

Beautiful because it is brief

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Time and the quotidian have become central themes in 20th century art. Over the past one hundred years, the temporal measures of our lives and the daily comforts we enjoy have accelerated beyond our forbearers' comprehension. Events which in the early 1900's, took years, months, or days now unfold over the course of hours, minutes, and sometimes seconds; and objects which were once scarce, coveted and crafted, now fall off the production line in droves. In contemporary experience time has become so compressed that concerns for the past and present are often eclipsed by the urgency of the now, and the glut of convenient, cheap industrialized items available to us, bombards the individual, creating oversaturation, and in turn a numbness.

It is within this space of the temporal and the everyday that Heidi Voet's work operates. If our fast-pace life and the kaleidoscope of material things that fill it engender apathy, Voet's work acts as an antidote. The artist re-creates scenes and fragments from our daily encounters using unlikely yet common materials. She transforms the banal into something wondrous, and in the process unearths concerns, connections and consequences that underlie the moment. Her pieces function like a prism, they show us the spectrum of experiences that re-awaken us to more nuanced understanding of the present.

The centerpiece of Voet's solo show at SGA exemplifies one of the main themes in her oeuvre, the omnipresence of time and how this augments our perception. *Is six afraid of seven/ 'cause seven eight nine/ I'm about to lose the pieces I find*, is an elaborate carpet woven together from over four thousand, multicolored digital watches all set to Beijing time. Time's web is here re-made as a whimsical interpretation of an often-overlooked domestic object, and at intervals throughout the day the watch alarms simultaneously ring in a symphony of digital chimes. Over the course of the exhibition, the inexpensive watches will inevitably malfunction, losing their synchronicity and eventually sounding like an out of rhythm and out of tune orchestra. Thus, as the title of the work implies, the march of time is subtle yet unceasing and its cumulative effect ultimately results in dissolution and increased chaos.

Equally spectacular is *Ersatz*, a large-scale rendering of a graffiti tag that the artist found on Shanghai's famous fringe, and rumored to soon be demolished, Moganshan Road graffiti wall. The tag, ersatz, meaning imitation or fake, in the gallery is displaced, a bad-boy remnant reproduced against the prestigious backdrop of the Bund in the unlikely material of gingerbread. This olfactory rich and memory laden material is in part a reference to the fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel*, where an evil witch builds her house out of this seductive cake in order to lure children. A nod to Shanghai's rapid urbanization, the work explores the challenges that attend the city's explosive growth: the memories of a more human-scaled and increasingly supplanted past and the promise of a mega-sized, glittering Modern metropolis future. The graffiti tag mirrors this tension by charming the viewer through sensory associations of domesticity and comfort inherent in the gingerbread while at the same time alarming the viewer with its strident, urban appearance. However, whether the graffiti is evidence of a bright future or a delectable decoy used to seduce and trick, remains a lingering question.

In her photographs, as well as vase and flower sculptures, Voet again transforms ordinary materials into surreal delusions that, this time, offer a sly critique on the representation of women. Her point of departure for these works are pictures appropriated from 'fine art photography' magazines. Sold at local corner newsstands everywhere, these spreads contain photos of nude women and in actuality function as erotica. By using a variety of techniques and configurations, the artist de-contextualizes and re-deploys these images to highlight the assumptions behind these depictions. Voet folds these magazine pictures into elaborate and colorful flowers and sets them in vases roughly carved out of cinderblocks. Here the construction of desire is linked not only to the building fever that has gripped China over the past twenty years, but to the flimsy, yet persistent gender perceptions of fragility as well. For her *Fruit & Vegetables* series the artist also uses these same nude pictures. This time she crops out the upper or lower half of the image, and fills in the missing body parts with vegetables. The resulting collage is a subtle pictorial joke, whereby the organic material will age and rot over time to reveal the lie— enduring youth, beauty and desirability- inherent in these images.

In spite of the varied nature of Voet's oeuvre, there is a lightness that runs through much of her work. From the watch carpet, to the gingerbread tag to the manipulations of 'nudie' magazine images, there is a quirky playfulness that easily seduces the audience into asking more serious questions. Her art reflects her choice to imbue the daily grind with a fleeting magic, and invites the viewer to do the same.