

# ARTFORUM



David Altmejd, *The Unicorn*, 2021, expandable foam, epoxy clay, epoxy gel, resin, wood, steel, hair, acrylic paint, quartz, glass eyes, pencil, Plexiglas, thread, metal wire, and glass rhinestones, 55 x 26 x 24"

LOS ANGELES

## David Altmejd

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY  
5130 West Edgewood Place  
May 15–July 2, 2021

Poignant, bizarre, and frequently perverse, David Altmejd's figurative sculptures stun on multiple levels. Be it the subtle tension of an eyelid or the considered positioning of hands, the works' scrupulously wrought detailing elicits our sympathies in remarkable and surprising ways. "The Enlightenment of the Witch," Altmejd's solo debut here, features ten new sculptures—a motley procession of fantastical creatures, including a decapitated sprite, a trio of "Crystal Christs" modeled from quartz, and an armless troll—that revel in their grotesqueness. They loosely illustrate a progressive spiritual ascent, wherein each successive piece appears increasingly mutated and mangled as it approaches the divine.

Altmejd shows spectacular range both in his mastery of depicting facial expressions and in his deployment of various materials and techniques.

Starting off the show is *Matter* (all works 2021), a vaguely Mickey Mouse–like bust assembled from a colorful patchwork of clays that retain the impressions of the artist's fingers. The precisely cast human hands over the figure's eyes allude to guardedness, grief, *unseeing*. By contrast, the exhibition's namesake work, installed at the back of the gallery, is exposed in a wild state of ecstasy: Her skull and legs are split wide open as she gives birth to a child whose head is crowned with a thick shock of the artist's own hair. The witch's unnervingly lifelike qualities intermingle with humbler, craftier moments: smears of glitter, globs of glue.

Transcendence coincides with transgression everywhere in this presentation, particularly in *The Unicorn*, a Christlike figure with a long phallic horn for a nose: His right hand, rendered in triplicate, is raised in benediction, while the left points to a vulva on his chest that's exposed through a hole in his tunic. Despite the aggressively absurd aspects of this personage, the sense of revelation he expresses feels vulnerable, sincere—it's almost as if Altmejd's road to enlightenment were only paved with good intentions.

— Janelle Zara