

# sculpture

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Anne Wu, installation view of “There Is No Far and No Near,” 2023–24. Photo: Etienne Frossard, Courtesy Smack Mellon

## Anne Wu

[January 10, 2024](#) by [Marcus Civin](#)

### Brooklyn

[Smack Mellon](#)

Anne Wu’s modular sculptures are precise and elegant, like carefully balanced room dividers, stage sets, or three-dimensional architectural drawings. Their colors call to mind the panoply of a 99-cent store and the palette of a Buddhist temple, where blue might symbolize knowledge and yellow could stand in for notions of wealth and beauty. The artist’s current exhibition ([on view](#) through January

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To the right, entering the gallery, there is a blue opening at the center of *Bay I*. Let’s call it a door. Ornamental silver spindles surround it, and a wooden header holds a lineup of incense sticks, making a sort of crown. To the right of the door, a rising zig-zag suggesting stairs, in shiny stainless steel, links in the same plane to a red-painted wooden railing, while on the left, a light blue dowel supports a white plastic bowl with scalloped edges. This small bowl is one of about a half dozen other bowls and chalices that Wu cast in plastic from two prototypes and perched within her sculptures. They bear Chinese characters spelling out wishes for prosperity and luck. *Bay IV*, to the left of *Bay I*, runs up and along the wall, laying out a path of slim silver steps that connects almost seamlessly to a light blue ledge, then more steps and another door. Two-thirds of this door is wood; one side is taut plastic packing rope.

Descendants of Bauhaus or De Stijl interiors, Wu’s sculptures assert bright, clean lines and use commonplace industrial materials. They evoke Fred Sandback’s 1999 description of his geometric yarn sculptures as “drawing that is habitable” and prompt associations or recollections. I thought of Teju Cole writing in his book *Black Paper* (2021) about his father purchasing a door that became a promise to build a house. For her part, Wu was raised by her mother, who immigrated to the U.S. in search of opportunity. Wu sets us within an architecture, aspects of which might harken to her story. Visible through *Bay I* or by walking up to and around it, *Bay II* features a colorful but precariously balanced ladder and portions of rails and silver fencing from the stock of decorative enclosures that have become popular over the last 10 years as status symbols among Asian immigrants in New York, especially Queens, the borough where Wu grew up. It’s tempting to read this work as a personal architecture, all about self-location and upward mobility perhaps, but that doesn’t feel exactly right.

According to the press materials, the title of the exhibition, “There Is No Far and No Near,” comes from the architect Claude Bragdon; Wu found his words in an epigraph to Yve-Alain Bois’s essay “Metamorphosis of Axonometry,” published in the German architectural journal *Daidalos* in 1981. If you’re wondering why a sculptor would reference drawing when she has physical space to work with, for Wu, this could be a nod to the power of two-dimensional syntaxes to inform and outperform other experiences in our digital culture, but ultimately it represents her rejection of fixed ways of seeing. Bragdon’s concerns in writing about axonometry are largely practical. Bois is more philosophical. Both compare the axonometric system of drawing to classical one-point perspective. Axonometry presents three-dimensional objects so that dimensions remain measurable, while in one-point perspective, objects become smaller the further they are from a fixed viewpoint. One-point perspective is singular by design. It demands, in Bois’s estimation, that artists and art viewers remain still, or even ossified. On the other hand, as both Bois and Wu assert, if we don’t manufacture distance or confine meaning—if there is no far and no near—we might move freely.

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