



RULES & REPETITION

CONCEPTUAL ART AT THE WADSWORTH ATHENEUM

THROUGH FEBRUARY 18, 2024



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM
MUSEUM OF ART

BOMB

Studio Visit: Anne Wu by Louis Bury

Hybrid sculptures that play with architectural space.

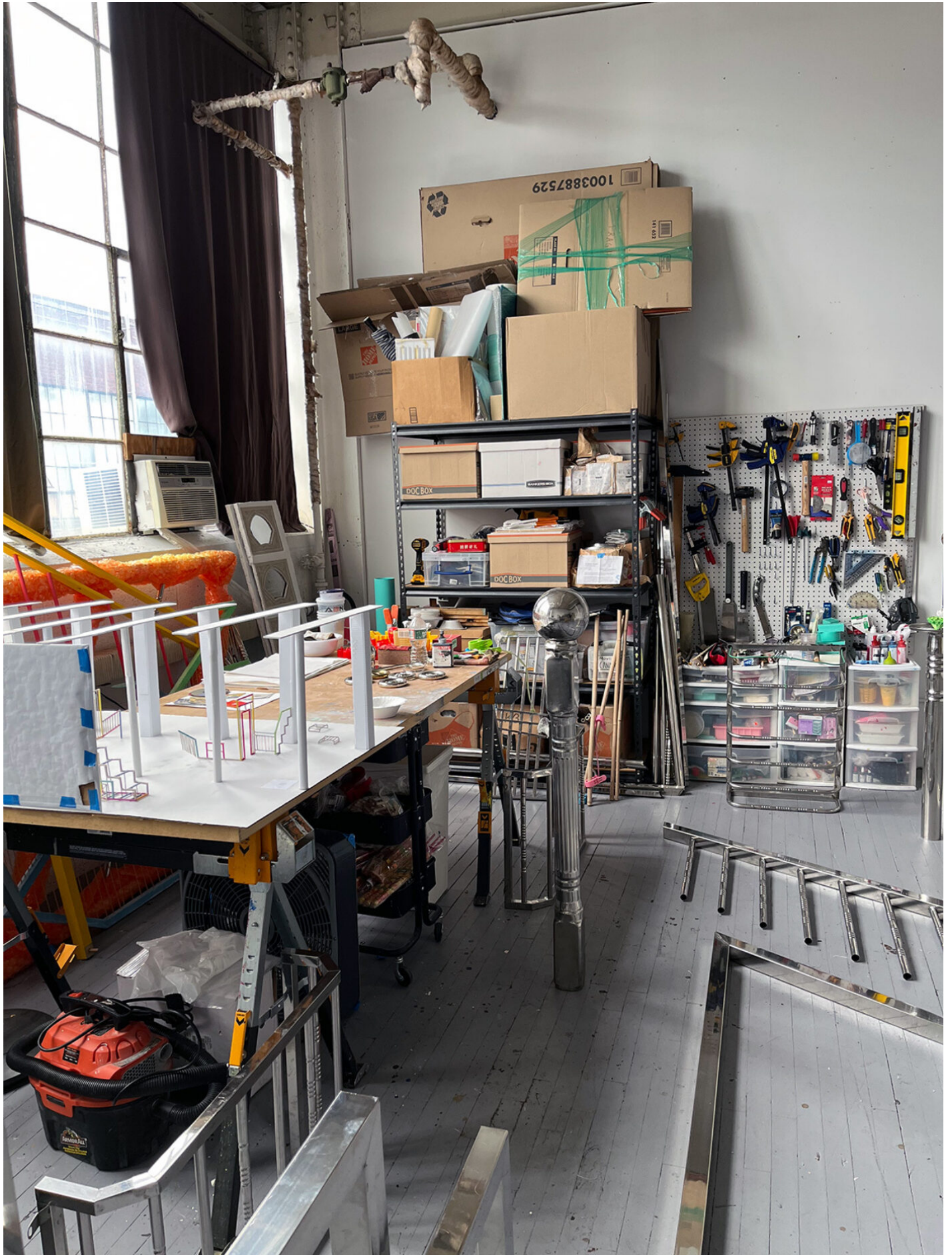


Anne Wu studio. All photos by Anne Wu.

The open area of Anne Wu's studio, in which the artist tests out different shapes and positions for her sculptures, resembles a DIY home improvement project that has gone off script. A doorframe incongruously fabricated from both wooden and metal posts creates an airy threshold between different parts of the room. Jutting out from the frame are other architectural Frankensteins: a waist-high, wood and metal fence whose interior bars are made from red plastic packing rope; a stepped form whose wood and metal segments converge at the studio wall, held together by four vises. These offbeat structures demarcate space with an economy of lines, playing with ideas of lightness and heaviness, openness and closure, on formal, material, and thematic levels.

