

rachel uffner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
upstairs: Hilary Harnischfeger
Six Blocks Away

February 6 - April 3, 2021

Rachel Uffner Gallery is pleased to present *Six Blocks Away*, Hilary Harnischfeger's fourth solo exhibition at the gallery. Comprised of new wall-mounted and free-standing sculptures, the show expands on Harnischfeger's ongoing dialogue with landscape which she often relies on for both material and conceptual inspiration.

Having spent much of the last year at home, this body of work departs from an increasingly removed recollection of natural sites. The phrase *Six Blocks Away* describes the distance Harnischfeger routinely travels between her home and studio. By referencing a measurement of both time and space, she grounds this presentation in facts of location. Yet the abstract works on display — hybrid objects which are at once anthropomorphic, geological, and architectural — evade specificity, much like the way we experience place through memory.

The sculptures are saturated with information and texture. Like her previous works, these are constructed with dense layers of clay, paper, crystal, and pigment. In addition, Harnischfeger is introducing new formal elements such as coiled ceramic scrolls which simulate a buildup of pressure and time much like the visible striations of rocks or the rings of trees. Calling on her memory of tactile and sensual experiences in nature, the scrolls take on a bodily presence, an arm or leg, protruding or penetrating the torso shaped works.

Harnischfeger is also incorporating screen-printed imagery for the first time, scans of her earlier clay sculptures as well as collages made from pages of a Gauguin ceramics book. In works like *Ghost-rock* printed matter serves to reference the history of ceramic objects and low-relief sculptures. The images suggest various narratives, alluding to objects that once existed in tangible form but are now only seen in memory or reproduction.

A number of sculptures including *Sharp Cutting Wings* and *Mmiri* are displayed on wall-mounted shelves. These pieces hold most of their information on the front-facing surfaces, a reference to Harnischfeger's longtime fascination with illuminated manuscripts. Drawing inspiration from the books on display at The Menil Collection or The Morgan Library, she considers the ornate coverings which protect and grant access to various texts. Like the manuscripts, Harnischfeger's sculptures call for a close read. This attention to surface as entrypoint is explored throughout the entire show.

Harnischfeger draws additional inspiration from science fiction. Through works like *Anwuli* and *Obi-3* she considers the potential of a place or structure to physically morph based in the inhabitants needs and emotional state. The titles reference "Mother of Invention" by Nigerian author Nnedi Okorafor. In this short story, the main character Anwuli is pregnant and alone, living in Obi-3, a smart house with artificial intelligence and the ability to shape-shift. Anwuli experiences a deadly allergic reaction to the local genetically modified grass and Obi-3 does everything in its powers to comfort her. Okorafor calls into question how our relationship with technology and even place is possibly an extension of self. Like Okorafor, Harnischfeger is also interested in the notion of beauty and danger when considering our climate and ecology.



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Hilary Harnischfeger (b. 1972, Melbourne, Australia) earned a BFA from the University of Houston, Houston, TX and an MFA from Columbia University, New York, NY. The artist has been included at exhibitions at the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS; State University of New York at Purchase, Purchase, NY; the FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY; MOCA Cleveland, Cleveland, OH; American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington, DC; the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY; 80 WSE, New York, NY; Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, TX; Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, TX; Artists Space, New York, NY; and the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, TX; among others. In 2007, Harnischfeger was the recipient of the Maria Walsh Sharpe Foundation Space Program Award. Her work is in the permanent collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH. Harnischfeger lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

Image: Hilary Harnischfeger *Obi-3*, 2021. Amethyst, ceramic, paper, hydro stone, pigment, steel, 20 x 12 x 12 in (50.8 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm)

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