

Jennifer Vanderpool
Yum! Yum!
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ART REVIEW | Jennifer Vanderpool

Her place is an artsy mess Gritty Girl Power comes through in ‘Yum! Yum!’

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Here’s just a taste of Jennifer Vanderpool’s mixed-media installation “Yum! Yum!” at the Project Space. “Yum! Yum!” a solo show at the Project Space by Los Angeles-based artist Jennifer Vanderpool, looks like the leavings of a homemaker gone mad.

Her mixed-media installation fills the gallery with unexpected combinations of manipulated kitchen and hobby materials to playful effect. Covering the floor are low-lying mounds of craft-store debris, including spilled colored sand, bubble wrap flowers, plastic cakes and trinkets that range from sparkly to mundane. New to the artist’s media repertoire are metal cake molds, scraps of burlap, Jell-O and Easter grass flowers, and mini plants made from neon duct tape.

A short path invites viewers to explore her strange, candy-colored terrain, where food and nature references mix freely. One will find small moments of beauty as the eye crops unexpected abstract color, form and texture, but Vanderpool relishes the injection of the odd and unattractive too. Unlike the perfect hostess who entertains with pleasantries, Vanderpool leads guests into a hectic and charged clutter zone, where one must watch one’s step — a slight discomfort that forces the contemplation of the awkward body within the gallery.

Vanderpool also activates the small gallery space with recorded self-made sounds of repetitive clicking and popping noises that drone continuously, while a slide projector flips images of convoluted Jell-O desserts and unusual confections from her mother’s old cookbooks. Long strands of knotted yarn hang from the ceiling like jungle vines and pool on the floor with gaudy artificial flowers. Painted on the walls, a sporadic green leaf pattern appears to have been rolled on in a hurry, adding to the spontaneous tone of this temporary exhibit.

Although the installation is unusual and animated, its scattered-and-clutter aesthetic is not its most memorable asset. Instead, Vanderpool's strength is evident in her lighthearted, feminist-inspired message of gritty girl power. Her visual barrage breaks down traditional associations of the feminine with the decorative and beauty to reinvent the domestic motif into something raw and unexpected.

Much of her domestic content is inspired by personal experiences. Food references often speak to the artist's memories of special time spent in the kitchen with her mother and grandmother, women who consciously guided her feminine identity.

“My mama raised me to be a Domestic Goddess,” Vanderpool writes on her Web site. “My studio is a kitchen where I melt wax and mix resin to bake fancy cakes, frost these baked goods with colored caulking and knit misshapened gnarled doilies from pastel yarn. I want it to look like a confectionary shop ... an explosive, overwhelming confectionary shop.”

Overall Vanderpool's feisty appetite for indulging in the odd juxtapositions of peculiar materials and her playful improvisational process that merges energetic chaos with deliberate ideas, effectively speaks to the curious heterogeneity of 21st-century life.