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ART



ARTIST'S ZONE: Sew Hoy works in a studio at her and her husband's Highland Park home. LEE O. BAYLEN Los Angeles Times

IN THE STUDIO

Reveling in the everyday

Anna Sew Hoy avoids grand gestures. She prefers to work with ordinary material.

HOLLY MYERS

When Anna Sew Hoy moved into the Highland Park bungalow she shares with her husband in fall 2008, she brought her studio — formerly housed in the Women's Building on Spring Street — with her. Rather than landing in a garage or sectioned off back room, however, it gradually spidered out across the property.

"It's decentralized," she says. "I have a studio there," she points to the front bedroom, "where I make things, and then I have a dirty place in the back, a wood shop, and then I have a room over there that's white, where I just look at stuff. But it took a while to figure that out."

From a seat at her dining room table, one glimpses her sculptures comfortably woven into the ambience of the house: a hive-like bundle of ceramic, fabric and twine hanging among the plants in the greenhouse alcove; a wall-mounted shield on the living room wall, dotted with finger-shaped hooks intended to serve as jewelry holders; loosely hexagonal ceramic "paperweights" scattered between picture

frames on the mantelpiece.

A graduate of the School of Visual Arts in New York and the Bard College MFA program, the 34-year-old artist works in familiar, even mundane materials, often intertwining ceramic forms with fabrics (especially denim), metal elements, wood, rubber, mirrors and commonplace items such as necklace chains, sunglasses and cellphone cords. In many cases, as in her memorable installation of sculptures in the Hammer Museum's "Eden's Edge" show in 2007 as well as the pieces now scattered about her house, the works assume a domestic scale; they are objects conceived to be integrated into the everyday — a stand on which to hang your jewelry, for instance, or "that little table sculpture next to your computer that you look at every day when you're doing your e-mail." She's fascinated, she says, with quotidian objects and the relationships we forge with them.

"Like when I was a kid," she says, "loving my Mickey Mouse so much. You invest all this emotional intention and physical touch into this one object. Or like in high school, your boyfriend's sweater or something. You feel like, 'Oh, my gosh, I love this thing. I love my mug that I use every day for coffee, every morning as my ritual.' It's about how these things get into the weave of your daily life to where you

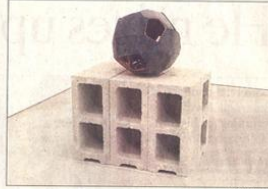
don't even notice it."

What raises the work above the level of a common jewelry holder or paperweight, however — and distinguishes it, for that matter, from much of today's frequently prosaic found object-friendly sculpture — is its sense of deeply conscientious materiality.

Sew Hoy has an indisputable talent for clay — a knack for drawing out its soulful, expressive qualities without tipping into preciousness or novelty, and for pushing its boundaries in terms of form, producing a surprising variety of shapes: off-kilter vessels, hexagonal spheres, hollow orbs, ank-like loops, spindly clusters resembling convoluted

honeycombs and wall-mounted bas-relief shields. She brings the same degree of sensitivity to more banal materials as well, and the effects can seem magical: denim takes on the delicacy of lace; cellphone cords assume an organic vitality of vines or ferns.

"I don't make sketches before I work," she says. "The sculpture comes from improvising with materials — just pushing them around and seeing what they do. It's a slow way to make work. It definitely feels like creating a new process for making something every time I'm making something."



'MIRROR ORB': Sew Hoy turns mundane objects — fired stoneware, jeans and sunglasses here — into art. JASON WYCKE



'HIS JEANS': More jeans, a favored material. JASON WYCKE



'BLUE VIEWS': She pushes boundaries. JASON WYCKE

The result is a strikingly varied body of work, ranging in tone from botanical to space aged, gothic to sleek. A 2003 exhibition at Peres Projects was a jaunty affair involving tree trunks, perfume bottles and beer cans. A 2007 show at Karyn Lovegrove Gallery was dark and almost sullen, dominated by a sprawling squid-like floor sculpture made from stuffed black denim. "Eden's Edge" foregrounded the ceramics, while a solo show at LAX ART the following year consisted of nothing but a pair of 6-foot plaster casts (as if for a broken arm and an ankle) covered with inscriptions by friends.

Lately she's ventured into photography, collaborating with Eve Fowler — they go by the name Two Serious Ladies — to make arresting photographs using a miscellany of objects the two mutually compile.

In her most recent solo show, at Sikkema, Jenkins & Co. in New York in April, she moved away from the domestic scale to create nine free-standing sculptures — several orbs; an ank-like form, 6 feet high and priest-like; a giant pair of vertically positioned hands that delicately touch at the fingertips

— intended to be regarded on their own terms. It is an experience, for the viewer, not of glancing over at a thing while doing e-mail but "letting that thing be the whole world and not looking at anything else."

Sew Hoy speaks slowly and deliberately, feeling out the words, it seems, as she feels out her materials, or the rooms of her house. She describes the shift from the boom market — a situation, for the artist, of "just making work and putting it out there as soon as it was done: making work, giving it away, making work, giving it away, for two years straight" — to the relative quiet of the recession as an opportunity to slow down, to let the work evolve more gradually. It seems a suitably contemplative state of mind given her next big project: the birth of her first child in August.

When asked, at the completion of this last body of work, about her thoughts or intentions moving forward, she points again to the social dimension.

"Exploring that relationship between people and things in our daily lives," she says. "That's a big part of what I'm trying to get at. And then exploring how things bring people together too, and in what ways. Those are two things that I feel like I'm really working on."