

Narumi Nekpenekpen,
Press

The Art Newspaper, 2023

London Gallery Weekend 2023 // Preview

London Gallery Weekend: our critics pick their top shows

From post-human smart cities to the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, Ben Luke and Louisa Buck choose their must-see exhibitions from the third edition of the city-wide event

Although a vast array of media is inevitably on view across London right now, it is difficult to escape the abundance of painting in this year's London Gallery Weekend (2-4 June) shows.

Sceptics will point to the market downturn and note that painting is a safe bet in uncertain economic times. But even if that is true, the breadth of work highlighted here attests to the continuing power of the ancient medium, whether it is in the hands of painting greats like Mary Heilmann, in Gagosian's group show, has its genesis in performance, as with Florence Peake at Richard Saltoun, or is a new medium for artists better versed in other disciplines, like Gary Simmons at Hauser & Wirth.

We have rounded up some of the best shows in central, south, east and west London—for painting fans and others.



Narumi Nekpenekpen, *something(s) more permanent* (2022)

Image: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening. Photography: Theo Christelis

Japanese-born, Los Angeles based Narumi Nekpenekpen regards her vividly-coloured ceramic figures and creatures as a form a psychological self portrait. Built up in layers of porcelain, these multi-dimensional beings with their suggestive protuberances and gash-like tears can be viewed from any angle, with the emotional ante further upped by a use of frenzied glazing techniques that reference tattoos, dress patterns and graffiti tags. Here they occupy glossy heart shaped plinths alongside more recognisable creatures—swans, horses, dogs and a rabbit—but while their forms may be simplified, in these new additions to Nekpenekpen's bestiary, the messages remain mixed.

Wallpaper, 2023

For London Gallery Weekend 2023, the mood is hardcore

With London Gallery Weekend 2023 almost upon us (2 – 4 June), here's our list of must-see art exhibitions

BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH
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London Gallery Weekend 2023 will soon be in full swing, and despite our best intentions, tackling 125 galleries over two days feels like an ambitious undertaking. Luckily, we've whittled things down to our ten favourite shows on view during the festivities, which will also include a public performance programme (featuring selected artists Nicole Bachmann, Li Hei Di, and Minh-Lan Tran), so you have a guide during London's art mega-fest.



Narumi Nekpenekpen, *gallops soaked in reverb*, 2023, Porcelain and glaze
(Image credit: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London Photography Theo Christelis)

LA-based Narumi Nekpenekpen's curious ceramic creatures caption a panoply of emotion, their exaggerated, warped features peeking out from a frenzied fusion of colour, form and texture. Through these intriguing sculptures, Nekpenekpen freezes facets of her own emotion and memories in porcelain and glaze, to captivating effect.

softopening.london

L'Officiel, 2022

15 Artists to Watch in 2022

Discover the emerging visual artists to put on your radar
this year.

04.20.2022 by Alexis Schwartz

With the art-world reawakening from a 2019 and 2020 slumber, auction sales hit record highs of \$6.5 billion, with a 201 percent increase for young contemporary artists. The fairs re-opened, with [Art Basel](#), [Frieze](#), and FIAC, while [NFTs](#) not only emerged as a reckonable force, but one that was dominant.

New York City recouped its losses, with nearly 50 percent of all market sales, while Hong Kong and the emerging Asian market netted \$142 million at auction. Everyone, and their brother, was pining for wet paint figurative paintings—the bigger the better. In addition, a diverse roster of BIPOC artists took their long overdue place at the creative helm.

At *L'OFFICIEL*, we found 15 artists you must see in 2022, including the youngest of those at Frieze NYC this year. With established or burgeoning careers, the roster takes you from textiles to porcelain, figurative to abstract, and everything in-between.

Narumi Nekpenekpen



"Narumi Nekpenekpen, Angels with Dirty Faces," 2021, exhibition view. Courtesy of artist and Real Pain, New York.

The Nigerian-Japanese artist's layered approach to sculpture caught the eyes of collectors during Art Basel Miami Beach Design week. The deeply emotional pieces spontaneously painted throughout her residency at Versailles, have a "Sanrio" quality, which makes them seem both distant and friendly. With her Real Pain booth at ABMB, the young sculptor has earned her acclaimed entrée with nowhere to go but up.

Narumi Nekpenekpen Sculpts From the Heart

The ceramicist known for her otherworldly sculptures shares how emotion informs her work.

