

# SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

For Immediate Release

## FIRST SOLO MUSEUM EXHIBITION OF BAY AREA ARTIST WOODY DE OTHELLO OPENS AT THE SAN JOSÉ MUSEUM OF ART

Woody De Othello: Breathing Room, on view November 2, 2019—April 5, 2020, features an installation of new ceramic sculptures and paintings on paper

**San José, California (October 16, 2019) –**

The San José Museum of Art (SJMA) is pleased to present the first solo museum exhibition of Woody De Othello, an Oakland-based artist who creates colorfully glazed ceramics of anthropomorphized objects.

For his new installation, *Breathing Room*, Othello has re-envisioned the Museum's gallery as an interior space padded with carpet and filled with large ceramic vessels that sprout arms, eyes, and hands rendered in gestures of both reverence and desperation. At first blush, these objects seemingly respond to the legacy of Bay Area Funk artists like Robert Arneson, Viola Frey, and others. However, Othello, who was born in Miami to a family of Haitian descent, was drawn to clay for its connection to his ancestral roots.

Influenced by postcolonial theorist Frantz

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.



Specifically, the ceramic vessels in *Breathing Room* are based around a work by Othello, *Defeated, depleted*, (2018), which was recently acquired in the Museum's permanent collection. Featuring a dark, richly glazed jug-like form with human arms, hands, ears, and lips in an anthropomorphically suggestive yet non-figurative arrangement, *Defeated, depleted* recalls African vessels and reflects the artist's focused research into his diasporic heritage. Othello's process also reinforces this influence: he builds up the clay until, burdened by its own heft, it slumps and folds, giving each piece a psychological weight and sense of emotion. He then allows the soft structure to reach a point of equilibrium only to apply more clay. The comedically crumpled and expressive objects embody the artist's own exhaustion and make visual the physical and emotional fatigue experienced by many African Americans in the US today.

Expanding Othello's interest in the tension between his sculptures and their environment, these new vessels are held up by ceramic space heaters, vents and air conditioners—tools for climate control, and a nod to the human desire to filter our surroundings and create a buffer against the outside world. Accompanying the installation are four new paintings on paper, a parallel component of Othello's practice that offers a diaristic form to explore related ideas. Additional creature comforts, like ceramic light switches and electrical outlets, animate the space. *Breathing Room* is both literal and figurative—a space alive and full of energy, yet one that offers respite from the stresses of daily life, leaving the artist with room to breathe.

### **Biography of the Artist:**

Woody De Othello received a BA from Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton (2013), and an MFA from California College of the Arts (2017), San Francisco. He has had solo exhibitions at Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco; Karma, New York; Quality, Oakland; and UFO Gallery, Berkeley, CA. His work has been included in group exhibitions including 33<sup>rd</sup> Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, Slovenia; *Bay Area Now 8*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; *Front International Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art*, Cleveland, Ohio; as well as exhibitions at Alter Space, Minnesota Street Project, San Francisco; Carrie Secrist Gallery, Chicago; Johansson Projects, Oakland; and Sonoma State University Art Gallery, CA. Othello lives and works in Oakland.

## RELATED EVENTS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

### **Opening Reception**

Facebook First Fridays

Friday, Nov 1, 5—9pm

Free admission; rsvp essential

Celebrate the opening of *With Drawn Arms: Glenn Kaino and Tommie Smith* and *Woody De Othello: Breathing Room*.

For more info and to reserve tickets, visit [SanJoseMuseumofArt.org/Woody](http://SanJoseMuseumofArt.org/Woody)

### **Creative Minds: Woody De Othello**

Third Thursday

Thursday, Nov 21, 7pm

Join Othello as he discusses recent explorations of his Haitian roots in this special walkthrough of his exhibition.

For more info and to purchase tickets, visit [SanJoseMuseumofArt.org/DeOthello](http://SanJoseMuseumofArt.org/DeOthello)

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### **SAN JOSÉ MUSEUM OF ART**

SJMA is located at 110 South Market Street in downtown San José, California. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday, 11am to 5pm and until 8pm or later on the third Thursday of each month. As of Friday, February 1, 2019, SJMA is also free to all on the first Friday of each month from 5–9pm. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors, and free to members, college students, youth and children ages 17 and under, and school teachers (with valid ID). For more information, call 408.271.6840 or visit [SanJoseMuseumofArt.org](http://SanJoseMuseumofArt.org).

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**Press Images:**

[flickr.com/gp/sjma/85QHs0](https://www.flickr.com/photos/sjma/85QHs0)

**Image Credit:**

Woody De Othello, *Defeated, depleted*, 2018. Ceramic, underglaze, and glaze, 38 x 22 x 19 inches; San Jose Museum of Art. Gift of Tad Freese and the Lipman Family Foundation; 2018.13.