

Nicki Cherry

*I can be a woman for you*





Nicki Cherry: *I can be a woman for you*

March 9 - April 21, 2024

Slow Dance

Chicago, IL

**Checklist:**

1. *Boning (right rib)*, 2024, Fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, plaster bandages, cement dye, blister pearls, stainless steel grab bar and hardware, 43" x 26" x 29"
2. *Boning (left rib)*, 2024, Fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, plaster bandages, cement dye, blister pearls, stainless steel grab bar and hardware, 50" x 23" x 37"
3. *Betrayal oozes out of every pore*, Fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, plaster bandages, cement dye, blister pearls, stainless steel grab bar and hardware, latex tubing, silk tulip, bedpan, oil of milk, 79" x 16" x 30"
4. *Like too-acidic candy made for thrill seeking children*, Fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, plaster bandages, cement dye, blister pearls, stainless steel grab bar and hardware, 24" x 10" x 9"

*What knowledge does a shoulder have? A foot? The tip of a finger?  
We are made of pieces. They often fail to communicate.*

*When I'm worried, I pinch my thumb and middle fingers together. I focus my attention there, outside of my brain, my head, my eyes. It has its own intelligence, this meeting point of skin. There are photos of me as a child, pressing my fingers together like this, looking anxiously at the camera.*

*I think of these touch-points between my fingers, these places of comfort, knowledge, unease in my body. There are so many spaces out of reach. I try to listen to them. I fail so much of the time, my attention redirected. Sometimes, the result of this is joy.*

The plaster fragments on view in Nicki Cherry's exhibition are the result of certain limitations, described by the artist as the limits of physical reach, but these barriers also enact pointed and clear moments of isolated presence. A shoulder, a lower leg and foot, an elbow...segments of the body brought into sharper focus, even when estranged from the whole. They have been touched and recorded, lingered on and mapped. These are places in the body where emotions nestle in deeply, out of sight and beyond immediate recognition. There is knowledge cradled in these places, too. In the lower back and collarbone. In the feet and hands. Cherry's fragments are molded from their own body, yet through the segments' particularities, they transcend biography, as though adopting a new sense of agency and individuality. We might identify with them, as viewers—relating shoulder to shoulder, arm mirroring arm—but there is something unknowable here, too. Beyond sight, like the spaces carved within us where feelings hide.

The surfaces of Cherry's quasi-exoskeletons are punctuated with the small, shining protrusions of pearls. Their presence is subtle, as though produced from below the surface of the material, not unlike a blemish or a cyst. While

most pearls are formed within the tissue of a mollusk, the variety of pearl Cherry incorporates are blisters, formed on the shell's inner surface, caused by a foreign object finding its way into the space between the mollusk's tissue and shell. They are, in a sense, unwanted growths; something unfamiliar expelled by the body. They are beautiful, and contradictory.

Each plaster shell appears weathered, exposing a patina akin to mold or lichen. At moments, we see the slumps in flesh, the wrinkles and goosebumps of skin. In this way, we're reminded of the material reality of these bodies we carry around with us. We're unable to escape them. But as they intertwine with the metal grab bars Cherry has installed, they are given a seeming weightlessness, poised as though alighting into the air. At other moments—a dangling foot, a portion of chest creased by the weight of a breast—the shells appear heavy, pulled by gravity. Their need for support is more apparent here.

Weightlessness, collapse, awkwardness, bliss. We know these feelings, don't we, even if we each know them differently? The sensation of feeling heavy in our bodies, bogged down by worry or fear or grief. By love unreturned. But there are moments of ecstasy and escape, too. We run, we swim, we ride in a car with the windows down. We get high, we have sex. We lay in the grass or float in water. Sometimes, we forget our bodies are anything at all: a peculiar kind of luxury. They always catch up with us.

As Cherry's work suggests, the body insists on its presence, but it doesn't do so alone.

