

# NEWCITY

## Wells Chandler Creates an Oasis of Allegorical Avatars at Andrew Rafacz Gallery

The New York artist makes hand-crocheted installations that chart a queer iconography.

BY SAMUEL SCHWINDT | DECEMBER 8, 2025



Wells Chandler, "Tigers Above, Tigers Below," 2025, hand crocheted assorted fibers, 16" x 19" /Photo: Andrew Rafacz Gallery

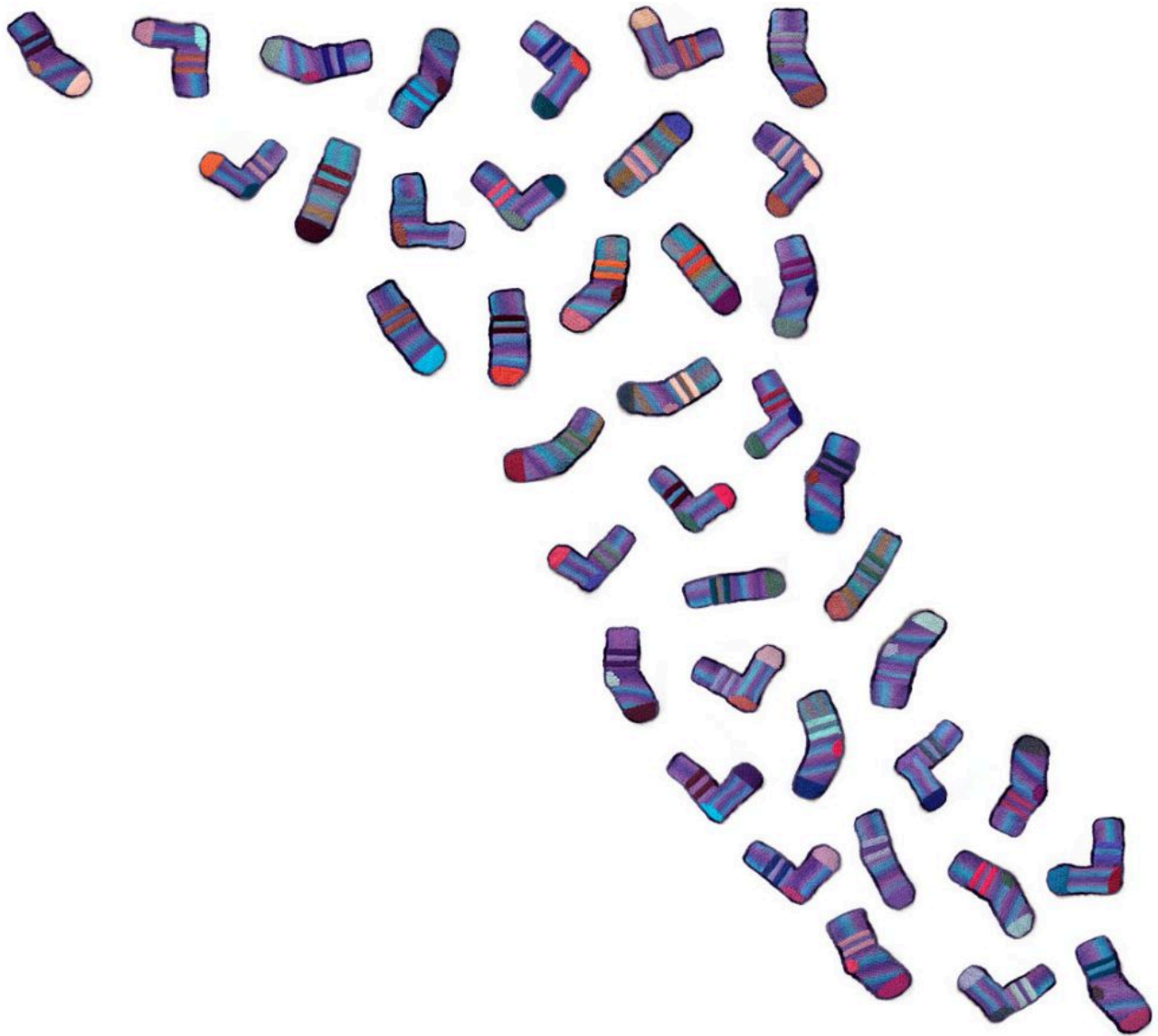
An exodus is a ceremony to the celestial. Spectrums of subdued color ameliorate unresolved alchemies of autobiographies. Repetitious symbols tell fortunes to cultivate a folklore of transformation.

