PASADENA

Lynn Aldrich: “Un/Common Objects” at Williamson Gallery, Art Center College of Design

On cursory glance, Lynn Aldrich’s sculptural objects share some of Pop Art’s fascination with consumer goods: an array of wax paper cartons, a shelf crammed with canned food tins, a surfeit of garden hose. And the title of Aldrich’s 23-year survey, co-curated by James Daichendt and Christina Valentine, seems to allude to “New Painting of Common Objects,” Walter Hopps’ seminal 1962 show at the Pasadena Art Museum, which lent critical support to Pop Art. Yet, while Aldrich constructs her sculpture using common objects—construction materials, home improvement supplies, and other domestic items—her survey observes the artist playfully transforming the stuff of everyday life into elegantly poetic meditations. Aldrich keenly subverts the intended functions of domestic objects, and crystallizes the effect with language. Pith titles, like The Birds of America (1993), a work of collected feathers stuffed into a brass cage and suspended from the ceiling can elevate the object, casting it in a momentous light. In Pressed for Time (1994), an ironing board loaded with layers of pressed flowers separated by sheets of wax paper introduces a play on words and offers a reminder of the withered future we face in common.

Aldrich reveals a sense of gravity through repeated expressions of concern with the natural world and our relationship to it. Marine Preserve (2010 and Starting Over: Neo-Atlantis (2008) resemble tropical reefs flourishing with coral and sponges. The constituent parts—scouring pads, synthetic sponges, and other kitchen cleaning items—which are products of the petroleum economy, jeopardize the oceanic life forms they evoke. Aldrich’s mimesis of biological forms using synthetic materials almost makes us forget as it beguiles. In this sense, Aldrich’s politics are never abrupt or confrontational; rather, they are subversive and even a bit furtive.

Her interest in the materials and conditions of the domicile, and in personal poetics, is reflected in works like My Niagara (2012). A cascade of vinyl tubing with various hues of blues and greens poured through the tubes, the work abstracts a roaring torrent, and places the idea of Niagara Falls within the personal domain. Similarly, Constellation (2005/2013), an array of lampshades whose interiors resemble celestial domes, brings the expanse of the cosmos into the realm of intimate space, while Ray (2005/2013), a sculpture of 150 uniquely colored sewing threads representing illumination, resembles an epiphany.

-CHRISTOPHER MICHNO