

CULTURE TYPE

NOVEMBER 24, 2019

ON VIEW: 'WOODY DE OHELLO: BREATHING ROOM' AT SAN JOSÉ ART MUSEUM

by Victoria L. Valentine



(Left) *Defeated, depleted*, 2018 (ceramic, underglaze, glaze, 38 x 22 x 19 inches).
(Right) *Getting in My Own Way Self Imposed*, 2019 (ceramic, underglaze, glaze)

THE SAN JOSÉ MUSEUM OF ART acquired “Defeated, depleted,” (2018) by Woody De Othello last year. Shiny, black, anthropomorphic, and collapsing in on itself, the ceramic sculpture (above left) inspired a body of work now on view at the museum. “Breathing Room” is De Othello’s first museum exhibition. Born in Miami to a family of Haitian descent, De Woody has a BA from Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton (2013) and earned an MFA from California College of the Arts in San Francisco (2017). He lives and works in Oakland, Calif. The installation presents “ritual and utilitarian” works that “express a tension between the animate and inanimate and draw humor from a place of pain.” The complexity of the objects featured in “Breathing Room” belies their appearance and is unpacked in the museum’s description of the exhibition: “Influenced by postcolonial theorist Franz Fanon’s study of the psychological impact of racism on black bodies, Othello’s vessels are linked by the artist to contemporary nkisi—a type of Central African object or container inhabited by a spirit. As characters, uncanny and alive with personality, they slouch and sag, seemingly exhausted by their own weight and the daily burdens of racial and economic strife. Yet they also absorb energy and trap emotion, containing the traumas of life to offer a moment of repose.”