

BOMB

The difference between studio materials and life materials.



Woomin Kim studio. All photos by Louis Bury.

Segmented lengths of embroidered tubing jut out from one wall of Woomin Kim's artist-residency studio at the Queens Museum in New York City. The pipework structure, whose looping shape and wooden supports recall a roller coaster, extends five or six feet into the room before terminating at the floor, as though the whimsical artwork connected one part of the museum's infrastructure to another. Nearby, another serpentine sculpture-in-progress from the same series, *Pipe Dream* (2019), has wide tubing and a crazy quilt color scheme that's the exuberant opposite of actual pipes' austere rigidity.

Kim's droll sculptures and wall hangings exist in unexpected mimetic relation to their referents. Her delightful *Minerals in Use* series (2018), for example, combines household goods (toilet paper, sponges, candles) with craft supplies (crayons, beads, glue) to fabricate objects that look like real geodes yet don't try to pass themselves off as such. Works in her *Urban Nest* series (2017), on the other hand—enormous, loom-woven rectangles of found fibers such as scarves, stuffed animals, and rope—won't be mistaken for actual nests but instead suggest a metaphoric relationship.

The work's beguiling interplay between artifice and reality registers a sense of material alienation. Kim's *Depth of Surface* series (2016), for instance—in which she lends quotidian readymade objects a matte finish by either sanding them, coating them in translucent paraffin wax, or encasing them in a tight-fitting silk net—transforms overfamiliar objects such as sunglasses and soap dispensers into ghosts of their typical selves.

Kim distinguishes between what she calls "studio choices" and "life choices" in how she handles materials. The former approach, whereby she might heat, flatten, or soak an object to see what happens to it, has an alchemical bent, while the latter—squeezing a soap bottle while doing the dishes, say—is routinized and purposive. Her distinction hinges on intent as much as it does method: routine choices are choices that have become so subconscious as not to seem choices at all. With subtlety and verve, Kim's art models ways humans can assume more responsibility for their capacity to remake the built world.

Bury, Louis. "Studio Visit Series: Woomin Kim", *BOMB Magazine*, 11 November 2020.

Woomin Kim's work can be seen in the group exhibition [Interpreting the Natural: Contemporary Visions of Scholars' Rocks](#) at the Korean Cultural Center New York in New York City until November 30.