



WAVE HILL SUNROOMPROJECTSPACE

June 27 – August 9, 2026

ETIENNE GISTO CIPRIANI

The Cryptozoological Vivarium

ETIENNE GISTO CIPRIANI

Born in Rome, Italy
Lives in Brooklyn, NY

Armored mantis crab as part of the exhibition *The Cryptozoological Vivarium*, 2027, clay, plaster, resin, recycled and organic materials, PLA, sound. Courtesy of the artist.

In *The Cryptozoological Vivarium*, presented in the Sun Porch, Etienne Gisto Cipriani invites viewers to “imagine a world teeming with creatures beyond our wildest dreams.” The artist has created a zoological environment populated by his own definition of cryptid: a species whose primary evolutionary specialization is the active deterrence and evasion of human detection, capture, and extinction. Through the lens of speculative biology, and in his self-proclaimed performative role as a professor, the artist imagines life forms that have adapted not to survive alongside humans, but to survive despite them.

Rendered to scale and crafted from clay, plaster, resin, recycled materials, 3D-printed components, and including ambient sound, each specimen is displayed within a terrarium constructed from natural materials gathered from the grounds of Wave Hill. Among Cipriani’s imaginings are the ink parrot (*Coprinara encaustum*) and armored mantis crab (*Odontodarnado armidactylus*). The ink parrot thrives in densely populated colonies and possesses the remarkable ability to blend into its surroundings through the secretion of an oily, wax-like substance produced by its feathers. This permanent black pigment stains anything it touches and, according to Cipriani’s research, enhances cognitive function when ingested. The ancient, armored mantis crab is a formidable predator protected by a heavily spiked exoskeleton that continually reinforces itself over the course of its long lifespan. Juveniles resemble thumbtacks and can inflict serious injury when stepped upon, while adults can deliver devastating blows that generate shock waves strong enough to boil water and pulverize smaller prey. Ancient carvings, the artist notes, depict warrior figures wearing triangular headgear that closely resembles the crustacean’s distinctive armor.

Through analytical yet speculative accounts of the subjects under observation, Cipriani constructs an alternative ecological perspective on evolution—one that celebrates cryptids as resilient life forms shaped by the persistent threat of human presence, bridging the gap between myth and science in an imaginative rethinking of the natural world order.

Etienne Cipriani’s multidisciplinary practice spans filmmaking, illustration, and writing to explore themes of morality, betrayal, and the complex nature of humanity. His work has been presented at Serbest International Film Festival, Moldova; Los Angeles Lift-Off Film Festival; Rome International Short Festival; and in New York at the TromaDance Film Festival and New York Lift-Off Film Festival. He earned a BA in film and animation from the University of Westminster, London, UK.

PUBLIC PROGRAM: SAT, JUN 27, 1PM, Meet the Artist: Exhibition walkthrough with Etienne Gisto Cipriani in dialogue with Curator of Visual Arts Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger.

Organized by Curator of Visual Arts Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, the Sunroom Project Space provides an opportunity for artists in the New York City area to develop and present a site-specific project as a solo exhibition. The 2026 season features Sujin Lim, Hyunjin Park, Etienne Gisto Cipriani, Tarik Jeremiah Brown, Camille Cooper, and Melanie Brewster, consecutively.

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