

**ArtSeen**

# Brandon Ndife: *MY ZONE*

By [Peter Brock](#)



Installation view: *Brandon Ndife: MY ZONE*, Bureau, New York, 2020. Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York. Photo: Charles Benton.

An architectural structure remains habitable for as long as it maintains its separation from natural elements. When this order breaks down, spontaneous reactions take hold. Domestic comfort gives way to mold, mud, rust, and rot. This entropic return can unfold slowly or with the overwhelming force of a fire or flood. The sculptures in *MY ZONE*, Brandon Ndife's debut solo exhibition at Bureau, resemble relics of an unspecified disaster. Many of the works reference furniture: cabinets tipped on their sides, a green hexagonal dresser with an open back, a black drawer mounted to the wall. These plywood constructions contain earthy scenes as if gathered from a feral swamp. Gourds smeared with chunky soil jut out from billowing towers resembling fungal growth. Household items lie caught within the

murky drama. Ndife lures us into examining these bizarre hybrids, which evince a process that simultaneously involves decomposition and growth. A mysterious form of allegorical and biological change emerges as the protagonist of this show, with each sculpture testifying to its strange presence.

Ndife's craftsmanship is so convincing at times that it's easy to catch yourself scrutinizing these works as if they were actual wreckage. The giveaway is that the sculptures don't smell like the decay and funky growth that they depict. In fact, he has chosen to fabricate these vegetal amalgamations from materials that share almost nothing in common with the substances they impersonate. Ndife's clever mimesis relies heavily on cast polyurethane foam. This substance requires considerable manipulation in order to give it a plausible semblance of organic matter, and he makes liberal use of mulch and other soil-like bits to add a gritty texture. In his efforts to transform these industrial materials, Ndife reveals himself to be a superb colorist. He achieves an earthy speckled pattern through blending layers of pigment suspended in resin; discovering scrubby yellow brushstrokes below the glossy resin was delightful and instructive. These traces of the artist's hand caused me to pause and appreciate the careful attention of his techniques. The gaps in the facades reveal their underlying materials and are equally as important to the impact of the work. Noticing the raw plasticky foam of an unpainted section reminded me of the effort necessary to sustain an illusion. Despite their wild energy, the narrative qualities of this work result from conscious choices. Ndife endeavors to make new things that feel deeply embedded in personal and ecological history.

*Door to Cupboard* (2020), is a large and rowdy construction whose bright red planks have succumbed to an aggressive form of rot. This janky door has swollen boards and a decomposing pumpkin embedded in it. Many layers of crusty paint make it feel almost implausibly old. A scattering of fresh holes drilled into its surface reveals that the object is in fact made of pink insulation foam with a thick skin of Aqua-Resin and enamel. Ndife has inserted an apartment-style peephole at eye level, making this door into a tiny-eyed cyclops. As I pored over its densely textured exterior, that minute oculus stared back at me. The scarring on its surface and skull-shaped protrusion



Brandon Ndife, *Door to Cupboard*, 2020. AquaResin, cast foam, earth pigment, enamel, door viewer 63 x 26 x 6 inches. Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York. Photo: Charles Benton.

give this work an eerie quality: it could feel more like the door to a dungeon than a cupboard. However, the incongruously shiny peephole and cartoonish distortion of the door's rectangular form deflate these ominous connotations. This wall-mounted sculpture has such a spunky presence that it almost reads figuratively.

Many of the furniture-oriented works resemble dioramas. Plywood boxes house scenes more dynamic than their containers, domestic fixtures that are drab and mass-produced. The orange paint on the interior walls of *Modern Dilemma* (2020) creates an enticing glow within an ordinary-looking cabinet. These containers conjure apartment living but remain largely unaffected by the wild activity going on within them. *Hygge* (2020) breaks from this tendency, offering an exciting interplay between the festering innards and the outer vessel. The doors and back of this cabinet appear to have been eaten away by fire or aggressive decomposition, yielding a void at the top of the work. The extent of the damage to this cabinet indicates a truly destructive event. I wonder if its fictional owners also experienced this scale of disruption. Nature slowly digests abandoned homes and plant life reclaims the ground. This regrowth heals the land, but not the pain of those who have been forced to leave their homes.



Brandon Ndife, *Sconce*, 2020. Corn husk, resin, AquaResin, earth pigment, enamel, wood, aluminum, plastic, 17 x 17 x 20 inches. Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York. Photo: Charles Benton.



Two works in the exhibition stand apart from the rest in their formal accomplishment and the type of transformation they imply. *Sconce* and *Öffnung* (both 2020) are smaller and shaped like gnarly branches with large bulbous pods sticking off them. Mounted directly onto the gallery walls at head height, their biomorphic forms don't seem to have obvious connections to human industry at first sight. *Sconce* would appear to be plucked directly from an eccentric tree if not for a ball of translucent blue plastic encased within corn husks. A puzzling metallic lump and a section of bicycle chain add to the deviant quality of this sculpture. *Öffnung* is quieter, but equally freaky. Its pods on either end of a curved stick look like large, closed flowers, a neat pattern of parallel veins running along their "petals." Their surface glistens with clear resin over gorgeous layers of green and speckled yellow pigment. Drawn in by the intricate coloring, I noticed a different texture overlaid on top of the veins of the corn husk. A spidery web of fiberglass spreads out across the murky contours. Encountering this structural enhancement of a seemingly organic form was thrilling and creepy. Is there a name for the plant equivalent of a cyborg? At this moment in particular, bioengineering seems equal parts promising and reckless.

Another remarkable quality about *Sconce* and *Öffnung* is that they manifest a less obvious but more insidious form of alteration to our ecosystem. When extreme weather floods our dwellings and rots their materials, the damage can usually be cleaned up or the structures rebuilt. It is not so easy to remedy interventions that escape their bounds and become incorporated into biological life forms. It is nearly impossible to know the extent to which this has already happened, and what impact these contaminants will have. A disaster that is largely invisible has haunting implications. Ndiye's work centers the fact of human fragility and menace by using our furniture and fixtures as avatars for our bodies. Despite their frightening connotations, the artifacts remain captivating for the peculiar vitality they embody.

## **Contributor**

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