Boning (right rib)



1. *Moonlight in Vermont*, Dorothy Ashby & Frank Wess, *Hip Harp*, 1958



2. *Close to Me, The Cure, The Head on the Door*, 1985

3. Jóga,



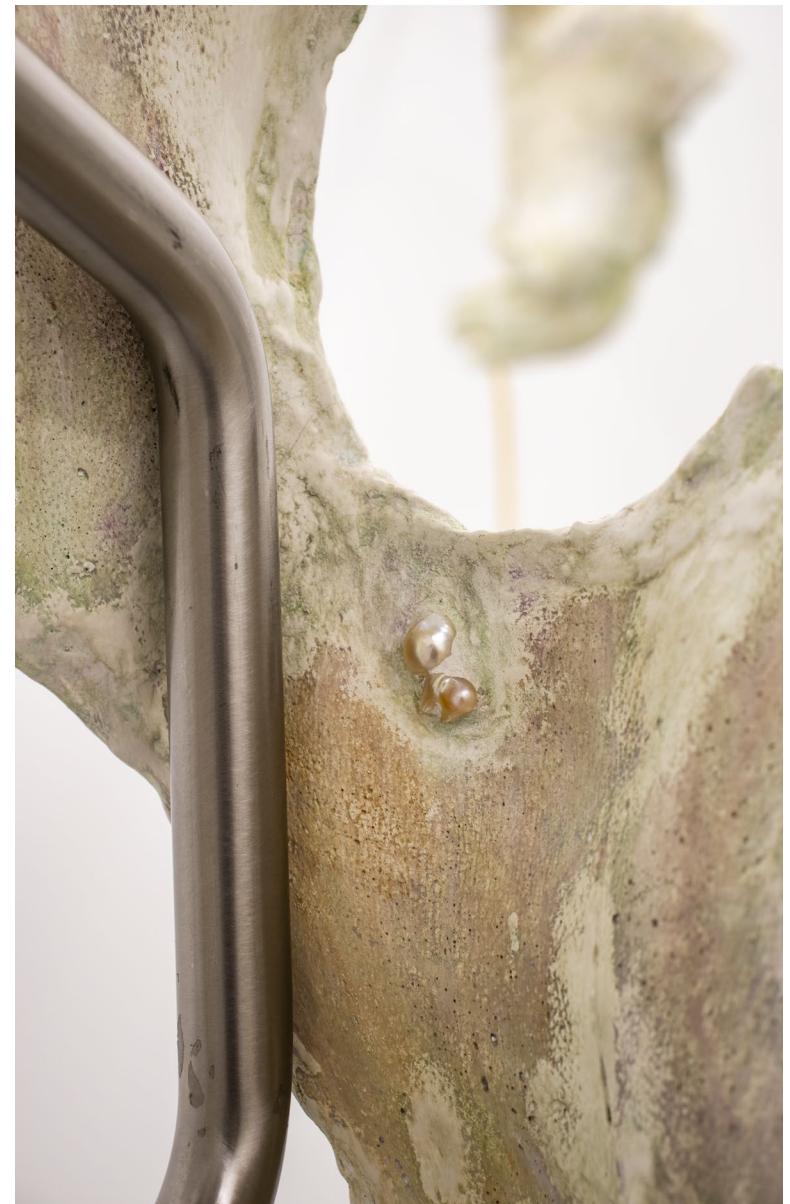
Björk, *Homogenic*, 1997    5. *Watching You Without Me*, Kate Bush,



*Hounds of Love*, 1985    6. *home with you*, FKA Twigs, MAGDALENE,



2019 6. *Cue*, Yellow Magic Orchestra, *BGM*, 1981 7. *Be My Baby*,



The Ronettes, *Presenting the Fabulous Ronettes*, 1964 8. *LOVE*

10

Boning (left rib)



