ALMINE RECH

Emma Stern
Hell is Hot

Apr 26 — Jun 7, 2025 | Paris

Almine Rech Paris, Turenne is pleased to present *Hell is Hot*, Emma Stern's third solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from April 26 to June 7, 2025.

A "to-watch" list titled: *She had sex with WHAT?* Sea creatures, sultry bodiless voices, all-seeing angels and motorbikes between the legs—all revved up and swallowed by girly ardor. AI-generated videos of tiny humanoids swept up in muscled, demonic arms. In these videos, the moment of contact is where their bodies—so sculpted, so solid—tremble and melt, meeting the limit of where a haphazard intelligence understands the contact of flesh on flesh. In Emma Stern's paintings, the edges hold: they gleam with the fullness of freaky desire. Dimorphic idealisms of snatched waists and anti-gravity T&A are morphed into adorable monsters sporting bunny ears and mermaid tails. Sculpted in 3D software favoured by amateur pornographers then finely painted in oils in cyber-sunset hues, Stern's idols and avatars are give us the post-human we deserve.

To think of screen-based perversions as thoughtless, or careless, neglects the extreme degree of attention lavished on creating fetish-creatures, furries, avatars, and other objects of otherworldly passion. Hair, outfits, accessories, and personality traits are lovingly selected and styled. Fantasy scenarios are scripted and rendered, drawn or shaped with the featherlight touch of a stylus in Blender. Is anything more devotional than airbrushing an ass to perfection, or picking out every individual strand of hair on an OC (original character) so that it might catch the Unreal sunset more realistically? Attention to detail licenses pure, unbridled fantasy.

Now *that's* a romantic imperative: attention, and loads of it. Anyone who has nurtured a state of *limerence* has turned the trick of flipping superficial elements into quenchless delusion. Even the most normie traits become ripe to recast into iconography through a ruthless, loving gaze. The cliché of the sexy fireman, or boss, or road hog becomes an ideal ground for the creative act of crushing hard. The world beyond the object either becomes a stage-set for the perfect fantasy-to-reality script, or it vaporises into irrelevance. It becomes a mist to blow around the divinely illuminated body, an empty gradient to better highlight the crucial mystery at the centre of attention.

A hard look, direct and unflinching, completes the melt. It seals the deal. It links one to another, in a devil's pact. "Am I connecting with this man or am I connecting with myself because I'm sexy and enjoy being surveilled by a symbol of my own desire to merge with myself as if I'm made of separate entities and can never get close enough"—goes an evergreen meme, plain-text over a hot girl in a bodycon dress. In 2025, all the scripts of heterosexuality involve a kind of sparring—with one's own image, with one's alien opposite. It's always fight night: true heart's desire VS. the imperatives of higher self. In the boxing ring or in the hot-tub, wielding gigantic Final Fantasy swords, Emma Stern's girls see how they're seen and they're ready to go to battle with the full arsenal of seduction, smoothness, and adversarial appeal. They somehow sense that full-contact won't result in a bruise, but a melt. Skin-to-skin like cream on pavement. Like a snowball in hell. The enemies-to-lovers pipeline has never been so scorching.

— Alex Quicho, theorist and research director