

Penny Davenport: The Looks of a Look That's Looking

30 Orchard St, Gallery 2 ▪ Oct 15 - Nov 19, 2022



Welcome,
You are welcome.
We've been waiting to look at you.
Poor thing.
Why, did you?

How, have you herd?
Animal.

To look at them makes them look so lonely,
From here, where we remember to smile,
We can see how lonely they are.
On their hill,
In the margins,
Are they free to embrace?
Grimace?
Dream
Of how to measure your very, personal world.
Intimacy against another,
Bubble skin against bubble skin and one has to burst,
So pity those in solitude whose face is honestly unobservable.
Far, sad so far,
Lovely bitter grip we have on each other isn't it?

—Toniann Fernandez

Penny Davenport's figures are presented to us in a state of psychological nudity. They make eye contact with us, inviting a sort of connection we cannot make with one another. Their inhumanity renders them incapable of judgement, and while their appearance may be soothing, something unsettling lies beneath. Their joy is dotted with discomfort. Their loneliness suggests peace. They hold the tension between the desire to satisfy social conventions and the will to express what must not be shared with the group. Each creature embodies a childlike benevolence as their complex facial expressions betray the bliss projected upon them by dreaming onlookers: a smile turns downward during a loving embrace, a figure surrounded, held by loved ones, betrays a mask of contentment with an edge of concern in their gaze. Davenport draws upon her experience as an educator, using her pen to explore social codes, to navigate the leylines of subcultures and human behaviors, and to magnify moments of alienation, communion, sameness and sanguinity. In their unimaginably proliferated and autogenerative worlds, Davenport's creatures are not sure how they feel. If they are happy to be together, to be in love, or if connectivity means misunderstanding, forever, then we can hope only to glean pearls from the surprising richness of their sprawling kinship.