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RADICAL CERAMICS BY ANTHONY SONNENBERG CHANNEL EKSTASIS AT GAVLAK,
EXPLORING INTERWOVEN THEMES OF TEMPORALITY AND (IM)MORTALITY

*Mirroring the expressive environment of a Baroque church, I'm not here. This isn't happening.
presents an ethereal sanctuary that is at once haunting and life-affirming*

GAVLAK Palm Beach is pleased to present *I'm not here. This isn't happening.*, Arkansas-based artist Anthony Sonnenberg's first solo presentation with the gallery. In this new body of sculpture work, Sonnenberg reveals an excitement about process and spontaneity of firing, with inspiration ranging from tombstones and funerary masks to the accumulated surfaces of Meissen and Sèvres porcelain. Featuring a bong, urn, flower vase, broken clock, eight pairs of candelabras with podium votives, and a "fear of death" mask, *I'm not here. This isn't happening.* allows concepts of eternity and anxiety to acquire specific shape. The exhibition's intentionally solemn, church-like environment harks back to the heightened drama of the Baroque era, while also retaining a formally playful, Rococo effervescence and sense of abundance. *I'm not here. This isn't happening.* opens June 9 and will be on view through July 25 at GAVLAK Palm Beach.

Structured like the interior of an otherworldly yet orderly church, complete with an entryway, candlelit nave, and altarpiece, the exhibition channels qualities of *ekstasis*—to stand outside of or transcend oneself—and other mystic experiences. The artist finds inspiration in the spirit of Silenus, the Greek deity admired by Nietzsche, and assumes his philosophical perspective on art, encouraging delight in the discord of Dionysian intoxication and exuberance. The resulting installation, reminiscent of Bernini's *Saint Teresa in Ecstasy* (1627-52), invites transgressive interpretations in otherwise sacred environments, and questions the constraints of ecclesiastical assumption and authority.

Known most for his decadent and intricately assembled ceramics, the artist is in many ways a collector, religiously searching for readymade material in local antique stores and markets, as well as the charged soil of the South, to form the basis of his sculptures. Sonnenberg carefully arranges these found objects, ranging from button-sized tchotchkes and porcelain figurines to Jurassic period fossils, around an architectural clay construction, which is then kiln-fired up to four times to achieve a fragmented surface bursting in staccato rhythms.

As a queer artist from the rural South, Sonnenberg subverts connotations of ceramics as decorative, derivative, or otherwise, and freights his work with cultural meanings through the transfiguration of preexisting, found materials. In this manner, Sonnenberg's candlesticks and clocks take on a political context and expressive monumentality, offering existential questions like—how many lives have these objects had? What can they tell us about our existence and its transience? Where will they go from here? Similar to aspects of drag culture, commonplace objects in Sonnenberg's work are aestheticized and sublimated into queer myth through the imagination of the artist, allowing for individualized and poetic interpretations.

Engaging the artist with his own version of hide and seek, one can vaguely identify the arabesque of a female figurine—rendered androgynous under layers of glaze—or the imbricated petals of a ceramic rosebud. Flirting between utility and ornament, illusion and reality, surface and expression, Sonnenberg's works are notable for their formal asymmetries and meticulously crafted imperfections, opening the door to an ethereal and liminal space on the threshold of Elysium.

ABOUT ANTHONY SONNENBERG

Anthony Sonnenberg (b. 1986, Graham, TX) lives and works in Fayetteville, AR. His works reside in the permanent collections of the Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, Bentonville, AR and the Archie Bray Permanent Collection, Helena, MT. Recent solo exhibitions include presentations for the Art Museum of South East Texas, Beaumont, TX (2018); the Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX (2015); and the Old Jail Art Center, Albany, TX. His work was featured in recent group exhibitions including the Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH (2020); the Fuller Craft Museum, Houston, TX (2019); the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX (2019); the Institute of Contemporary Art at MeCA, Portland, ME (2017); and the Texas Biennial, Austin, TX (2011).