



Emma Hart, *Give Way*, 2018, ceramic, Perspex, steel, 71 1/4 × 59 × 42 1/2".

## Emma Hart

ANDREW BROWNSWORD GALLERY AT THE EDGE

Emma Hart's "BANGER," a presentation of works commissioned in 2018 for Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery, was a joyride through strange psychological weather. The artist has adopted the car, that mobile extension of the self, as the vehicle, so to speak, for her meditations on the ways in which we navigate our own identities and the world around us. Through a series of jump cuts and careening swerves, Hart reveals the eye as no objective reader of signs, but rather a speeding maniac—erratic and split-second impulsive.

Four double-sided planar ceramic sculptures on steel legs stood on the floor like temporary road signs along an expressway. These "signs" permit a kind of double vision: On one side, they show car interiors, with scenes of captive, combustible human behavior. On the reverse, the view looks outward from the inside, paying attention to the world beyond. As one moved among these sculptures, the categories of inside and outside blurred. In *Green Light* (all works 2018), for example, we saw the curves of windshield wipers as crescents in the glass, shot through with passing headlights. Ceramic hands tightly grip the steering wheel; another pair cling manically to the dashboard, as if holding on for dear life. What road rage has overcome us? Flip to the other side, and we've become the passengers, finally

arrived at somewhere more serene: rolling green hills zigzagged by white road markings pouring surreally from a tissue box.

Works in the show repeatedly scramble familiar scenery into unsettled new forms. Hart uses the suppleness of ceramics to enact surprising sleights of hand. In *Give Way*, windblown autumn leaves as seen from a speeding car transform into parking tickets; from another angle, they become pine-shaped air fresheners dangling from a rearview mirror, or an arrow floating free from a road sign. Often, the show's workaday realism—the banal repetitions of a life on the road—edges into witty trickery. From a distance, *Flats* appeared to be an actual heap of abandoned tires. As one moved closer, it was revealed to be a paper-thin simulacrum of the real thing, a pile of Pop-art-style prints. Finally, the form of the piece shifted again, and we saw the tires as they actually are: clay sculpted with fluid dexterity into a kind of material optical illusion. In *X*, a cracked windshield reveals a broken heart substituted for a GPS location arrow: travel as the melancholy of always being already elsewhere.

Hart bends the velocity of her images with slick choreography. A pair of bright-orange safety barriers, *Gatecrasher* and *Totalled*, operated like visual punctuation, slowing the accelerated scenes. The former unfolded like a concertina between two other sculptures, while the latter squared off what could have been a hole in the road. In *Fix Up*, a propped car hood presents the outline of a pair of figures as a kind of blueprint for a relationship. *Race You to the Bottom* shows two wall-mounted steering wheels that resemble whirlpools, or car wheels that have spun free, hurtling along with chaotic energy.

Yet there are intimations of peril, of the darkness that can erupt if we look back or linger too long. The walls of the gallery were mounted with several ceramic rearview mirrors. In *Just Because You're Paranoid Doesn't Mean They Aren't After You*, two bright headlights flashed, like glaring eyes. In *Slippery Sloped*, we glanced back at the treacherous road traveled—with its unlit helter-skelter bends—inviting anxiety about the onward journey.

—Daniel Culpan

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