Wells Chandler's solo exhibition, "What A Long Strange Trip It's Been," at Andrew Rafacz is a contortion: spectator versus participant. The viewer can nest in a cozy group of bean-bag chairs ("Sky Man" series). The viewer can lean against a wall and side-glance for a truncated bug to sneak ("George," among others). The viewer should twist their pupils to view the lightning-head icon's textured torso and stretching arms. That artwork is the resolute centerpiece of the exhibition (titled "The Secret of the Golden Flower"). Am I going to join this knit-confection, or is it going to engulf me?

Walking in, "Tigers Above, Tigers Below" is a cutesy strawberry creature winking on a low wall. Crinkle your neck to the left and a flower stigmata adorns slightly above. Turn the corner and two stylized critters crawl up the wall. Turn the corner again and a seemingly never-worn sweater with a tangled-coat sheep pastes the wall ("How Bold One Gets When One Is Sure of Being Loved").

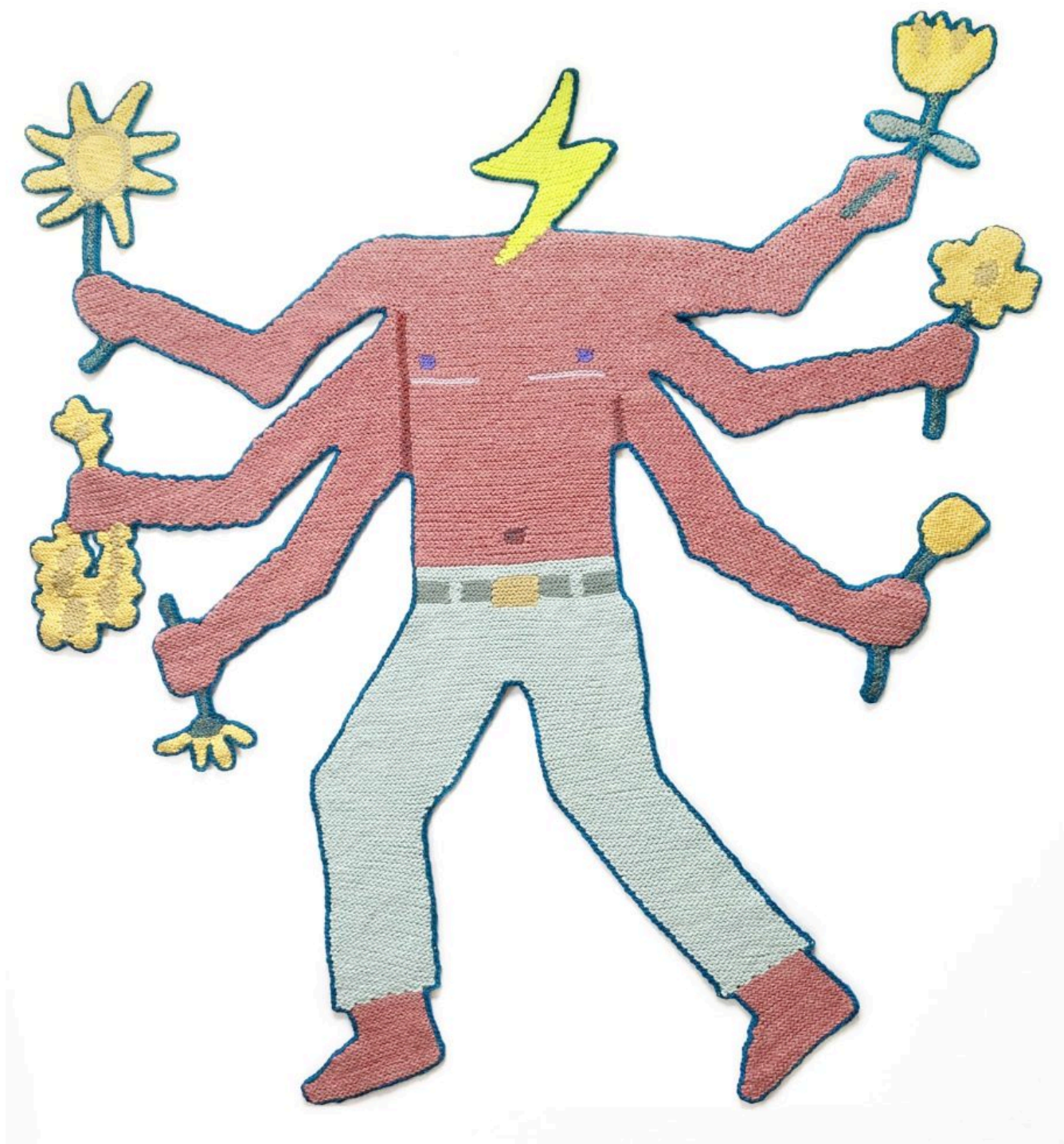
If the viewer chooses a different path than the quick trot up shallow steps, they shuffle through the ramped hallway of the gallery. "The Transmigration of the Milky Way" is sock soles, the abject souls of Chandler's characters and a path of enlightenment. The hallway ends with "Gender Affirming Dragon Granting Wish Fulfilling Jewels." A designation of beginnings and ends, however, is already troubled in a delineation of Chandler's world. The standard spike-scales of the dragon tell me the pace of a journey is steady, forward, back, to the side. Never-ending.

