



ILY2 is excited to present new work by Leena Similu for Ether II, New York, opening May 6 and on view through May 10.

Working in clay-based sculpture, Leena Similu explores identity as a dynamic continuum—one shaped by the tension between lived experience and inherited memory. Her ceramic vessels speak through dual registers: the intimacy of personal narrative, particularly her own experience of motherhood, and the broader legacies of matrilineal heritage. Drawing from her West African ancestry, Similu's forms echo the sculptural traditions of masquerade and ritual, while also incorporating distinctly contemporary materials and surface treatments - such as synthetic hair, textiles, beads, and high-gloss platinum glazes - that blur boundaries between the folkloric and the futuristic.

Similu began working in clay while pregnant with her son, an embodied threshold that opened a generative inquiry into origin and transformation. Her fertility forms have since evolved into masklike figures and anthropomorphic totems that feel both archaic and speculative - resisting the logic of linear progression. These works channel a desire to materialize something timeless without erasing the messiness of the present. They do not reconstruct the past, but rather cull from it - both selectively and intuitively. Myth and memory become tactile materials, spun and shaped into form like clay thrown on a pottery wheel.

The resulting sculptures reflect a shifting index of archetypes, each rooted in the idea of personhood not as a fixed role, but as a force of continuity. Her vessels are transhumanist and genderless portraits of matrescence: stages of becoming that trace the looping path between birth, ancestry, and self-invention. The vessel becomes the object of both origin and outcome - a site of transmission and transformation alike.

While referencing traditional Cameroonian masks and fertility effigies, Similu's visual language eludes distinct categorization - intentionally distorting the codes of ethnographic legibility. Her sculptures feel like relics from a parallel lineage: familiar yet foreign, reverent yet rebellious. Through these dichotomies, her sculptures speak to the malleability of agency, identity and authenticity and propose new pathways through which personhood might be reimaged.

Similu (b. London, UK) has had recent solo shows at Mariane Ibrahim, Paris, FR; The Pit, Los Angeles, CA; Emma Gray HQ, Los Angeles, CA; and Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland, OR. In 2024. She has participated in group shows at Carlye Packer, Los Angeles, CA; Royal Society of Sculptors, London; The Pit, Palm Springs, CA; and The Future Perfect, Los Angeles, CA. Her work has been written about in The New York Times and Vogue, among other publications. Similu lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.