

Narumi Nekpenekpen, *where you fit in my palm*

2 June–29 July, 2023

6 Minerva Street, London

Positioned atop a pair of glossy red heart-shaped plinths, Narumi Nekpenekpen's complex figures and creatures appear frozen in states of feeling, with their clumpy feet and oversized doe-shaped eyes peeking out from a whirl of colour, shape and texture. Nekpenekpen's work involves and processes her emotions within an alternative subconscious, where layers of porcelain and glaze represent thoughts and memories. A reflection of her often indefinable innermost conflicts, in *where you fit in my palm*, clay becomes a translator for grief, fear, pain, hope, joy, love and desire. By projecting her emotional state onto her sculptures in both their material construction and frenzied glazing techniques, Nekpenekpen externalises the confusion of her internal world in a courageous approach to self-portraiture.

Gazing shyly heavenward, the artist's signature figures are accompanied by newer creatures, including swans, horses, dogs and a bunny rabbit. Hyper-simplified, Nekpenekpen's childlike play with form prioritises tactility over realism, occupying a space at once abstract and familiar. The sculptures invite close reflection in order to discern recognisable features: only intimately do we recognise these forms as figures or animals.

Folds, creases, cracks, splits, gaps, holes and crevices flourish — these amplified feminine imperfections seem to burst each sculpture open, tearing the core of Nekpenekpen's works inside-out to embrace their own material worth. Glazing both follows form and undermines its logic: tracing protrusions and edges while drips eke out from nowhere and angsty patterns or scribbles accidentally decorate.

In her construction, Nekpenekpen uses the specifics of porcelain as a material that requires a build-up of flat layers to imagine a solid object. This attitude of layering in her process mimics alternative practices — from collage and papier-mâché to digital imaging. A method also found in

Soft Opening,

fashion styling, Nekpenekpen turns to the visual language of dress, tattooing and graffiti to inform her work. In all these practices, the flat or two-dimensional becomes immediately animated once activated by the body in space. These forms of communication embody an attractive immediacy to the artist: tattooing changes your physical appearance, clothing can affect your mood and graffiti tagging communicates the inherently personal. In fact, these public-facing forms of communication with an often anonymous external audience, all remain distinctly personal to their individual wearer or writer — a core concern for Nekpenekpen.

Preferring complexity over cuteness, the works remain inherently multi-dimensional both formally and materially: the artist does not prioritise any part of a sculpture over another, resulting in countless viewpoints and no trace of where each figure begins or ends. The works in *where you fit in my palm* offer a playful language of symbology that might seem incoherent, but it's in this abundant expression of angel wings, eyelashes, hearts, tears, chains and patterns, that we find the clearest reflection of our complicated and conflicting inner selves.

Main Gallery
(Each plinth, Anti-clockwise, L–R)

Plinth I

Plinth II

swan's song turn to dust,
2023
Porcelain and glaze
24 × 30 × 27 cm

catch my attitude, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
18 × 19 × 21 cm

paws on me, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
9 × 5 × 12 cm

biscuit bunny, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
18 × 32 × 16 cm

Xx, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
9 × 6 × 12 cm

circle cycle, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
25.5 × 21 × 20.5 cm

honeylike, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
35 × 32 × 35 cm

feeling and learning,
2023
Porcelain and glaze
37.5 × 45 × 30 cm

*we speak the same
sounds, feel the same
shapes,* 2023
Porcelain and glaze
17 × 24.5 × 31 cm

*sleepless but brown
ribbons, baby blue
speakers,* 2023
Porcelain and glaze
17 × 16.5 × 18 cm

gallops soaked in reverb,
2023
Porcelain and glaze
36.5 × 45 × 41 cm

sky tying hilltops, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
40 × 29 × 47 cm

garden of romance, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
25.5 × 22 × 22 cm

my melting sorbet pink,
2023
Porcelain and glaze
16 × 17 × 20 cm

Poems, 2023
Porcelain and glaze
24.5 × 24 × 28.5 cm

grasshopper. blushing,
2023
Porcelain and glaze
13 × 11 × 17 cm

Narumi Nekpenekpen completed a BFA at California State University, Long Beach in Ceramics (2021). Recent solo exhibitions include *Butter* at South Willard, Los Angeles (2022); *SUGAR2* at Lefebvre & Fils, Paris (2022); *Angels with Dirty Faces* at Harkawik, New York (2021); *Intra-action: Part 1* at Soft Opening, London (2021) and *Toothache* at Oddark, Los Angeles (2019). Past group exhibitions include *On Failure* at Soft Opening, London (2023); *Possibility Made Real: Drawing and Clay* at 12.26, Dallas (2021); *Speech Sounds* at Harkawik, New York (2021); *HU* at Real Pain Fine Arts, Los Angeles (2020); *Terra Firma: Foreign Lands* at Murmurs, Los Angeles (2020); *Centre Of the Core* at Deli Gallery, New York (2020); *Speech Sounds* at More Pain, New York (2020); *VIVID* curated by Sonya Sombreuil at The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2020); *The Struggle for Change* at Murmurs, Los Angeles (2020) and *Transmissions* at Insect Gallery, Los Angeles (2019).

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