

ARTILLERY

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“Various Small Fires: Amy Yao”

by Michael Shaw



Amy Yao, *Doppelgangers* (2016), courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires.

There are 15 pieces in Yao’s show “Bay of Smokes,” but one work transcends its counterparts so glowingly that it’s hard not to long for a one-work show. Or at least with a caveat: one work per room. The piece in question, called *Doppelgängers* (all works 2016), is a chest-high pile of rice in a loose pyramid, near the gallery’s center, its cement floor covered in light-beige carpeting. The apt title refers to the pile’s lack of uniformity,

not only in that the edible rice is accompanied by PVC rice, but there are also strategic insertions of resin, plastic pearls, and, allegedly, freshwater pearls (there’s more than one form of “real” here, in a co-mingling of real vs. synthetic). Completed by a warm infusion of skylight, the rice et al. inhales and exhales in and out of soft focus. Andrew Russeth’s recent ArtNews piece on one-work exhibitions comes immediately to mind in terms of what this



Amy Yao, *This Is How I Drive My New Car* (2016), courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires.

could have been; but one suspects that this type of emphasis-on-visuals experience conflicts with Yao's conceptual ambitions. Plus, with younger artists there's almost always a tendency to top-load a show with a backlog of ideas and projects (three of the show's pieces are collaborations with other artists); sparsely installed shows are, alas, the province of artists with a significant track record. As for the cast-rubber brains, rubber dog bones, the plastic roadblock ("K-rail") and chrome towel bar hung with a lead blanket, it's unclear how they add to the show's tone other than as stand-ins compiling a generic conceptual-sculpture gestalt.

Kinder, $COC1=C(C(=CC=C1)OC)O$, the installation in the second gallery, meanwhile, does



Amy Yao, *Support II* (2016), courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires.

keep it spare. Consisting only of a scent diffuser resting on the floor under the stark light from yellow gel filters over a pair of fluorescents, the piece is a headscratcher until you realize it's only about the scent, an ambitious paradigm shift from eyes to nose that subverts well-trodden expectations. The scent itself, made from charcoal and a few spices, is an intriguing mixture of mystery and oppressiveness; it's a firm tone that the rest of the show's work, strapped with the confines of now familiar visual tropes, doesn't quite attain, due to over-inclusiveness.

Amy Yao, "Bay of Smokes," January 23 –
March 19, 2016 at Various Small Fires, 812
N Highland Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90038,
<http://www.vsf.la/>.



Amy Yao, Fried Feet (2016), courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires.