

VISUAL ARTS & ARCHITECTURE: Fantastical sculptures look at what life might have been

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REVIEW

Pandra Williams: "New Sculpture: Munusculi Tantilli, Very Small Gifts"

Through Feb. 23. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays; noon-5 p.m. Saturdays. Prices: \$1,250-\$10,800. Kiang Gallery, 1011-A Marietta St., Atlanta. 404-892-5477, www.kiang-gallery.com.

Bottom line: Eerie, imaginative and playful.



Pandra Williams' plankton-inspired "Pervagus Nubigena" conjures an imaginary jellyfish.

Sci-fi blends with Jacques Cousteau in Pandra Williams' latest exhibition, "New Sculpture: Munusculi Tantilli, Very Small Gifts." Taking us on a fantastic voyage through the depths of her imagination, the artist re-creates tiny life forms, running the gamut from fanciful to ominous.

Williams' larger-than-life interpretations of both plant and planktonic organisms (microscopic algae and protozoa) are eerie and irresistible hybrids. Wriggling, sprouting, coiling and honeycombed, they evoke deep sea documentary and Biology 101. Unusual configurations are both beautiful and fierce — floral, fungal and at times, predatory.

Made from stoneware, encaustic, engobe (clay slip colored with metal oxide) and terra sigillata (a lustrous ceramic slip that resembles glaze), Williams' crew of creatures is subtly textural and softly colored. Their oddly appealing mix of wan green, dusty blue, silvery mauve and rusty orange enhances the impression of otherworldly origins.

Clever titles add to our viewing pleasure. Tongue-twisting names are concocted of pseudo-Latin with a dollop of Italian, as the sculptor combines phonetics and meaning in playful accompaniment to the works themselves.

"Auspicium Brieseum" is a gorgeous creation composed of a large orb and jutting appendages that open like gaping, feeding mouths. Delicate shoots spill from the sculpture's center, suggesting spores in flight. "Pervagus Nubigena" takes jellyfish form, with twisting tentacles flowing from a bulbous head. "Insteti Dotis" houses three small balls in a web-like sponge; it's impossible to discern if this is nurture or entrapment. Rising from the rounded, ribbed exterior of "Saltcello de Gamba" are crablike claws and small, sharp spikes. A hollowed interior contains ocher globes poised atop wire filaments — stamens fluttering in the heart of a blossom.

For those new to Williams' work, these sculptures will astonish. For those already hooked, they will not disappoint; we marvel at the mind that conceived them and the talent that constructed them.