

4/13/19

“Anna Sew Hoy’s sculptures are weird, funny and erotic”

by Leah Ollman



“Veiled Orb,” 2019, by Anna Sew Hoy. Fired clay, glaze and printed leather, 27 inches by 30 inches by 29 inches

In Anna Sew Hoy’s work, the body is everywhere, especially where it’s missing — just slyly implied.

The L.A. artist’s recent sculptures at the gallery Various Small Fires join clay, fabric and common objects like safety pins and ping pong balls to defamiliarize the familiar, rendering it uncanny, uncouth. Sew Hoy takes what might be assumed to be binary oppositions — protection and exposure, psyche and skin, mind and material — and crafts them into convincing hybrids. There is much to smile at here, and plenty that swirls, wonderfully unresolved, long after in memory.

Sew Hoy’s allegiances lie with textures of the everyday, things touched and used. Electronics, however, are categorically dismissed, willed into relics. She buries an iPhone and computer mouse in colored sand and embeds a scanner and phone dock in plaster in two pieces titled “Accumulation Entropy” (I and II). In most of the other sculptures, she explores the physical and metaphorical possibilities of clay (glazed, flocked and sheathed) and fabric, whether denim jeans, lacy leggings or stamped and perforated leather.

Los Angeles Times

In a Pop-inflected piece gone curiouser and curiouser, an oversize, mirrored sunglass lens is framed by a stuffed tube of tie-dyed denim and corduroy, its seam stitched as if in an emergency, with an urgent row of Xs. The shade itself is shaded with a loosely draped piece of latticed brown leather.

“Blood Moon Breastplate,” one of several wall-mounted works, does quintuple duty as body (it’s a plate with breasts), body shield, celestial schematic (those mounds now moons), goofy face (now they’re eyes) and functional decor. Hair scrunchies are looped around two hooks, and a scrappy, pinned-together strip of denim drapes around the parts to fall freely below, ending in a hollowed pant cuff — an open-mouthed cry, a noose, the joke-collar of an invisible dog.

Other pieces also serve at least ornamental purpose — as birdbath, for instance. Mostly, the functionality in Sew Hoy’s work is psychological. Allusions to inner states and the outer layers that house them abound. “Veiled Orb” whispers of the metaphysical, as do two other ceramic sculptures installed in the courtyard. Titled “Within, within” (I and III), their nested forms resemble beehives or blank-faced sphinx heads.

Sew Hoy’s work is something to be reckoned with, body to body. It has kin in the sculptural world, but in effect it feels most closely related to the fiction of Carmen Maria Machado — uninhibited, at once weird and erotic, humorous and unsettling.

Various Small Fires, 812 N. Highland Ave., L.A.
Tuesdays-Saturdays, through April 27. (310) 426-8040, www.vsf.la