

SOMEDAY

Umico Niwa

The Quantified Elf (and how it came to love itself)

Opening Saturday, May 14, 6-8PM

May 14 - June 17, 2022

Someday is happy to announce "The Quantified Elf (and how it came to love itself)," an exhibition of new work by Umico Niwa.

Niwa combines organic and synthetic materials to create hybrid creatures that resist normative classification systems. Working within the porous membrane that appears to separate animal/vegetable/mineral; human/machine; male/female into rigid binaries, Niwa dissolves illusory divisions that contribute to bodily and spiritual dysphoria. Her sculptures speak to a palpable longing for transcendence - a desire for self-actualization that is not contingent on language, body, logic, rationality, sexuality or time. Rejecting the Western obsession with quantification that reduces personhood to analytics, they ask: *is it even possible to be queer within a hyper-digital, capitalist system - let alone human?*

Tiny anthropomorphic beings, dubbed *Daphnes*, animate the gallery. Formed from foraged plant matter (radishes, dandelions, orange rinds, rose petals, eggshells, seeds and stems), these miniature, nymph-like creatures colonize each crevice of the gallery - scurrying walls, borrowed in light fixtures, hanging from rafters, and dancing in circular chains along window sills. The *Daphnes* spin across spheres of ancient mythology, fable, paganism, natural folklore and contemporary fantasy, fluttering from one reference to the next. They are imbued with a latent sexuality - not so much erotic, as in celebration of fecundity and the remarkable perseverance of even the most fragile forms of existence. Teeming with life, Niwa's creations posit Poesis to be the primary "maternal wellspring," rather than biological reproduction. In this realm, birth is separation and death is reconvergence.

The hybrid creatures are adorned and staged within a built environment. Bulkier figures are encased within electroplated metal shells, blossoming like the nodules of a borax crystal hatching in an elementary school science lab. Copper rinds, iron alloys and wilted petals garnish each host like the ornate regalia of kings and queens. Architectural structures (altars, towers, vehicles, houses, ladders, baby carriages) constructed from wood, computer hardware, plastic and deconstructed electronics function as the sculptures' material world. The recurrence of computer "motherboards" playfully question how sterile technology can be maternal, or binary code queer. In the center of the gallery lies a large, elaborate cityscape assembled from a wide variety of materials. The kinetic structure is powered through solar energy - technically functional, yet with no discernible purpose. It is hermetic and unyielding, reflecting the arbitrariness of a system that once deciphered reveals nothing more than its own internal logic - like the discovery of fractal patterns that we recognize everywhere, yet remain inscrutable.

Within this efficient and self-organized environment, the *Daphnes* and Fruiting Bodies poke fun at the quizzical tendency of humans to lend intelligence to technology, but not the natural and metaphysical world. The beings are imbued with a joyful exuberance - they are playful and celebratory, arguably more "alive" than we are. Expanding this metaphor, Niwa's sculptures speak to the human body not as unadulterated and individualistic, but as permeable and collectively-motivated, fully colonized by archaea and bacteria; microplastics and Fitbits; epigenetic genes and trauma-curdled cells; SSRIs and Bluetooth and birth control pills and electromagnetic waves; geo-temporal ideologies and the downward gravity of time - all settlers of vastly disparate origin and substance firmly situated within the flesh. It is notoriously difficult to evict a squatter once they have set up house. Are we the tenant or the landlord and which do biological laws favor? How do you take back control of a body that was never yours?

Rejecting Western notions of personhood, Niwa considers alternative modes of existence unbridled by bodily-restrictions or gender constructs. Her creations speak to a state of being defined by perpetual movement - a flower, wilting; a fruit ripening. A seed vault, a genetic sequence, a sensorium, a somatic memory bank. A valley full of weeds, bursting with life.