11





True to Life, Roxy Music, Avalon, 1982

11. Slip Away, Clarence

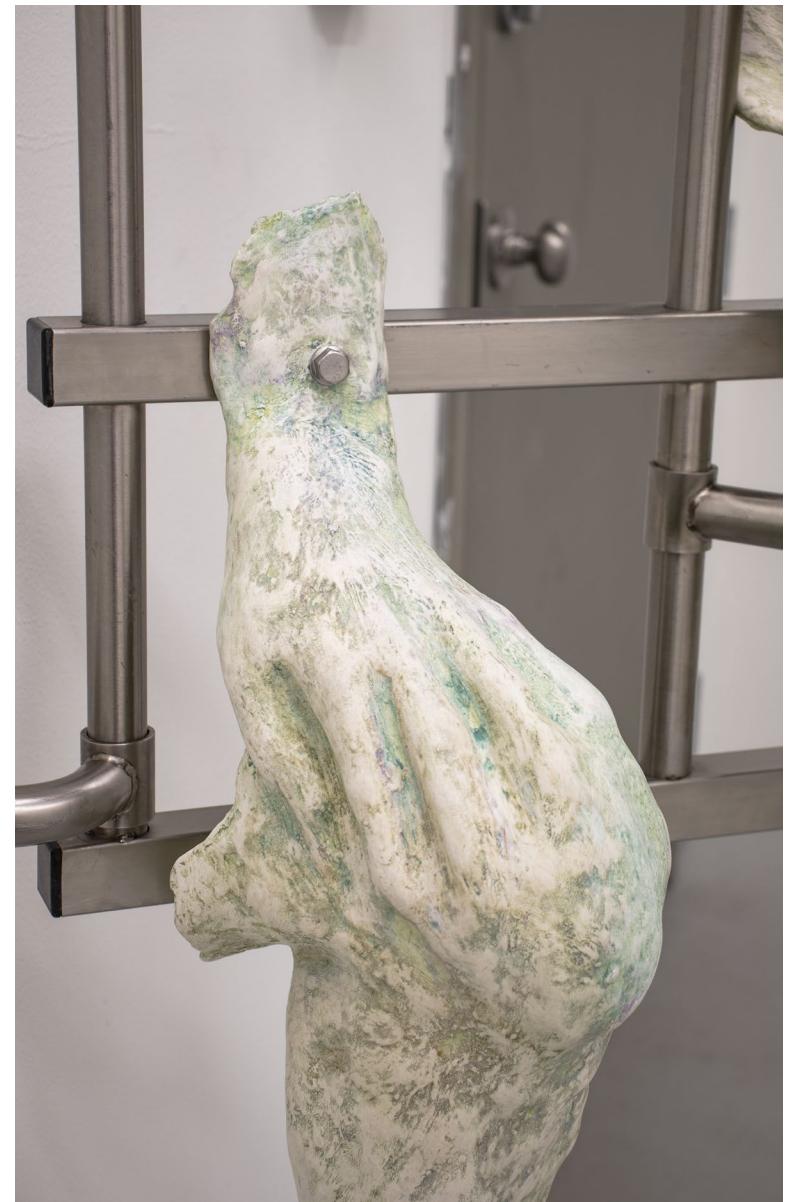


Carter,

This Is Clarence Carter, 1968

12. Well I Wonder,



