

It is a common rule at many galleries that staff should not consume strong-smelling food on the premises. Oppressive odors are typically considered distracting to collectors and detrimental to the experience of an artwork.

Stepping into Anicka Yi's recent New York exhibition "You Can Call Me F" (2015) at The Kitchen is, by contrast, a powerful olfactory experience. Enveloped in thick wafts of a biotic-sweaty scent, the space is dark, with a series of quarantine tents, illuminated in part by work lights, housing an array of sculptures. In some, motorcycle helmets rotate on metal stands, tracing the space like 360-degree surveillance cameras; in others, metal bowls filled with indistinct materials incubate uncertain life forms. Mixed in with these natural odors is another, more neutral smell: the aseptic scent of the Gagosian Gallery ("the ultimate patriarchal-model network in the art world," according to the press release), captured by Yi and piped into the space.

"You Can Call Me F" makes direct reference to Steven Soderbergh's paranoia-inducing film *Contagion* (2011). A quick YouTube search of that film yields scenes of anxious pedestrians staring at a promotional "bacteria billboard" embedded into the façade of an abandoned storefront in Toronto, the word CONTAGION rendered in an array of live molds. A construction worker takes a picture of the billboard with his iPhone, then covers his mouth. Someone poses against the façade in a hazmat suit.

Yi offers a sculptural response to the billboard, the piece *Grabbing at Newer Vegetables* (2015), which displays the words YOU CAN CALL ME rendered in molds and set in a glass case installed at the exhibition's entrance. The work contains within it the elements of a living organism, but Yi's is of a particular origin: a collective

Anicka Yi
(South Korean, b. 1971)
lives and works in New
York. She is represented
by 47 Canal, New York.

Yi's forthcoming
institutional solo
exhibition, "7,070,430K
of Digital Spit,"
will open in June at
Kunsthalle Basel.

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*The Mess to the
Masses*, 2014
Installation view
at Galleria Franco
Noero, Turin
Photo credit:
Sebastiano Pellion
di Persano

"super-bacteria" grown from samples taken from 100 different women in Yi's professional network. At once clinical and sensual, the sculpture equates the anxiety surrounding the recent Ebola crisis with the unspoken repression of female bodies and voices in the art world.

A recurring thread throughout Yi's work is an attention to senses aside from sight, and an interest in the memories and potential narratives that are inscribed in biological material. A recent trilogy of exhibitions—"Denial" (2013), "Divorce" (2014) and "Death" (2014), presented at New York's 47 Canal, Berlin's Lars Friedrich and the Cleveland Museum of Art, respectively—presented the biological remains of emotional and physical separation. A forthcoming exhibition at the Kunsthalle Basel, "7,070,430K of Digital Spit," will serve as a kind of culmination of the series, with a focus on the theme of forgetting.

One piece in "Divorce," *verbatim? verbatim?* 4 (2014), featured a cardboard and resin box filled with live snails, injected with the hormone oxytocin, that crawl along its moss-dotted interior. Humans naturally release oxytocin, colloquially known as the "bonding" or "love" hormone, during activities like sex, childbirth and even just friendly interaction. (Some websites argue that an affectionate text or a simple "like" from an ex's Facebook page can trigger its release.) It's strange to imagine a collection of snails—hermaphroditic, able to reproduce asexually and therefore firmly self-reliant—creeping across the inside of a box in a kind of collective ecstasy. It suggests that the social and romantic lives of all living things, even artists, have powerful biological implications—and it's here, at the intersection of art and science, that perhaps Yi has found the medium best suited to explore them. ◉

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