Woody De Othello: Hope Omens
September 26, 2021–September 25, 2022
The first time I recall touching clay was in undergrad, in an elective ceramics course. Our first project in that class was a combined pinch pot where I made a little bust combining two pinch pots together. I experienced some sort of revelation, where my past and future kind of clicked together."

In this oft-repeated quote, San Francisco Bay area ceramicist Woody De Othello expresses the profound connection he feels to his medium. This instant attraction has endured, leading Othello to a successful and experimental engagement with clay's potentials.

Best known for his large-scale anthropomorphic figures, which often appear as humorous portrayals of domestic objects, Othello stretches the scale of the everyday. For Hope Omens, he presents an entirely new body of work. Eschewing the traditional delicate preciousness associated with ceramic work, these larger-than-life scaled sculptures upend expectations and traditional uses of clay.

Drawing on various household objects' human qualities, Othello's anthropomorphized figures express a range of emotions. "We use phones to speak and to listen, clocks to tell time, vessels to hold things, and our bodies are all indicators of those things," Othello observes. Breath and breathing are ideals often expressed by his forms, and the power to deprive people of their breath and their ability to breathe, are now more highly charged. In addition, many of these new works feature ears, offering meditations on listening, hearing, and being present.

Some of his objects appear collapsed, or folded over, as if exhausted by use or deflated by the passing of time. Others seem to cover their eyes or ears, unable or unwilling to see or hear what is around them. Some seem to wring their hands, and grip themselves for support.

This expressiveness, in conjunction with their lumpy and shiny surfaces, animate the works throughout the exhibition. This suspended tension represents both Othello's working process and a sensation viewers may have in the works' presence.

"There is a lot of anxious buildup when constructing some of the objects," says Othello. "At times I am unsure if things will collapse under their own weight, but as I'm working the clay starts to dry and solidify. It freezes that tension. Gravity is literally at play." Their scale, and fragility, combine to create a heightened awareness of bodies in space, the exchange of energy between viewer and object can be thick with suspense and expectation. Their precariousness belies the physical and emotional pressure they hold. Will this last? Can this stand? Is this too heavy?

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For Othello, these familiar objects become bearers of his own interrogations, but some stories and accounts are tragic, unjust, and heart-wrenching. So informed by his Haitian heritage, and his own investigations into diaspora, these familiar objects become bearers of his own interrogations, but some stories and accounts are tragic, unjust, and heart-wrenching. So his objects appear collapsed, or folded over, as if exhausted by use or deflated by the passing of time. Others seem to cover their eyes or ears, unable or unwilling to see or hear what is around them. Some seem to wring their hands, and grip themselves for support.

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