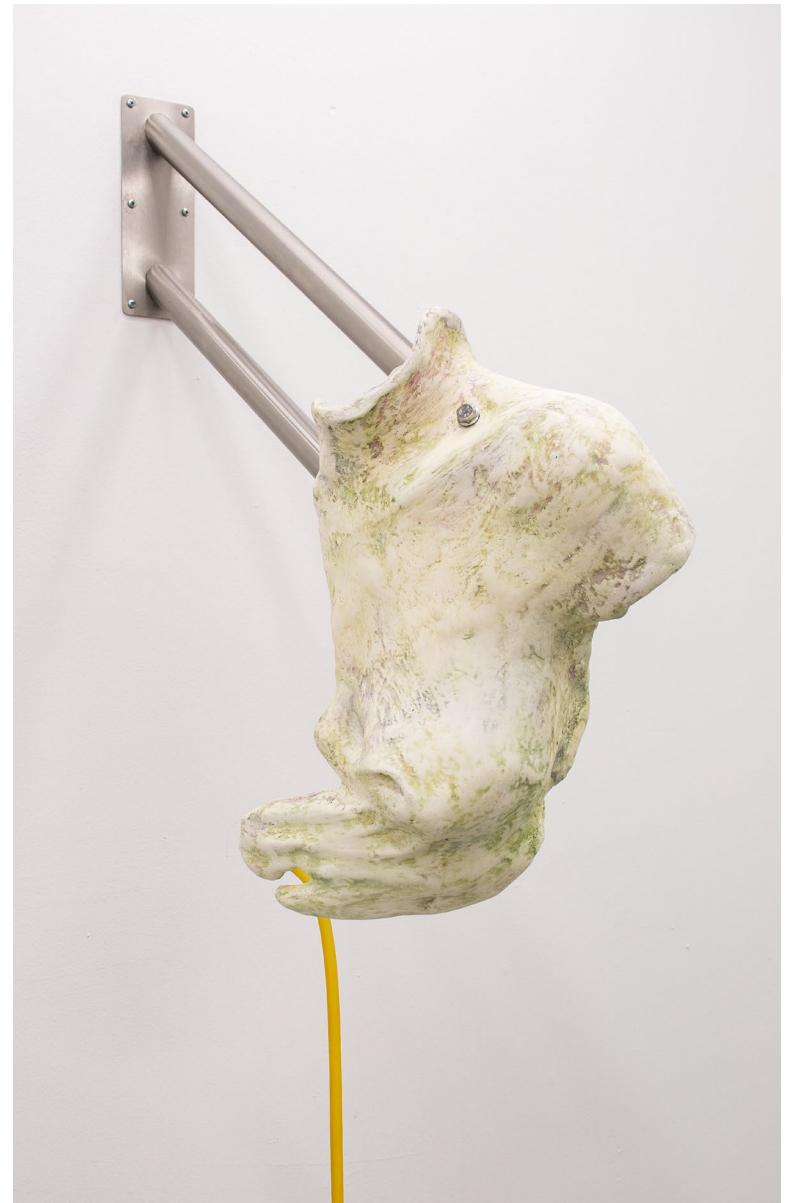
The Smiths, *Meat Is Murder*, 198513. *Heaven, Shygirl, Nymph*, 202214. *Crying*, Roy Orbison, *Crying*, 196215. *Glory Box*, Portishead,



