

# Myth and Metaphor: Jaime Bull and Lauren Clay at Camayuhs

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Installation view of “Porthole Portico” at Camayuhs gallery, featuring works by Jaime Bull and Lauren Clay.

An imagined world of psychedelia and delicate intensity comes to life in “Porthole Portico,” an exhibition of works by Jaime Bull and Lauren Clay at Camayuhs in Atlanta. The two artists’ whimsical use of color, texture, and illusion — Bull in sculptures, Clay in wallpaper installations — makes for a natural pairing.



Lauren Clay, *Wavy Colonnade*, pigment print on vinyl  
dimensions variable, 2018.

Upon entering the gallery, located at the back of a private home, Bull’s *Raft of Medusa* is the obvious attention-grabber. A 10-foot-tall creation made of foam stuffed into prom dresses, tube tops, and various Spandex garments, *Raft of Medusa* draws the eye. The plush, cushy mass seems to invite not only observation but also physical interaction. The piece acts as an off-kilter reference to Géricault’s iconic oil painting *Raft of the Medusa*, which depicts the aftermath of an infamous shipwreck. Bull’s piece is, indeed, a raft; rhinestone-covered fabrics are wrapped around long foam sculptures that weave basketlike over a raft and reflect the

same construction seen in the painting. According to Bull's title, then, it is Medusa lying on top of the cushy raft — though perhaps "medusa" the cnidarian rather than "Medusa" the monster. Headless and limbless (and hairless, for that matter), the foam creature lies rather helpless upon her raft in a black, white, and yellow sequined swimsuit. By portraying "Medusa" alone, sedate, and stuffed into an ill-fitting garment on bejeweled yacht, Bull gently and somewhat humorously asks the viewer to examine their assumptions around women's bodies and "feminine" materials. Sequins and glitter are often considered frivolous adornments, but the size of Bull's work is aggressive, and there are disturbing undertones carefully crafted into the installation. Swimsuits have strong associations with beauty pageants, and by extension the objectification of women's bodies.



Jaime Bull, *Raft of Medusa*, 2018; sequins, glitter, prom dresses, tube tops. Spandex, rhinestones, velour and foam, 11 by 11 by 10 feet.

In the same room as *Raft of Medusa*, Clay's printed vinyl wallpaper complements Bull's installation with its oceanic colors in swirling patterns reminiscent of the sea and wavering columns of purples and blues that suggest Classical columns and give the walls a 3-D effect. Clay begins by making marbled paper, then creating forms and arrangements that are scanned and enlarged, lending an aged and peeling appearance to the paper's ragged edges.

In an adjoining room, Clay's wallpaper continues in shades of pinks and yellows that surround two arched windowlike openings that flank an actual arched window. The textural and layered quality of Clay's work creates a dialogue, not only with the viewer and Bull's sculptures, but also with the realms of 2-D and 3-D, and the illusive space in between.



On walls, Lauren Clay, *Wavy Petit Trianon*, pigment print on vinyl, dimensions variable, 2018. On floor, Jaime Bull, *Sea Princess*, 2018; Spandex and foam, 4 by 4 by 7 feet.

The floor of this adjoining room, little more than a space between stairwells, is covered with gray and white checkered tiles that evoke David Lynch dream sequences, which, when combined with Clay's psychedelic wallpaper, gives the room a distinctly surreal feeling. Here, Clay's wallpaper functions particularly well, as the blue and purple tones visible through the 'windows' make the space feel much larger than it is, as if the viewer is standing under a portico looking out across the ocean. Bull has a small work in this room, a Spandex and foam sculpture titled *Sea Princess*. Playing off the Grecian sea-creature imagery in the adjacent room, *Sea Princess*, a silver vulva-like form that gleams seductively, could be construed as some sort of fin or mollusk, were it not for the ball placed at the center of the V-shape that suggests a clitoris more than a pearl. The hint of mythology, the invocation of the ocean, and the sly visual representation of sexuality are all extensions of themes present in *Raft of Medusa*.

The metaphorical layering of Bull's installation pieces and the literal layering and allusive dimensionality of Clay's make "Porthole Portico" well worth the journey.

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