

Galerie

"Woody De Othello Opens the Door of His California Studio Ahead of a Major Exhibition in Miami"

By Michael Slenske

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Woody De Othello is seated in his East Bay, California, studio where he makes his animated ceramics and paintings, a selection of which are on view at the Pérez Art Museum Miami through June 28, 2026.

A self-described '90s kid from North Miami Beach, Woody De Othello grew up bingeing the Nickelodeon shows *Rocko's Modern Life* and *Doug* while gaming on Nintendo and PlayStation. "A lot of those aesthetics are still ruminating around in my subconscious," says the artist, who is based in Oakland, California.

Nickelodeon's motto, after all, is "We make fun," and there is plenty of fun to be had experiencing Othello's Funk Art-inflected, cartoonishly styled sculptures and Expressionistic paintings. With collectors and curators taking notice, his work has been featured in recent biennials at the Whitney Museum of American Art and at the Orange County Museum of Art. Now Othello is having a full-circle homecoming moment, as the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) presents his largest museum exhibition to date, on view through June 28, 2026.

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Left: A collection of glaze samples.

Right: Othello's show at the Pérez Art Museum Miami includes *Coming Forth by Day* (2025), an altar-like pyramidal installation filled with ceramics.

"Miami is central to Woody's story, as he was raised here surrounded by a vibrant Haitian community that shaped his worldview and sense of identity," says PAMM curator Jennifer Inacio. "In this exhibition, that comes through not only in the works themselves—objects infused with an emotional, spiritual, and cultural resonance—but also through the installation, which creates an environment that feels both intimate and contemplative."



A selection of pieces from the exhibition.

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Best known for his ceramic and bronze sculptures of seemingly animated telephones, clocks, fans, and musical instruments, Othello breathes life and feeling into these quotidian household objects, often embellishing their surfaces with hands, ears, and limbs, transforming them into anthropomorphic totems. His still lifes and interiors paintings, often vibrantly hued and surreally stylized, have a similarly charged effect.

Othello works out of two East Bay studios about ten miles apart: One is in a former gym where he paints and sculpts and fires his ceramics, while the other is a woodshop for making pedestals and the rhythmically carved frames he recently began adding to his paintings. "The frames, which I carve intuitively, are an extension of my thinking around the bases in my sculptural work," he says of his stack pieces, which were influenced by pioneering West Coast Expressionist ceramist Peter Voulkos.



Left: *Truth doesn't come through thinking (maquette)* (2025).
Right: Othello with his dog, Mia, and recent work *Memory* (2025).

There's a real generosity in his practice"

-Jennifer Inacio

His earliest art-making efforts weren't so much an expression of formal or spiritual concerns as they were a response to being bullied in elementary school as a bookish first-generation American born to working-class Haitian immigrant parents. "Something that helped me deal with those feelings was just drawing myself as a superhero beating up all the people who were tormenting me," he says, with a laugh. "I also used to make these cityscapes and figures out of aluminum foil. Maybe what I'm doing now is a continuation of that."

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The artist applying glazes.

Othello's first turn with clay came at Florida Atlantic University, but it wasn't until he was working toward his MFA at California College of the Arts, then in Oakland—the birthplace of the California Clay Movement—that he began fusing the Nickelodeon visual language and his aluminum foil world-building with broader, more academic references while reaching into his personal narrative. "California had this magnetic pull, the history but also in terms of the potential of what clay can do and what clay can be," says Othello, who has worked with San Francisco dealer Jessica Silverman since 2018, which, he adds, "kind of kept me here."

Expanding beyond individual objects, Othello began to experiment with incorporating them into immersive environments. He has complemented some with soundscapes composed by Oakland musician Cheflee and others with sulfuric lighting or sand-covered floors. At PAMM, he limewashed the walls in a vermillion hue recalling the brightly painted cinder block walls he saw on a trip to Senegal with his wife, the artist explains.

The exhibition's title, "Coming Forth by Day," is from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and the show pulls in a number of ancient references—Egyptian funerary architecture, Central African nkisi figures—as well as New Age mysticism. The show's titular work is a ten-foot-high, pyramid-shaped, openwork altar in wood that Othello blackened and then filled with sculptural ceramic offerings. The structure suggests a kind of spiritual progression: tension at the base (represented by elements such as a ceramic head on its side) and acceptance at the apex (a sculpture of four hands facing upward toward the sky).

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Left: Supplies in the studio.



Right: *In praise* (2025).

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Inspiration for the monumental work was sparked by reading Eugene Fersen's *Science of Being*. "He has this pyramid chart that graphs a path between life, mind, truth, and love, all forming this center point for spiritual evolution," he says. "In order to experience love, you must first have a life. You must first have a mind; you must seek truth to find love, to find your spirit. It gave me goose bumps."

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Left: Othello in his studio.

Right: Recently fired works drying in the kiln.

As Inacio notes, Othello's works "not only hold his own experiences but also create space for viewers to reflect on theirs," adding, "There's a real generosity in his practice."

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