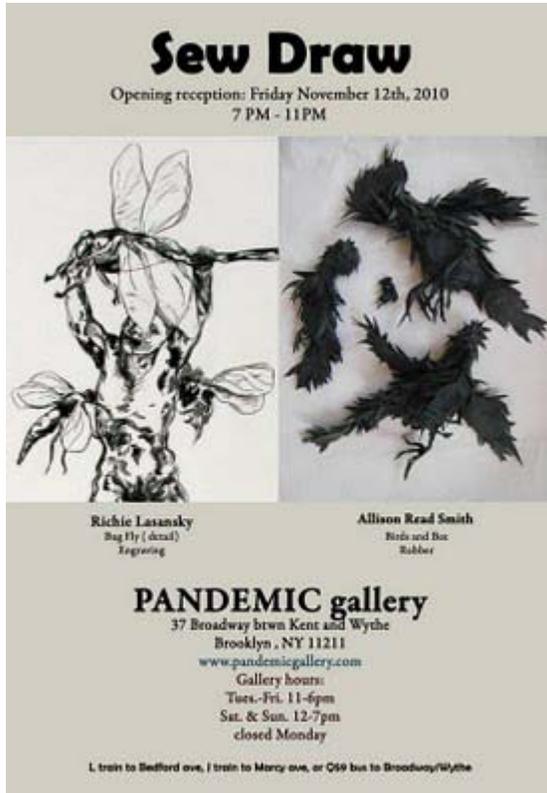


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## Allison Read Smith and Richie Lasansky Sew and Draw Wildlife

The artists' delicate black-and-white depictions of animals thrive together at Pandemic Gallery.  
*By Kathleen Massara*

Allison Read Smith's large black rubber frog hangs limply from a wall at Pandemic Gallery. It's sewn together with heavy clear stitches, but it looks almost stapled from farther away. "Frog Prince" has one entreating hand open and a mouth curved in an open smirk. Nine crowns float above his head, while a tenth sits atop an adjacent print of a large stork framed under glass ("Marabou").

Richie Lasansky and Allison Read Smith have known each other for more than a decade, but *Sew Draw* (through December 10) is the first time they've exhibited their work together. Both are transplants to New York: Lasansky was born in Bolivia, the son of two members of the Peace Corps; Smith was born and raised in Memphis. Both are from families of working artists, and

seem grateful for this fact. Lasansky never went to art school, though he did do an eight-year apprenticeship with his grandfather, Mauricio, who exhibited his work at the Whitney in the late 60s, among other renowned venues. Here, Lasansky learned how to make his own ink and master the medium.

Lasansky works with intaglio prints and large-scale pencil drawings, while Smith creates sculptures from salvaged materials. Intaglio is a technique wherein an image is etched into copper plates and the ink sinks into the grooves, showing up on the paper when it's pressed. "You tell someone you're a printmaker these days," Lasansky says, "and people ask, 'Oh, where do you have your work printed?' And that's when I stamp my feet... It's not just conceptual, it's a physical act." Though craft is important for both artists, they acknowledge the importance of content. Lasansky's work is expressive and mischievous, while both artists described Smith's work as "goofy." Smith says, "The humor in my work is something I'm incredibly serious about; that's very much a Southern [thing]."

There is a waggish narrative to the exhibition; animals play dead, devour small children, or stare directly at the viewer in a stiff pose that seems almost human. This tongue-in-cheek dynamic is also apparent in the pair's curatorial decisions; Smith's work hangs from clips or lies on the floor, while Lasansky's pieces are arranged more conventionally. Through these two approaches, the traditional gallery setting is upended.

"It was a really fun show to install," Smith says, "because we allowed ourselves to be silly about it, not 'You get this side, I'll take this side.' It's why you have a conversation—because it gets you to a point where you couldn't get to alone."

Despite working in different media, these two artists were able to create a space at Pandemic that strengthens their existing work while challenging viewers to generate their own narratives from pieces steeped in magical realism or rooted in Southern Gothic lore.

