

ARTFORUM

Sam Anderson

CHAPTER NY

249 East Houston Street

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“Does anybody need my love?” one of New York’s nine million strangers murmured on the street as I walked to this exhibition. His inquiry felt out-of-nowhere, gentle but rather threatening: descriptors that also apply to the show in question, Sam Anderson’s “A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing.” Here, other lovesome/lonesome things—a harp, an outsize cake-topper bride, a grinning tube of sunscreen—become stripped-down monuments to withheld affection. Anderson’s fragile, frugal sculptures often appear hurried to the point of incompleteness, as if to stress that her work is not a product of impassioned labor but of studied abandonment. It often puzzles. At a moment lousy with “immersive” art experiences, Anderson favors spatial and emotional exclusivity. Her deceptive whimsies signal inner worlds you may never access.

In the room’s center, five tall, round plinths comprise an awkward archipelago. On separate pedestals are *Two Babies* (all works cited, 2018) made of papier-mâché and given a few taped-up sticks for legs. One mouthless tot eyes its frowning, turned-away twin, wondering perhaps if it could make the jump. The aforementioned bride, *Paula*, gazes at nothing, presumably jilted. Elsewhere, a pair of *Best Friends*—epoxy-clay and papier-mâché pawns conjoined at the hip—binge on a video bearing the show’s title. It’s projected to look like what Anderson calls a box-office window. The footage, comprising stock imagery and scored by the Vince Guaraldi Trio, loops through visions of longing: prayerful aliens, cartoon storks ferrying baby bundles, somersaulting astronauts, and napping hippopotami who bring to mind anthropomorphized internet darling Fiona the Hippo and her mother. There’s a voiceover, but it’s too soft to hear. Communication—its delicacy and swift infantilization—emerges as a concern, one underscored by the fact that each sculpture loosely resembles an emoji prototype. Anderson’s show doesn’t disclose much, but its unmoored feeling follows you outside, making you a little stranger.

— Zack Hatfield