

Sweaty Wedding

Sweaty Wedding showcases a new ceramic sculpture series by artist Juntae TeeJay Hwang. Portraying hard work, societal pressures, and expectations as sweat, each sculpture has quirky, human-like attributes that effuse performative qualities. Through the ceremony and pomp of a wedding, TeeJay alludes to the stress and anxiety that comes from being on display and the emotional labor exerted in everyday life that is often invisible yet holds familial and societal structures together.

The exhibition title, *Sweaty Wedding* is a nod to the uncertainty and insecurity around commitment, trust, and sacrifice within marriage. Through the abstraction of sweat as labor in the context of a wedding, TeeJay takes a look at our collective drive to outwardly exhibit perfection and success through performance, while inwardly grappling with divergent emotions. The labor of straddling contradictory internal experiences like pride and shame, excitement and fear, intoxication and sobriety is a symptom of the tensions that exist between the hyperreality of spectacle and the quiet, tedious day-to-day struggle. This tension is a symptom of the gap that resides between the upkeep of our public or digital personas and the need to experience authentic humanity. TeeJay examines this gap and the tensions within it with honesty and humor, asking us to take a look at our own relationship to perfectionism, labor, and the societal pressures to perform.

The exhibition consists of over fifty sculptures and five paintings, demonstrating TeeJay's ambition and work ethic, although the complete body of work is even larger. Some ceramic objects are representative of laughable domestic tropes with names like "Naggy King" and "Petty Bebe", the viewer can imagine the annoying idiosyncrasies of relatives who must be invited to a wedding. On the other hand, the series of paintings provides an aerial view of a landscape with erotic and daily life references sprinkled within. TeeJay frames these as perspective pieces or maps; the perspective his ancestors might have of him from above. Inspiration for the entire collection originated from the process of working with clay. "Working with clay is like being in a marriage. Clay is petty and remembers everything. There is a lot of love and uncertainty that goes into the process. My sculptures are fired multiple times in a temperature higher than a volcano, I often think of it as my works being in a super hot sauna sweating and steaming," says TeeJay. With a background rooted in activism and performance, he is always thinking about the multifunctional and performative aspects of static work. The "sweaty" resin-cast feet of every ceramic sculpture (or wedding guest) seems to perform with attitude and quirkiness of its own, reflecting the characteristics of a family member, friend or spouse.

— Esther Hz, Chief Curator