

# CHAPTER NY

**For immediate release**

Em Kettner  
*Sick Joke*  
October 14 – November 12, 2022

Chapter NY is excited to announce, *Sick Joke*, Em Kettner's first solo exhibition with the gallery, featuring a new series of miniature, figurative sculptures and small-scale drawings on glazed tile.

Kettner's practice celebrates the power of mutual dependence, both in her subject matter and chosen materials. By referencing familiar moments of physical fragility and mutual support, she revises problematic stereotypes about the disability community and illuminates instead what makes each figure desirable, funny, and powerful. Assembled from separate or broken porcelain limbs, Kettner's spindly sculptures approximate human forms—twisted and stretched to merge with their surroundings. She weaves costume coverings from cotton and silk thread to cover, embellish, and bind their delicate surfaces. Returning to motifs such as the hybrid body and the bedridden body, her figures intertwine in erotic and assistive gestures, knitted to each other and their furniture supports. Her drawings on small tiles expand the narrative of her sculpted characters, depicting imagined origin stories and future scenes from their fictive lives. She embeds these tiles within various surfaces, allowing them to combine with the architectural features that reinforce them.

The tongue-in-cheek title of the exhibition, *Sick Joke*, embraces the thematic intermingling between comedic performance, medical procedures, and accessibility policies present in Kettner's new body of work. The artist designed a grouping of pedestals scaled to accommodate and prioritize viewing from a seated position or shorter stature. Their varied, multi-layer surfaces aid Kettner's sculptures in moments of implied movement upward, forward, and downward. In *The Eternal Worm*, a slithering figure embarks up steps that cave to gently support its undulating body. An accompanying railing—typically a utilitarian device—serves to display her tiles in a linear formation that encourages sequential, serial viewing. The subjects suggest the potential theatricality of clinical spaces, drawing connections between bodies that elect to entertain, perform, and jest and those who are put on display for medical study.

The small scale of Kettner's work alludes to votive objects that were historically placed on altars by the devout as pleas for relief from pain, illness, or deformity. Kettner, however, insists that nothing is too sacred to be comical, or to be shared. She invites her viewers to peer into her works with intimate proximity by moving their bodies along railings or adjusting themselves to observe the intricate geometric pattering of her woven forms presented at a low height. She rewards those who feel compelled to slow down and look closely.

**Em Kettner** (b. 1988, Philadelphia, PA) lives and works in Richmond, CA. She received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2014 and her BFA from The University of the Arts, Philadelphia in 2011. Kettner has had solo exhibitions at François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, CA; Specialist, Seattle, WA; Goldfinch, Chicago, IL; and Harpy, Rutherford, NJ. She is the recipient of the Wynn Newhouse Award, the MIUSA Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability, an SAIC Teaching Fellowship, and the 2019-2020 AAC Diversity and Leadership Fellowship. Her work has been reviewed in Artforum, Art in America, Contemporary Art Review LA (CARLA), Hyperallergic, and Sixty Inches From Center, among others. Her work is in the public collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, the DePaul Art Museum, Chicago, IL and the Joan Flasch Artist's Book Collection, Chicago, IL. Kettner is represented by François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, CA, and New York, NY and Goldfinch, Chicago, IL.