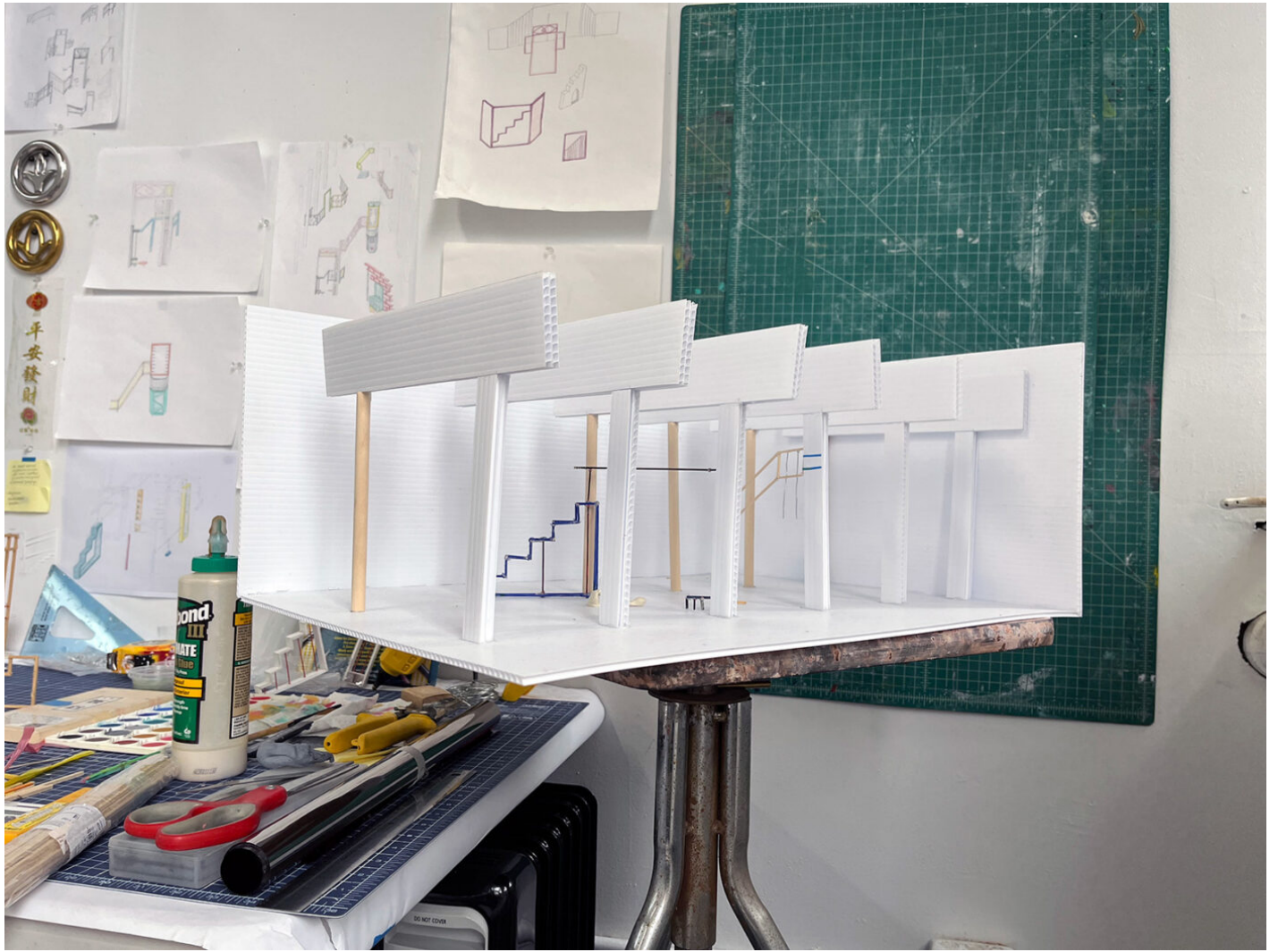






"I think of them as structural drawings," Wu explains about the works-in-progress, which now appear in her Smack Mellon exhibition, *There Is No Far and No Near*. "I'm interested in how pared down the forms can become while remaining a door or steps." The skeletal sculptures establish a strong sense of negative space, as if the barriers between parts of the room were psychological more than physical. This aesthetic constitutes a way, in the artist's words, to "depict spaces you can't or don't enter," a kind of "architecture for ghosts," particularly in its references to temples and their incorporation of objects, such as casts of votive candles, used in memorial services.