Dummy, 1994

16. Breathe In, Frou Frou, Details, 2002

17. I'm

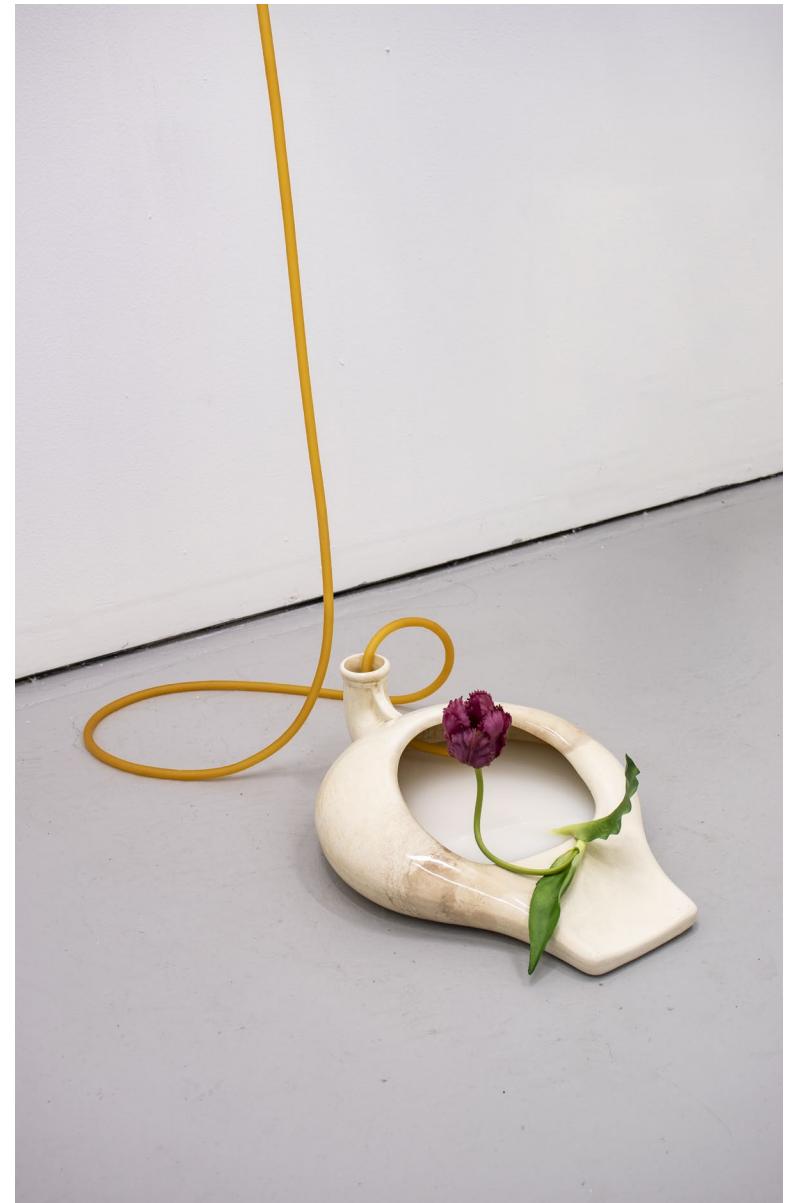


Not In Love, 10cc, The Original Soundtrack, 1975

18. I Want You



*To Love Me*, Fiona Apple, *Fetch the Bolt Cutters*, 2020      19. Hammond



*Song*, The Roches, *The Roches*, 1979      20. Poor Places, Wilco,

*Like too-acidic candy made*



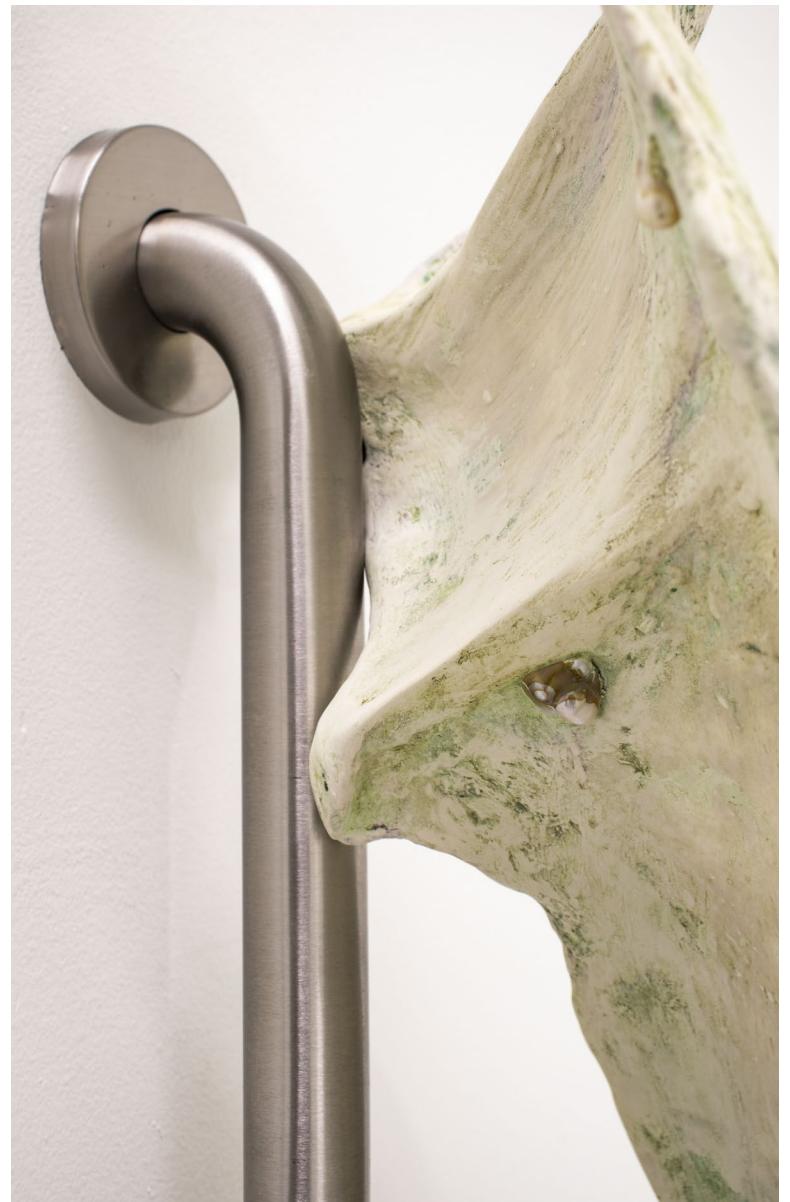
Yankee Hotel Foxtrot, 2002

*for thrill-seeking children*



21. Unison, Björk, Vespertine, 2001

22. *Peace Piece*, Bill Evans, *Everybody Digs Bill Evans*, 1959



23. *Wild Is The Wind*, Nina Simone, *Wild Is The Wind*, 1966

*"I've been cold ever since I came to this world"*

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

It is the beginning of winter and I am waiting for the arrival of the tulips I planted long ago. It's been so long since I dug into the soil and hid the bulbs that I am starting to forget that they're even there, patiently building up the energy to sprout to the surface and greet me.

Yearning and anxiety sit in the same space in my body—crammed squarely in my sternum. Both feel like an animal has gnawed a space out of my chest, a cavity in which it can hibernate. What material matches the feeling? It's heavy, sweeping from upper chest to gut. Not hard like metal, but not with much give. It burns like a too-acidic candy made for thrill-seeking children.

It is winter and I am unaware that my fingernails are sunk back into the damp soil to plant more tulips that I have collected in the whistling corners of snowbanks. I am only conscious of my body nestled into the folds of a tattered couch positioned in front of a fireplace, my skin reaching out for its flickering warmth.

I detect the trail of scent that your breath leaves behind. Although I do not yet understand the impulse, I collect the vapors and use them to water the bulbs.

The decades drip by as the tulips writhe.

*"The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals"*

Sylvia Plath, *Tulips*

Ever since the blossoms' arrival, I have been in a manic state. I have a tendency to not recognize more tepid emotions—I often oscillate between numbness and hysteria. The strong emotions fracture my body, making it difficult to pay attention to anything else. Shucked open, I can press my fingers against the pearls that have formed like blisters against the inside of my skin.

It feels all at once profound and embarrassing to realize how much I've repressed rather banal truths from even myself.

In the heat of summer the tulip bulbs shrivel and mold. Devoid of their brilliant blooms I am listless. I slide into our bathtub, contorting my limbs to reach towards the limits of where I can touch—and thus know—myself. The body and mind are messy, slippery things. There are parts of me that can only be formed in relationship to another.

Woman isn't a label that belongs to me, but I can put it on, just for you, if that's what you'd like to see.

