

Erica Westenberger

a murmur at foredawn

October 6 - November 19, 2023

Sibyl is pleased to present **a murmur at foredawn**, an exhibition of drawings and sculptures by Erica Westenberger (b. 1991, New Orleans).

Westenberger's intricately detailed compositions draw on the architecture of myth and storytelling to explore the complex emotions and doubt that have been a part of self-discovery throughout time. Her work depicts bodies that twist and stretch like taffy in atmospheres hinting at complex interior and domestic spaces. Multiple characters intertwine limbs in carefully composed encounters. The pieces reflect tumultuous inner narratives wherein actions are ultimately deliberated through arduous emotional labor.

The liminal settings in Westenberger's drawings represent the complicated internal landscapes of a lived feminine experience as modeled on the artist's own life. The accoutrements of femininity physically bind the characters—ribbons, corsets, ruffles, chokers—to create a sense of tension wherein the femme protagonists tie themselves up in knots. The characters share space with objects placed within cryptic surroundings and narratives. Each object invites symbolic readings and yet escapes conspicuous interpretation. Westenberger's visual lexicon invites the viewer to search for meaning while also allowing for the enjoyment of small discoveries.

Westenberger's sculptural works share a language and syntax with her drawings. Cement relief castings allude to ancient tablets wherein we find the earliest transcriptions of mythology, religion, and lore. Sculptures situated on the floor in beds of black sand call to mind an anthropological dig site, hinting at the internal excavation performed when questing for meaning. Between the sculpture and the sand (which simultaneously reads as gunpowder, soil from a garden or tomb, or the same graphite carefully applied to paper in the drawings), the worlds within the drawings bleed into the physical gallery space. The fraught feminine interiority central to her two-dimensional compositions are given a tangible shape.

Westenberger's interest in private spaces, both real and psychological, draws on the aesthetics of suburban landscapes. In Westenberger's own words, "the artifice of normalcy is broken by experiences of emotional disappointment within traditional systems of domesticity and caregiving relationships." Installed on the mezzanine level of the gallery are objects that allude to a suburban lawn, complete with a two-tier water fountain and pink astroturf.

SIBYL

They are rendered in the candied pinks that might reflect the playful and garish aesthetics of feminine adolescence, a period rife with the dichotomous desires to simultaneously conform to and defy societal norms. The installation gives clues towards the mercurial frameworks that encircle the overall exhibition, inviting the viewer to explore the nuance and constraints of traditional feminine identity. *A murmur at foredawn* is an exploration of the nature of self-doubt and the constraints of feminine identity, expanding the narrow boundaries of these concepts by delicately pulling at their threads until they unravel.

ABOUT ERICA WESTENBERGER

Erica Westenberger (b.1991) is an interdisciplinary artist from New Orleans, LA. She renders narratives about femme apprehension through graphite drawing, painting, bas reliefs, and installation. Tension is used as a recurrent theme to explore feminine relationships to beauty politics, domestic spaces, and mental health. Westenberger received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2014, and her MFA from Tulane University in 2023. She was a 2021 Artist-in-Residence at the Joan Mitchell Center in New Orleans.

ABOUT SIBYL GALLERY

Founded by Katherine Lauricella Ainsley in 2022, Sibyl Gallery is a contemporary art space in New Orleans dedicated to promoting emerging artists and art practices. Collaborating with artists, patrons, and institutions alike, the gallery aims to continue to diversify and strengthen the New Orleans art community and connect it with the broader international art world.