

REVIEW: TAMMIE RUBIN, *EVERYTHING YOU EVER* AT WOMEN & THEIR WORK



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Tammie Rubin, *Everything You Ever*, installation view.
Courtesy Women & Their Work.
Photos by Ryan Hawk.

[Tammie Rubin's](#) exhibition at Austin's [Women & Their Work](#) (through Jan. 10) ostensibly takes the Texas ball moss as its subject. The plant (which, despite its name, is not a moss) perches on trees and plants, collecting nutrients from the surrounding air. This visually delicate plant has a death grip: its tendrils encircle the tree it lives on, gradually tightening until its host loses circulation. For Rubin, the ball moss offers an apt metaphor for the times we live in, serving “as a signifier of gathering chaos, conclave connections, concentrated confusion, a labyrinth of values, and growing will.”



***Comfort Bind*, 2018 and *Less*, 2018.**
Porcelain, underglaze, wire, steel wool.

Built from tangled twine and rope that she has embedded with steel wool, cotton, and wire armatures, Rubin has covered these structures with porcelain slip, “drowning, distorting, and obscuring the original.” The exhibition includes a work of hanging ceramic pieces—*Invisible Visible Indivisible*—delicately floating on clear monofilament through the middle of the gallery. Two lines of tall table-pedestals hold a series of larger sculptures (to the scale of a soccer ball, more or less), and another two sculptures sit on wall-mounted pedestals protruding from a piece of felt that marks a black horizon line throughout the space. These larger sculptures play fast and loose with the ball moss form: in some cases, the moss seems to drape over and around a white conical structure—a holdover from Rubin’s earlier work—often read as a reference to Klan hoods. The thin tendrils of the sculpture are weighted with gloopy slip that trickles and spreads across, through, and under. Thick tar-like surfaces seem to hang heavy over the delicate lines of the wire armature on one sculpture; on

another, a muddy surface the color of caramel pushes up against sickly lavender and pink-red swathes of color.



Standing (detail), 2018. porcelain, underglaze, wire, steel wool.

The installation *Invisible Visible Indivisible* is especially satisfying, its floor to ceiling threads holding ceramic balls and bits that range in size and color. As if they have been picked up by a stormy wind and are about to be hurled at something, the objects pause, hover, and—instead of transforming into projectiles—gently float. Each object in the piece is visually rewarding, but seen together, they construct a narrow pathway through the space, in which the viewer is surrounded by clouds of ceramic thoughts and feelings.

The rows of sculptures Rubin installed on tables sit high. They are lined up in two single rows, and the black felt on the wall behind them grounds them, keeping them from disappearing against the walls behind them, in contrast to the hanging installation. In these sculptures, the ball moss seems to have grown into larger masses, almost-tumbleweeds, ready to roll away. These might be undersea anemones or Fraggles with their wispy lines and slightly menacing presence, or they might be the ugly thoughts and stereotypes that continuously float to our shared surface, choking and stifling difference, hope, and exploration.



Gallery view.

All of the sculptures in the exhibition are from 2018, and Rubin has titled them in a manner that might be a log of one's emotional state in this frightful political moment (and yet, as Rubin reminds us, for many communities this is also *Same as Ever*). Titles such as *Anxiety Dive*, *Comfort Bind*, *The Answer is Horrible/Rhetorical* sit alongside physical states: *Driving*, *Riding*, *Waiting*, *Eating*, *Listening*, *Worshipping*, *Being*. Her title decisions indicate the relationship between psychic distress and survival: some days, just *Being* is the only way to push past the *Clashes*, *Tangles*, & *Knots*.

The exhibition title—*Everything You Ever*—is not citing the 2008 TV miniseries *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, and yet the lyrics to that show's final song might be relevant here. At the final moment of the show, Dr. Horrible sings over the body of his lost love, Penny. In the song, "Everything You Ever," we find his realization of the horribleness of a world without feeling. He ends with this verse: "Now the nightmare's real / Now Dr. Horrible is here / To make you quake with fear / To make the whole world kneel / (Everything you ever) / And I won't feel / A thing."

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