

Susan Hamburger

Near Enemies

October 24 - December 20, 2025



Asya Geisberg Gallery is excited to announce “Near Enemies,” **Susan Hamburger’s** first solo exhibition with the gallery. The show pairs medieval-style banners hung on the wall, inspired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s armor collection, and invented helmets made of papier mâché and paper clay. The artist works within the history of Western European decorative arts with its hyper-feminine association, to re-imagine the chivalrous, performative function of these highly embellished artifacts of military glory. Her delicate sculptures, ever more baroque yet equally preposterous, are in turn utterly useless to protect or even intimidate. The overall exhibition can be read as both an admiring re-engagement with seemingly antiquated decorative traditions, and an excoriation: the ludicrousness of glamorizing the savagery of war and empire building.

Hamburger has long worked with current events and history as her subject, and in this current series, begun after prolonged museum visits during the pandemic, she has zoomed out to war’s symbolic elevation into parades, ornamented armor, or sartorial embellishments. The artist’s paintings dote on heraldic banners, used in processions and pageantry, adding regalia such as tassels, sewn golden borders, and hanging each banner on a rod. In tarnished hues of greens and blues, the helmets are romanticized, as a wistful idea of long-gone empire and hierarchical mono-culture. Included on the edges of the painted banners are decorative herbs with dual properties: poisonous, or choking out native species - beautiful but with a dark connotation - or “near enemies.” Finally, meaningless banners at the bottom of each work wink at the hollow empty promises of proclamations of power. Everywhere the relationship between meaning and its form is critiqued, subverted, or denied.

The sculptures push the frivolity and decorative excess into absurdity - adding yet more animal, floral, or fantastical elements. Stripped of color and placed on pedestals, they promise pomp, within a painted architectural installation meant to evoke a royal past. Instead of the anonymity of most historical craftsmanship, with twenty-first century eyes we are meant to consider who is making the artwork, and who is missing from the conversation, whose power these objects could be sanctifying, and which standards the standard-bearers are parading.

The exhibition’s oxymoronic title operates on many levels - a hint at frenemies, or keeping one’s enemy closer. “Near Enemies” is also a Buddhist concept borrowed by psychotherapy, establishing four desired virtues and their corresponding *near enemies* that masquerade as each virtue, such as the virtue compassion and its enemy: pity. Hamburger has a history of working in one material to mimic another, manipulating a common material such as paper to emulate a more refined material such as porcelain. Akin to a covert operator - Hamburger places herself within a long tradition of content camouflaged in the “merely” decorative. In a moment when we are told that enemies are everywhere, the show is a potent reminder of the visual glory and perils of excess.

Susan Hamburger lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She holds a BA in Fine Art from Brandeis University, an MFA in Visual Art from Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University and an MA in Art Education from The City College of New York, CUNY. Awards and fellowships include: The 2026 Anita Wetzel Residency at The Women’s Studio Workshop, Dieu Donne Papermill, The Wassaic Project Print Studio, The National Academy Abbey Mural Workshop, and Aljira. Hamburger has participated in residencies at Ucross Foundation, Jentel Foundation, Saltonstall Foundation, The Millay Colony, PS122, Abrons Art Center, and Chashama. Solo exhibitions include: Asya Geisberg Gallery, The Wassaic Project, Roger Smith Hotel, Auxiliary Projects, Schroeder Romero & Shredder, The Gallery at IGAP, Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Tomasulo Gallery at Union County College, Safe-T Gallery and Cheryl McGinnis Gallery. Group exhibitions include: The Brooklyn Museum, Urban Glass, Mixed Greens, Pierogi Gallery, 601Artspace, Pelham Art Center, and No Longer Empty. Her work has been featured in American Craft Magazine and Cultural Politics (Duke University Press) and has been reviewed and/or reproduced in numerous publications: The New York Times, The Village Voice, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, Better Homes & Gardens, Apartment Therapy, The James Kalm Report, ArtFCity, and Hyperallergic. Hamburger was a contributing art editor at Waterfront Week, covering Williamsburg’s nascent art scene (1996-2002).



*Susan Hamburger
Banner (Oriental Bittersweet, Left), 2025
Acrylic and wax pastel on canvas, textiles
55h x 35.50w in*



*Susan Hamburger
Helmet (Dragon), 2024
Papier mâché, celluclay, paperclay, wire, wood
stand
20h x 18w x 18d in*