integrated; her own universal remedy.

"I am interested in a new world where humans no longer create animals in their own image but are equally part of the mix; equally vulnerable and intertwined."²

Working across photography, sculpture, installation and performance, Eisler maintains a hybrid and fluid practice. Each body of work draws on previous work, often directly constructed from elements of the last. She makes a sculpture, and might then photograph it, take a mould of it, or perform with it, in an evolutionary process that is unrestricted by medium. The title, *Progeny*, is a direct reference to this process, as these works are deeper inquiries of themes that emerged in earlier series. However, the focus has shifted slightly to a more direct investigation of natural internal/external structures and recurring patterns of growth.

Eisler's childhood interest in science informs these explorations of internal and external organic structure. She recalls performing inquisitive dissections in her father's veterinary practice;³ a memory especially pertinent when examining the crafting of *Progeny*. Here, Eisler bisected casts of natural skeletal forms such as shell, antler and bone, to reveal an internal cross-section. She then applied external textures, which nature originally intended for armour or attraction, and has meticulously lined internal surfaces with them in a careful process of conversion. The result is fur, scale, copper and plumage blanketing every surface; gradually merging and integrating one another.



Hybridity and fluidity, the rejection of essentialist boundaries, have grown to become unifying and utopian tools in Eisler's work. Coming from a pluralistic background brought about discussions of hybridity in her early practice, which formerly concerned issues of migration, influence, and change. These ideas later manifested as re-imagined chimeric mythologies in installations such as *Anima Requiem* (2007) and remain evident in the blending of distinct animal materials in *Progeny*.

Eisler's visual vocabulary is therefore vast and interconnected, merging together like a museological collection or wunderkammer (cabinet of curiosities): places of natural and historical re-contextualisation where the familiar and unfamiliar intermingle in a complex visual exchange. Stylistic allusions to the gothic, European folk art and occult phenomena also permeate the work. These visual markers are a residue of her German and Romanian heritage,⁴ however they are never directly referenced. Also rejecting directness of interpretation by fabricating her own ambiguous forms, Eisler allows space for subconscious understandings.

There is a bodily nature to these forms: an imperfect symmetry and tactility emerges from the wall, whilst tendrils and limbs grow in organic configurations across it, imbuing them with slow movement and sexuality. These opulent and benevolent beings openly invite us to gaze at their sumptuous interiors, instead of armouring and camouflaging themselves; abounding with fecundity yet deeply vulnerable. In this imagined world, natural evolutionary systems and foundations are subverted: the aquatic and terrestrial are combined, coverings used originally for armour and camouflage become adornment. The most decorative natural membranes that we usually desire for our own beautification have been kept solely for the internal surfaces.

Like alchemy, these works allow a new visceral understanding of the natural world, and our relations to it, through the combination and transformation of materials; a new speculative philosophy. Though these natural forms have been cast, bisected and then reconstructed, there is no sense of the macabre, only sublime chemistry and talismanic power. It is Eisler's visual-alchemical poetics that allow such an explorative and scientific methodology to produce works that are so mystical in nature.

1 Paul-Jacques Malouin "Alchemy," *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. Translated by Lauren Yoder. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2003. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.057> (accessed [June 21, 2015]). Originally published as "Alchimie," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 1:248–249 (Paris, 1751).

2 Owen Craven, 'Process: Simone Eisler', *Artist Profile Mag*, 2011
<http://www.simoneeisler.com/uploads/PDFS/MEDIA%20ARCHIVE/ArtistProfileMag_2011_Eisler.pdf>

3 Kevin Wilson, 'Simone Eisler, The Armoured Forest' 2009
<http://www.simoneeisler.com/uploads/PDFS/MEDIA%20ARCHIVE/ARC_Biennial_2009_Invite_Eisler_WEB.pdf>

4 Genealogical research in church records whilst travelling in Romania in 2011 indeed revealed the majority of Eisler's family had listed their occupation as metallurgists. (Personal communication with the artist, 23 June 2015)

