

# Em Kettner

## *Slow Poke*

Opening June 26, 2021



Francois Ghebaly is proud to present Em Kettner's *Slow Poke*, the artist's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles.

Em Kettner's sculptures joyously reimagine the disabled body. She works at the scale of an outstretched hand, fashioning figures in glazed porcelain whose forms act as support structures for tiny tapestries handwoven from thread. In turn, these textiles hold the ceramics in place, a mutual interlocking that speaks to wider themes of caregiving and interdependence.

"There's power in embracing your own smallness and fragility," Kettner has stated, "and insisting others delight in these conditions as well." The works carry an aspect of the talisman, the charm, the relic—objects whose smallness endows them with auras of significance rather than diminishment. The woven wrappings are evidence of loving care and act as a kind of costuming, expanding upon or hiding aspects of a physique. These wrappings protect, cushion, and embellish in equal measure. Drawing on deeply held traditions of craft, the works embody a kind of devotion that in ancient times was reserved only for the holy and transcendent.

Across the show, the sickbed serves as a recurring icon. Furniture legs and human limbs commingle, heads sprout left and right, stray genitals pop up through the covers. Throughout, Kettner puts forward the sickbed as a place of joy, eroticism, and togetherness. Figures constantly merge into each other, their limits dissolving into patterns as they meld with a lover, a bed frame, a cane, a hand mirror. These moments of hybridity play on historical tropes that cast disabled bodies as totemic half-animal gods or demons—images that may project power yet ultimately dehumanize. On another level, the sculptures illuminate the systems of support that disabled people rely on, whether they be designed, like a prosthesis, railing, or wheelchair, or social, like another person lending an arm along a flight of stairs. Kettner's many limbed figures point to a crucial expansiveness within disability thinking. We never end at our edges.

**Em Kettner** (b. 1988, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) weaves, writes, and fires clay in El Cerrito, California. She has a rare form of muscular dystrophy, and works to upend misconceptions related to agency and sexuality in the disability community. Em holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she has also taught as a Lecturer in the departments of Painting & Drawing, Contemporary Practices, and Liberal Arts. Her recent solo exhibitions include *Play the Fool* at Goldfinch Gallery, Chicago; *The Eternal Worm* at Harpy, Rutherford; and *Phantom Limb* at NIAD Art Center in Richmond, California. Group exhibitions include Julius Caesar, Chicago; Compound Yellow, Oak Park; Institute of Contemporary Art, Baltimore; Fernwey Gallery, Chicago; Smart Museum of Art at University of Chicago; Andrew Rafacz Gallery, Chicago; and LVL3, Chicago. This is her first exhibition with François Ghebaly.