

ANICKA YI

BY ALEX GARTENFELD

TO LOOK AT ANICKA YI'S work is to be inundated by signifiers. Consider her installation *GLHF*, shown at the 2012 Independent Art Fair in New York. A bird-cage rested on the floor before mural-size sheets of black velveteen paper that had been graffitied and hung with neon lights. Looking inside the cage, viewers noted scissors, a Girl Scout cookie, a puddle of coffee, a sweatshirt hood and rocks. These objects function as descriptors, yet Yi's patchwork contemporary surrealism suggests ways to exceed language.

The New York-based Yi makes assemblages unburdened by the patina of age that often implies a distance from systems of exchange. Her found objects are freshly torn from the world of commodities, as in *Table for One (at the sad café)*, 2011, which comprises an acrylic Philippe Starck chair "wearing" a vacuum-packed string of pearls. By its proximity to commerce, fashion and distribution, the piece evokes art historian Alexander Alberro's notion of artworks as "models of sensibility," registers of taste equally economic and moral.

Yi's appropriations rehearse a suspicion among some Surrealists that the Duchampian readymade mystifies production, reifying commodity fetishism. Art historian Sven Lütticken has critiqued the focus, in the tradition of the readymade, "on giving new meaning to existing objects—on producing meaning, and ultimately value, by consuming objects." With Yi, objects are not merely presented, but suspended, as in a conceptual soup; with distinctive, sometimes awkward syntax they brush up against each other humorously and tensely. In some cases, ingredients spill onto each other.

"Sous-Vide," her 2011 show at New York's 47 Canal, was named for the technique of cooking food in airtight bags submerged in water and inspired in part by the phenomenon of the leak, specifi-



View of Anicka Yi's mixed-medium installation *GLHF*, 2012. Courtesy 47 Canal.

cally WikiLeaks. Among other works, the show featured olive oil pouring from holes in a freestanding wall. "L'Haine" comprised wall-hung turtleneck sweaters, their collars stuffed with tempura-fried flowers that stain the fabric.

Hybridity, a well-known antidote to modernist purity, manifests in Yi's work, and not merely in formal terms. The Korean-born artist treats her Asian heritage as content both distorted and essentialized. For *Convex Dialer Double Distance Of A Shining Path* (2011), she placed objects including antidepressants, palm tree essence, dust from Teva sandals and Korean thermal clay in a rice cooker to brew, playing modern-day witch, but also doctor and designer.

As part of the group show "A Disagree-

able Object" at New York's Sculpture Center this month, Yi will present, on customized pedestals, three internally lit perfume bottles filled with clear saline solution. Floating inside will be colored contact lenses known as circle lenses, worn by young Asian women in order to look Caucasian, or like anime characters. It's the second time Yi has made perfume as her art, and in neither case has she attempted something so mundane or naturalistic as a floral scent.

Standing before her works, one remembers at times, perhaps nostalgically, the words of Comte de Lautréamont that famously inspired Surrealism, describing a boy as "beautiful as the chance encounter on an operating table of a sewing machine and an umbrella." Yi might suggest a parasol. ○

CURRENTLY ON VIEW

Yi is included in "A Disagreeable Object," Sculpture Center, New York, through Nov. 26. She will also be included in the group show "THE LOG-O-RITHMIC," opening Sept. 27 at GAMeC - Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo.