

FRIEZE

"Woody De Othello's Monuments to Everyday Life"

By Natasha Boas

November 2, 2021



Woody De Othello, 'Looking In', 2021, exhibition view, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Courtesy: the artist and Jessica Silverman; photography Philip Maisel

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Bay Area-based artist Woody De Othello created work that celebrates life, time and interiority. 'Looking In', Othello's latest outing at Jessica Silverman in San Francisco, is as ludic and funky as his past exhibitions while further investigating elasticity and mutability in everyday forms. In this show, the artist's recurring motifs of plants, flowers, mirrors, phones, light switches, clocks and body parts – depicted in ceramic sculptures, works on paper and paintings – deliver an experience akin to noticing the minutia of our daily lives while stuck at home during shelter-in-place orders for the better part of a year.

At the entrance to Jessica Silverman's new space in the heart of Chinatown, the artist has installed a dramatic partition that acts as a screen to conceal the works in the gallery behind. Here, visitors are offered a peek into Othello's universe: the partition is covered in a dynamic, floral-patterned wallpaper featuring Salvador Dalí-esque illustrations of melting watches (*Wallpaper for Solo Show*, all works 2021) to which are affixed a framed work on paper (*On the Horizon*) and a larger oil on canvas (*Gotta Handle Your Business*). The paintings introduce Othello's obsession with still-life tropes, skewed perspectives and formal investigations. To the right hangs a playful yet functional yellow pendant lamp with a decorative pattern of lemons (*Making Light of Lemons*). The stage is set.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Woody De Othello, *Making Light of Lemons*, 2021, ceramic, glaze, electrical and light bulb lemon fixture, 25 x 43 x 43 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco; photograph: Philip Maisel

What follows is a series of ceramic sculptures installed within the spacious white cube of the gallery. In *Making the Most of the Day*, a stool, alarm clock, prayer hands and a mirror are fused together. Consistently pushing the limits of ceramic as a medium, the artist has been constructing seemingly precarious sculptures of everyday household objects such as these since attending California College of the Arts (CCA) in 2015–17. Clearly influenced by CCA's pioneering alumni ceramists, Peter Voulkos and Viola Frey, as well as the Northern California funk art movement of the 1960s, which elevated ceramics as an artform, Othello focuses on found objects and autobiographical subjects with great humour and audience engagement.

Equally pronounced within the gallery space are a number of intriguing standing mirrors: double-sided, non-reflective, in matte silver glaze, facing up to the ceiling or down to the floor, while six oil-on-canvas and four acrylic-on-paper paintings refer back to the sculptures in a game of endless mirroring. In a recent video interview for the Museum of African Diaspora, San Francisco, Othello says his ceramic sculptures and paintings 'cross-contaminate in a natural relationship'. Indeed, the show feels more like one immersive experience in which the boundaries between media are fluid..

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Woody De Othello, 'Looking In', 2021, exhibition view, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Courtesy: the artist and Jessica Silverman; photograph: Philip Maisel

The centrepiece of the show, which stands an imposing three-metres tall, is not made of ceramic. Instead, this bronze piece, coated in a brilliant and sensual orange lacquer patina, is estimated to weigh just shy of a tonne. The result of the artist's constant experimentation with new materials, *Fountain* – a not-so-subtle nod to Marcel Duchamp's legendary 1917 readymade that also contains an implicit reference to California's endless drought – consists of two, twisted, column-like pipes with three knobs and faucets. (The tallest tap lets out a single drop of water.) *Fountain* is impressively imposing yet intimate: the entwined pipes resemble writhing bodies embracing. A well of ideas, the work reads like an optimistic monument for a disconsolate time, looking to a post-pandemic world when the very source of life could re-emerge in an upswell of potential.

Woody De Otherllo's ['Looking In'](#) at Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, is on view until 13 November.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508