Published on the occasion of:

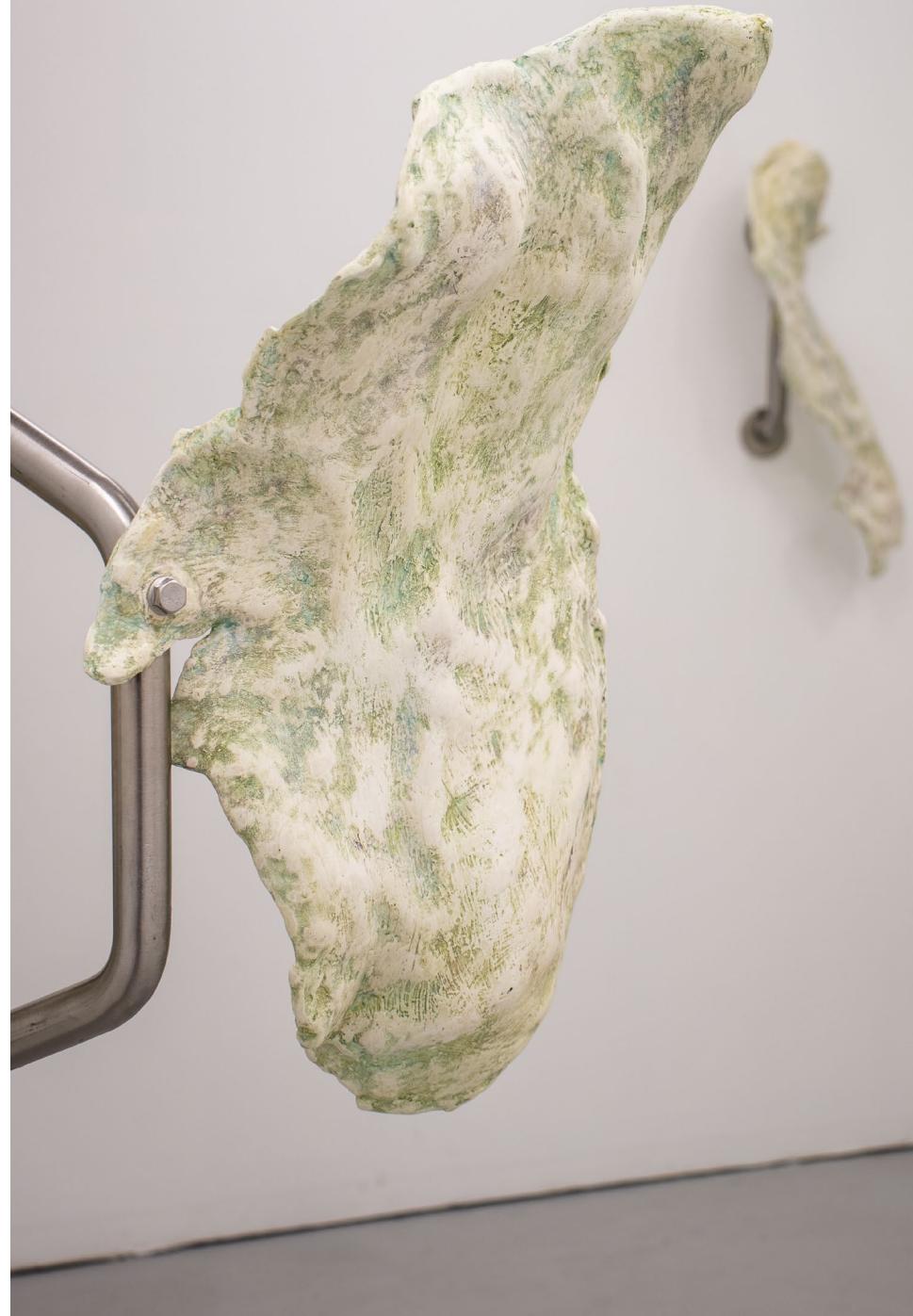
Nicki Cherry: *I can be a woman for you*

March 9 - April 21, 2024

Slow Dance

319 North Albany Avenue

Chicago, IL



Slow Dance

March 9 - April 21, 2024

