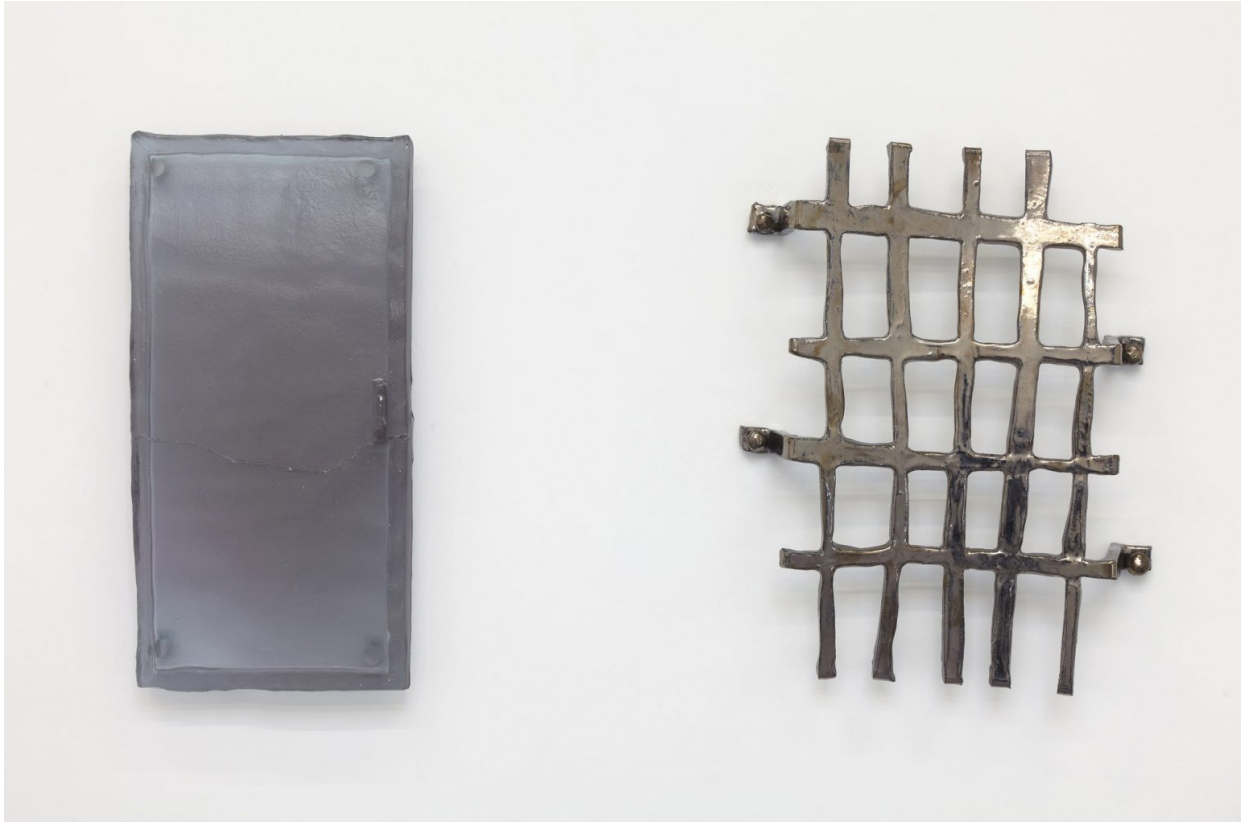


sculpture

"Woody De Othello"

Written by Christopher Hart Chambers

March 4, 2020



Woody De Othello, *Opaqueness* [purple glass, shiny metal-colored bars], 2019. Ceramic, glaze, and glass, 23 x 16 x 4 in.
Photo: Courtesy the artist and Karma, New York

New York

Karma

Facing the street in the gallery's storefront window hung a grill that resembled a barred gate to keep people out and in, bolted over a cast resin, translucent blue portal—a door perhaps. The main room housed an assortment of objects, which eventually came together to spell out an emotionally charged narrative. Two oversize human/monster left feet (cut off neatly at the ankles) ascended a short, lumpy, gray staircase with a silver/bronze ankle bracelet draped over the lowest step. Or maybe it was a wristwatch, or perhaps a GPS monitoring device for house arrest. Nearby on the floor, a pair of clasped ceramic hands with mottled blue and gray glaze, set on a white pillow, looked like they were cut from the same owner as the feet. Other than a few monochromatic fabrics, all of these oversize, physically imposing works were done in glazed ceramic. Another pair of hands was joined together, palm to palm, praying on the vinyl seat cushion of a comically crude chair. A stool held a melted, Dalí-esque alarm clock.

Another, contorted hand grasped a wristwatch or belt, a pair of giant deadbolt locks hung on the wall to one side, and across the room, another gated window echoed the one seen from outside. A pentagon of five life-size doors surrounded a clumsily sculpted mirror barely visible through the cracks between them. Together, these simulated artifacts imbued a somber goofiness, like stills from a claymation drama. Around this time, I started wondering about the identity and experience of the artist. The themes of security, repression, and claustrophobic entrapment were making themselves felt.

Centrally placed in the rear gallery was a large, upright, clenched fist—the iconic symbol of the Black Power struggle during the 1960s. A broken chain that might have restrained a giant prisoner in a dungeon hung on one wall, and finally liberation—another gate and portal. This time, they were apart. The separation of these pieces ended Woody De Othello's narrative with a sense of release and freedom. *No Way Up*, the most damning work in "To live in hope," consisted of a ladder with almost all of its rungs missing and a coffee cup left behind on the bottom step, as if gulped down during a daring, albeit doomed attempt at escape.

De Othello employs a popularizing faux naiveté, deliberately handling sophisticated materials in a crude way, as if an expert had assisted a child. Here, the presentation mocked despair, weighed urban desolation with historical oppression, and ended on an uplifting note that was neither condemning nor angry. There was a general mood of gloomy melancholy, yet it was all done with a wry, serious humor, as if to say, "I don't even know who to blame nowadays but all of us."