

The Beauty of Bacteria: Anicka Yi's 'Life Is Cheap'

By ROBERTA SMITH APRIL 15, 2017



An installation view of Anicka Yi's "7,070,430K of Digital Spit" at the Kunsthalle Basel in 2015. Credit Anicka Yi and Philipp Hänger, 47 Canal, New York, and Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland

With their unlikely combinations of beauty, science, organic material and occasional living things, Anicka Yi's works rarely fail to intrigue, provoke and delight. Her titles can range from the abstruse to the sinister, as with "7,070,430K of Digital Spit," seen at the Kunsthalle Basel in 2015. On Friday, April 21, the Guggenheim Museum will unveil "Life Is Cheap," an exhibition honoring Ms. Yi's receipt of its [2016 Hugo Boss Prize](#).

Accomplished with the help of a team of molecular biologists and forensic chemists, the exhibition will start with an aroma called “Immigrant Caucus,” based on chemical compounds derived from Asian-American women and ants. There will be a diorama lined with tile and containing sculptures coated with agar, a gelatinous substance that supports the growth of bacteria gathered in Manhattan’s Chinatown and Koreatown. A second diorama will contain an ant colony, along with mirrors that multiply their numbers, pathways and incessant labor, mimicking the flow of information along electronic highways. (Through July 5, guggenheim.org.)