

**IMPRESSED:
LaKela Brown at REYES | FINN**

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LaKela Brown: IMPRESSED opened at Reyes|Finn on September 2nd, 2021. This show included 14 of Brown's signature plaster reliefs as well as 4 works on paper. Brown takes objects such as door-knocker ear rings, rope chain necklaces and figurine chicken heads, transfiguring them "into symbols that powerfully reckon with historical representations of Black women"¹. Brown's work exudes a genuine sense of warmth and affection for her subject matter that is evident in the amount of labor invested in these works. Hundreds of earrings and chicken heads had to be cast individually in brittle plaster and then inlaid into these tablet forms. The care shown and labor exerted is presented as if they are love letters to all of the women who have adorned themselves with these ornaments throughout history. When Brown showed similar work in Rockefeller Center in Manhattan through the Art Production Fund in 2019, the subject matter of the series both complimented and contrasted the gilded space that it was shown in and because of that dynamic, was particularly impactful, but here in Detroit, the work feels right at home.

The warmth for her subject matter is not spared on her viewers; it seems as though Brown has included a composition for every sensibility. In *Composition with Grid Layout of 21 Embedded Doorknockers and 19 Multi-Color Metallic Door-knocker Impressions*, the elements are laid out methodically on an evenly spaced grid for the logical, rational thinking viewer to study.



Composition with Grid Layout of 21 Embedded Doorknockers and 19 Multi-Color Metallic Door-knocker Impressions © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn

In *Composition with 18 Multi-Color Metallic Doorknocker Impressions in a Cluster*, the same elements are overlapping each other and creating harmonious vibrations like a dancing crowd. This overlapping creates small voids between the elements that allows us to see just how delicate these pieces truly are.

Composition with 3 Golden Doorknocker Impressions and Chain has the elements that make up these works on full display. Here they are organized in a way that is reminiscent of a jewelry store display, overlapping just enough to seduce the viewer into wanting to be a part of whatever is going on just beyond the surface.



Composition with 18 Multi- Color Metallic Doorknocker Impressions in a Cluster © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn



Composition of Chains with 16 Golden Doorknocker Impressions © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn



LaKela Brown: IMPRESSED at Reyes | Finn © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn



IMPRESSED © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn



Chickenhead's Revenge Part I © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn

In the work that shares its title with the show, *IMPRESSED*, the viewer is confronted with a colorless grid of doorknocker impressions, or the negative space left behind by the removal of the object. With only the void where these precious adornments once resided left over, we are left to consider their absence, and for some, perhaps what it means for identity. This is the most meditative of all the works in the show.

The work *Chickenhead's Revenge Part 1* consists of a stark white cluster of chicken heads piled on top of one another. The title evokes a sense that these chickens have been somehow wronged and that we as the viewer, or someone at least, are about to pay the price. It is hard to shake the feeling that all of their little chicken eyes are following you around the gallery like a flock of irritated Mona Lisas.

The largest work in the show is entitled *Composition with 35 Golden Doorknocker Impressions*. This is the only work in the show that includes a cast of, what I believe to be, the artists own hand. This hand is outstretched as if reaching out for a handshake or to caress the cheek of a loved one. On the floor below this work is a pile of cast chicken heads. They lay there discarded as if a remnant of some other time or place.



Composition with 35 Golden Doorknocker Impressions, 2021 (Detail) © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn



Composition with 35 Golden Doorknocker Impressions, 2021 © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn



Composition with 35 Golden Doorknocker Impressions, 2021 (Detail) © Clare Gatto + Reyes | Finn

All of the elements of these cast reliefs adhere to gravity. The door knocker earrings hang off of the surface of these reliefs in the same orientation that they would when attached to a body. Even when these elements are clustered and piled on top of one another they are giving the impression of chaos while still adhering to a carefully oriented grid. This adherence to gravity comes unglued in the paper works as well, as the doorknockers are embossed into the paper, providing a shallow relief that separates them from their objecthood. This is enough for Brown to break from the adherence of the grid and gravity. In these works the ear rings are positioned in multiple directions with some even falling off the edge of the picture plane. Examples of this can be found in an untitled work from this show. This venture into paperworks is a lovely evolution for Brown, however it also continues to be refreshing to see continued experimentation with the medium of plaster and the subject matter for which Brown is so well known. It truly feels as though this work is a love letter to a people and a culture that she comes from and holds near and dear to her heart.



Untitled © Dieu Donn  + Reyes | Finn

LaKela Brown: IMPRESSED on view until October 16, 2021

For more information about LaKela Brown and Reyes | Finn:
<https://www.reyesfinn.com/>

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1. Reyes | Finn, "LaKela Brown: IMPRESSED," September 2021, https://www.reyesfinn.com/exhibitions/lakela_brown