

*Critic's pick: Em Kettner at François Ghebaly*

By Daniel Gerwin, July 2021

One is instantly charmed, disarmed, and utterly moved upon encountering Em Kettner's diminutive ceramic figures. The viewer initially looks down on her doll-like sculptures because they inhabit a subtly carved white-ash platform, which rises just thirty-one inches off the ground. Be they at play, at rest, or having sex, Kettner's zany and at times abject beings cannot be grasped from above; one must quickly get down to their level.

Kettner weaves silk and cotton threads into intricately detailed textiles, which not only clothe the porcelain forms but hold them together. Out of nineteen characters, eight lie in beds, whether sickbeds (*The Invalid*, 2021), love nests (*The Long Night*, 2021), or a combination of both. These berths are, in a sense, prostheses: The sculpted bodies are incomplete and could not function without the armature of the bedframe and linens. *The Lemon Drop Dream*, 2021, features a yellow bed from which emerges a pair of heads, four feet (from the legs of the bed itself), and two hands—all these elements bound into a single, symbiotic life. Through fragmented anatomies and intimate relationships, Kettner, who has muscular dystrophy, explores the erotics, ecstasy, and comedy of disability, as well as the social and mechanical interdependence that is the province of all bodies.

Kettner's tabletop tableau also features people slithering or crawling with offerings in their outstretched arms; one is even hanging from the ceiling, suspended just above the plinth. *The Pilgrim*, 2020, is a virtually limbless, wormlike soul whose forward progress is marked by a light furrow carved into the wood, giving the platform



View of "Em Kettner: Slow Poke," 2021.

a soft, sandbox quality. Kettner's characters eschew what might be called a "normal" body, often flaunting extra heads or appendages (or too few of them), while others sport numerous protuberances that may or may not be sex organs. Her work incarnates the internal experience of living through our corporeal selves: elastic and euphoric, hallucinatory and humbling.

<https://www.artforum.com/picks/em-kettner-86208>