My conversations with the artist a day before the opening careened and curved. The habitual bordering-ritualistic knitting method charts the trans story of the artist. With mentions of a recent top surgery and the ensuing recovery, with Chandler's revealing of snapshots of childhood and murmurs of gender-nonconforming histories, the work alludes to an autobiography. It doesn't stop there; Chandler wistfully reminisces about an Eastern religion trip in Tibet and elsewhere that inspired their god-like creatures for the exhibition.



Wells Chandler, "The Transmigration of the Milky Way," 2025, hand crocheted assorted fibers, 162" x 192" /Photo:  
Andrew Rafacz Gallery





Wells Chandler, "The Secret of the Golden Flower," 2025, hand crocheted assorted fibers, 92" x 84"/Photo: Andrew Rafacz Gallery

A contrasting religious connection sutured my conjoining of Chandler's work. The reference: the Book of Kells, an intricately illuminated manuscript containing the four Gospels, produced around the year 800 C.E. Widely regarded as a masterpiece of medieval Western art, the text cursively makes Christian stories sacred, embodies religious rites in

stylized figures and memorializes parables as concrete (even on deteriorating vellum). The book is now housed behind glass at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. That manuscript is preserved and protected; Chandler's manuscript, even though warm in fiber, is laid bare and vulnerable. It has a hand reaching forward to the viewer—not stagnant and steeped in constrained iconography. So squat, kneel or crane your neck: Wells Chandler has an oasis of allegorical avatars, ready to worship.

Before I left, my pocket accidentally dropped a dime. Chandler solemnly joked: "An offering."

*"Wells Chandler: What A Long Strange Trip It's Been" is on view at Andrew Rafacz Gallery, 1749 West Chicago, through December 20.*

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