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WELCOME TO NEWHO

If you can learn to say no to a piece of art, then saying yes will gain power and importance. Beyond yes and no is so-so. That's the kiss of death to most artists who would rather hear praise or criticism over a mediocre maybe. Most artists just want you to look, knowing that the more you see, the more you learn to like and dislike.

Sculpture is a tricky medium to judge, for many reasons. It's clearly dysfunctional, yet sculpture takes up a lot of functional space. And it demands, by virtue of its in-your-face stance, both your mental and physical attention. Sculpture is confrontational. As modernists, we generally expect new art to be original, yet we also expect it to have enough long-term substance to survive the time machine.

A handful of shows featuring emerging sculptors have just opened in the neighborhood surrounding the New Museum, not Soho or Noho, it's New Ho.

Newho art stars have applied unconventional materials to suggest excess and fallen empires, such as, Huma Bhabha's metal and plaster giant, its decaying feet are all that's left. The gallery, Salon 94 (1 Freeman Alley), has a tomb-like interior that complements the exhibits other pieces as well, a grave effigy and a fallen god-head.

Over at Rivington Arms (4 E. 2nd St.) they're presenting Agro Bongo, a group show of assembled objects. The show's stand outs are from the world of Home Depot. Artist Michael DeLucia has pushed a few dozen deck mops through a section of chain-link fence. The stringy side of the mop clumps into a clownish cotton blob, while the spear-like poles jab out in militarist fashion. DeLucia's "Untitled (push-brooms)" looks like a red-headed mob, an army of tools ready to clean up. See how easy that is to love or hate?

Over at Smith-Stewart (53 Stanton St.) the show of Turkish-born, New Yorker Elif Uras features large paintings and painted vases sloppy with loud colors and stylized details. The faux Ottoman jars carry off the look the best thanks to the vase's decorative history. Their shiny ceramic surfaces depict women flaunting their sexual and economic freedom against traditional backdrops that once confined them as inferiors.

At nearby Gallery OneTwentyEight (128 Rivington St.) they're offering Reflection by Gordon Sasaki. Along the walls of the narrow, darkened gallery are business shirts with their ties pulled open and under garments, all softly glowing; lit by an unseen internal light. The clothing is actually made of rice paper, like traditional lanterns. The question is, do they light your way or burn you out? Yes or no?