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Arrangements

Anuta Skypnychenko

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In her most recent project, *Arrangements*, Anuta Skypnychenko draws inspiration from one of her day jobs working as a server for a catering company. While talking over coffee, Skypnychenko talks about how the job helps to sustain her financially, simultaneously giving her time to develop her personal work. "Your art practice is connected to your environment. The physical life you spend in certain places and it leaves a certain mark. I like that I have a job that allows me to think. If it's more mechanical work I can think about art. I didn't do art in school. I didn't really get to play that much since I started going at around age 7. I think I missed out on that stage where you can take things apart." Skypnychenko's practice is playful, with previous works including acrylic fingernails affixed with false eyelashes, electric candles coated in real candle wax and a discarded art deco jewelry display with fake blue hair cascading from its base. "I like exposing and seeing what's inside things. I like taking them apart and unfolding them, ripping them, looking in and then rearranging them".

The specifics of catering and producing events inform Skypnychenko's process. "I'm interested in how work changes who you come in contact with, the people you otherwise wouldn't have a chance to talk to. The catering job becomes anthropological" she explains. "I see large homogenous groups of people --for example just doctors, just lawyers or a certain nationality. Sometimes it will be a family that comes from a particular country. I get to see them interact, the food that they order and prefer to eat and how we decorate to suit the group's interest. We go through the whole routine of setting things up for the event. Then we are present at the event as servers, setting up the snacks and the food and all that. I get to see people getting drunk and listening to loud music. At the end of the night, everyone leaves. We take off all the tablecloths and dismantle everything and the lights go on. There are all the beautiful things and under that it's like plastic tables. We have to take apart these arrangements. I get to see all the insides and take them home sometimes." Many of the elements that make up the sculptural objects featured in *Arrangements* are artifacts from such events. Pre-used and punctured green foam balls normally used to preserve floral arrangements are filled with the bare, plastic stamens taken from fake flowers. Balloon weights are rendered totally unrecognizable when they are stripped of their helium counterparts and colourful foil wrapping. They are small, palm-sized domes with a texture that almost resembles concrete, a far cry from their polished "event-ready" state.

Skypnychenko incorporates other commonplace, recognizable knick-knacks that are mass-produced, usually with the intention of replicating a supposedly natural environment. Store-bought feathers, artificially coloured water, decorative sticks, fake plants, fake fruit and bags of stones are among her materials. In addition to the prefab elements she sources, she uses found materials from her own surroundings: pieces of asphalt, garbage left near her studio and sticks.

The juxtaposition of materials in Arrangements pokes fun at the often bizarre, but broadly accepted conventions of contemporary, North American style decorating. Why are certain items desirable to decorate with and why not others? Why do we surround ourselves with plastic replicas of things that really exist? What does how we decorate reveal about what we value?

“I guess my interest is in people's temperament, their decorations and what they choose to have at an event like a wedding. The symbols of things like beauty or eternal life. Things like fake flowers and fruits and stuff like that. Real fruits die and they have seeds but this just keeps that moment of beauty, of youth.”

-Vida Beyer