by **Maxine Wally**



Photographed by Antoine Doyen, courtesy of Real Pain

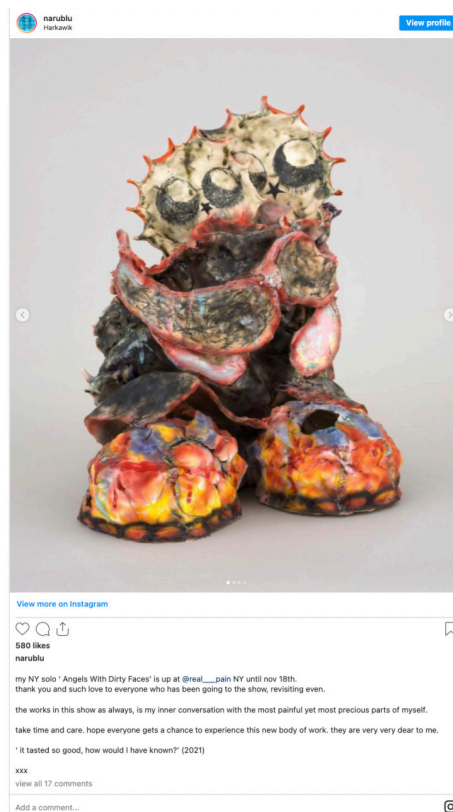
“I knew you were going to ask me what I’ve been up to while living in France,” the ceramic artist Narumi Nekpenekpen tells me with a laugh from her bedroom in Versailles, where she’s carrying out an artists residency. “Let me show you.”

Nekpenekpen, 23, is one of the most exciting new faces in the art world. Just one year after graduating from California State University, Long Beach, she’s secured a solo show at the gallery Real Pain, on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. The exhibition, titled *Angels With Dirty Faces*, is filled with her cartoon-ish, slightly wonky, anthropomorphic beings sculpted from clay. The sculptures, which Nekpenekpen has painted, written upon, and drawn onto, creating doe-eyed faces in pink, blue, yellow, and slime green, resemble characters the ceramicist Alice Mackler might have enjoyed. But the characters are certainly not of this earth. Some resemble Sanrio icons, two Bartz-Marus locked in embrace, while others are simply multicolored orbs with spikes, covered in handwritten text.

But when Nekpenekpen shares her Zoom screen to give me a glimpse of how she’s spent her time in Europe, she reveals something unexpected: iPhone photos of the childlike, colorful mosaics on the walls of her local train station. “I’ve been going into Paris every day, because there’s not much to do here in Versailles—it’s conservative and really bougie,” she explains. “Seeing these mosaics every day has been—well, inspiring is an understatement.”

It makes sense that Nekpenekpen, whose style and technique are not rooted in any sort of classical training, would draw intrigue from hallucinatory images of aliens, witches,

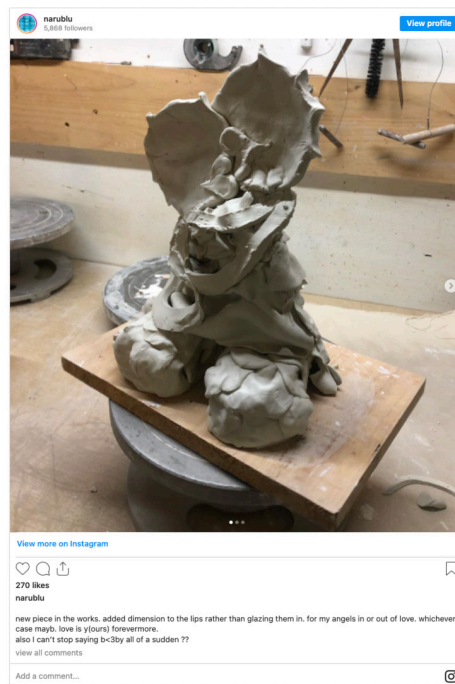
and unknown animalistic blobs. In her own work, Nekpenekpen dives headlong into her feelings, creating pieces that embody the physical representation of a diary entry from the depths of her mind. “That’s how I process all of my pieces,” she says. “What births the value of my work is me being able to reflect how I’m feeling on the inside. I write words on my pieces, but the colors I use, and the facial expressions, and the way I structure the pieces act as this cryptic language of me having a conversation with myself.”



The visual conversation that occurs in *Angels With Dirty Faces* is a result of “going through a crazy heartbreak,” Nekpenekpen says. “I experienced so much pain that listening to music or watching films that took me out of reality felt more reassuring than being present. But having this show and this deadline and also having a way to exert everything out allowed me to not only focus, but be sincere and vulnerable. All that pain didn’t stay in me.”

Despite their otherworldly, hard-to-explain look, the sculptures evoke feelings of love and longing alternately, which Nekpenekpen says she's injected into every piece since her early days working with clay at CSU Long Beach. The artist got her start at the state university—where she initially entered with a major in biology—by taking classes within the school's large ceramics facility. "I always had an interest in clothes—something creative, but I never knew where to express it," she recalls.

During her second semester of college, Nekpenekpen had a choice: she could either get a financially stable job to help support her parents—both of whom are first-generation immigrants: her father is Nigerian, and her mother is Japanese—or she could take a risk and follow her heart. "I was the only one in the family going to college. And growing up, I had this sense of responsibility to take care of my parents. The risk was prioritizing my own wanting to explore," she says. She decided to pursue the latter, and subsequently threw herself into clay after watching ceramics instructors like Anabel Juárez and Jennie Jieun Lee. "My first ceramic class, Anabel pounded the clay," she says. "It going from this solid block to whatever she wanted it to be fascinated me. It was so powerful and badass."



Nekpenekpen spent the first seven years of her life in Japan, where her parents first met. She says she has strong ties to her Japanese heritage, but has reached a point in her life where she's closely examining her Nigerian side. "I remember being a kid in Japan, and always getting stares," she says. "Whenever I asked my parents, they'd say it was because I looked pretty, and never because I looked different. It wasn't until we moved to the states that I started actually thinking about my identity in such an intense way, because I was confronted by it externally and not personally."

But at this very moment, Nekpenekpen's personhood is being shaped by her experience in France, where she has been working on one particular sculpture that will be on view as the centerpiece for Real Pain's booth at NADA Miami's show in December. She's not quite finished with it yet, but knows it will depict a couple holding each other. And of course, the piece will call to those colorful tile murals in the train station—pure, unadulterated emotions that exist in no kind of gray area, straight from the heart of her inner child. "My theme, still and forever, is warmth and love," she adds.

Galerie Magazine, 2021

9 Emerging Artists to Discover at NADA Miami 2021

Check out the rising stars making waves at the 19th edition of the buzzy fair, which runs from December 1–4

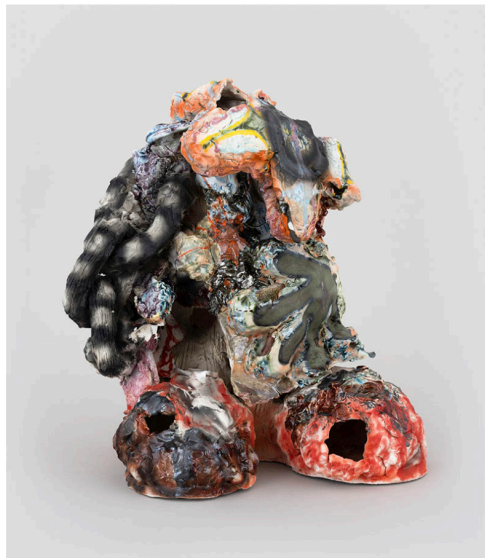
BY PAUL LASTER

NOVEMBER 30, 2021



One of *Galerie's* favorite art fairs, [NADA Miami](#) returns to the Ice Palace Studios better than ever. Presented by the New Art Dealers Alliance, the 19th edition of the fair runs from December 1–4 and includes 170 exhibitors from around the world. Featuring gallery exhibitions, artist book displays, and a curated spotlight show organized by David Zwirner director and curator [Ebony L. Haynes](#), this year's event is guaranteed to have art that appeals to everyone, from the savviest collectors to new buyers.

Here, *Galerie* has assembled the works that stand out in the crowd. Scroll through to find some of the best works on view—but be sure to move fast if you hope to take one of them home.



Narumi Nekpenekpen, *in the seas of corruption*, 2021. Glazed ceramic, 19 x 13 x 14 inches.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF REAL PAIN, NEW YORK

2. Narumi Nekpenekpen at Real Pain

Born in 1998 to a Japanese mother and a Nigerian father, the L.A.-based Narumi Nekpenekpen creates wildly expressionistic ceramics with a colorful street art edge. The subject of a recent solo show, titled “Angels with Dirty Faces” at Real Pain’s Lower East Side gallery, the 23-year-old artist makes rough-and-ready, wide-eyed porcelain figurines that offer a deep dive into the uncooked side of urban culture. Her colorfully glazed, slab-built piece *in the seas of corruption*, on view at the fair, offers a charred and melting figure that charmingly looks as if he just emerged from a festering pile of trash—a somewhat aesthetic version of a Garbage Pail Kid.

Narumi Nekpenekpen's Angels with Dirty Faces

November 16, 2021



my chipped tooth oozing, 2021, Glazed ceramic, 12" H x 9" W x 6" D

Text by Olivia Whittick

Breaking the mould of what we've come to expect from slab porcelain, far from a demure vase or an oat-colored dish, removed from any familiar hand-building process, Narumi Nekpenekpen's sculptures look like if Bratz dolls had their genes scrambled with your morning coffee mug. Diverting radically within a medium often streamlined and classical, Nekpenekpen's bisque works appear as heaped-up, patch-worked and Crazy Bones-esque figurines, their Bambi-eyes twinkling with emotion, exploding outwards with pouting lips and clowny platformed boots. Nekpenekpen says the ideas for her work come from the depths of her soul, her sculptures becoming a tangible form of what she feels inside, the dolls representing a diaristic catalogue of the artist's psychological states. A graffiti-meets-sgraffito technique, mixed with a kawaii-infused form—no doubt fostered by the artist's childhood years in Kashiwa, Japan—brings a refreshingly playful spontaneity and visceral punk sensibility to the canon of works in clay. Nekpenekpen's solo show "Angels with Dirty Faces" is on at Harkawik, New York, through November 18th.



it tasted so good, how would I have known?
2021
Glazed ceramic
17" H x 13" W x 9" D



reflections on a stream, splinters through
2021
Glazed ceramic
10.5" H x 7" W x 4.5" D

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