

plug nina beier

solo exhibition
3 june — 7 august 2021

Ah, luxury!

Reclaimed porcelain sinks form the bases of Nina Beier's Plug sculptures, in a variety of undulating shapes and muted colors, each fitted with a fat, hand-rolled cigar sitting neatly in its plughole. The sinks on the floor are upturned, claiming freestanding independence like toddlers, whilst others are fixed to the wall. They are squat and shiny, little carriers of the void.

The product names for the shades of the porcelain reveal an intense desire for bathroom-based transportation, and summon lingering imperialist fantasies from half a century ago: Bahama beige, Bali brown, Indian ivory, champagne, vapor pink. This reeks of shame. We must travel while we wash our hands, to a pastel kingdom where we can forget this corporeal shit. Our minds must temporarily be evaporated away into a cerebral mist, leaving the body to do what it must. We transcend. Clean between the fingers and up to the wrists. Don't sink.

Porcelain takes its name from the cowrie shell, or Venus shell (porcella in Italian), which is not the scallop that the goddess of love sailed into the world on, riding on a froth of blood and semen, but those beautifully smooth and glossy ovoids with labial openings. Porcelain is named after that perfect translucent finish, yet the shell is actually named after the word porcella, a young female pig. Whether the connection of young sows to shells is made for the shape of pigs' genitalia, or if porcella was a slang for pudenda like pussy, remains unsettled by etymology. My gut says it's the latter. It will come as no surprise that cowry shells were used as a currency, a history which has even left its mark on the Classical Chinese, where the character for money/currency is the same as cowry, 貝.

These sculptures are more anal than vaginal, though they are a little porcine. They have a stocky perseverance. Little piggy banks stuffed with a few rolls of twenties. Those fat cigars, that money, that power, wadded. A history of monstrous violence, globally rolled, like gold. The accursed share. The shit. Ah, luxury!

text by Laura McLean-Ferris, Writer and Chief Curator at Swiss Institute, NY