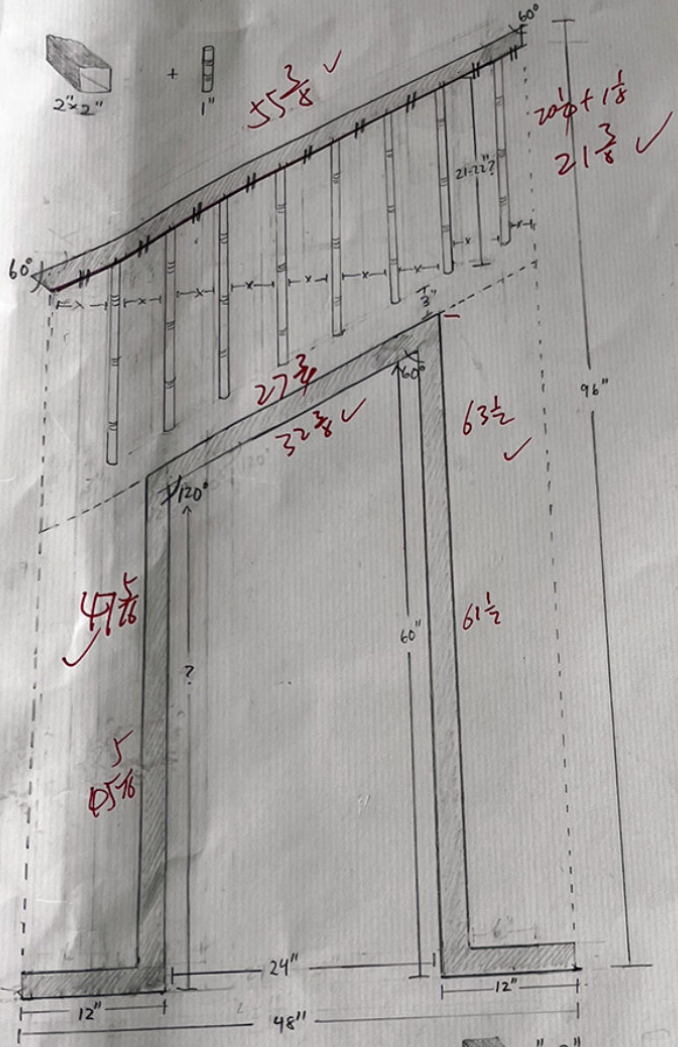




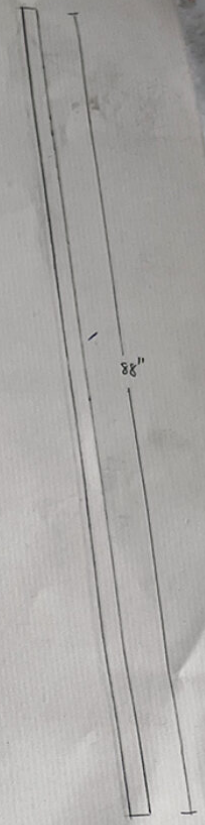
Yet the work also has a playful side: from its odd flashes of color, to the more intimate scale suggested by its small cast objects, to its gleeful abstraction of utilitarian forms. Wu describes her exquisite corpse-esque wood and metal hybrids as sculptures in which “the materials finish each other’s sentences.” The metaphor captures the works’ aura of continual self-reinvention, of improvising for the future by drawing upon the past. Though Wu’s artistic practice requires her to do a lot of math, she has no formal architectural training, which helps her focus on vernacular uses of architecture rather than textbook ones.

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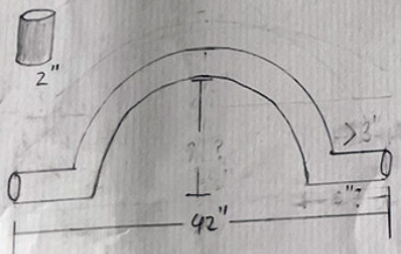
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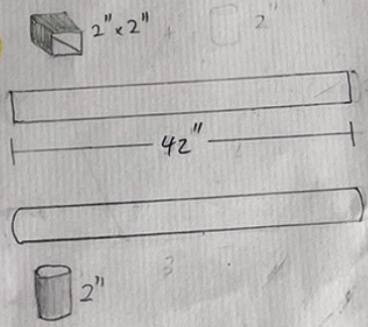
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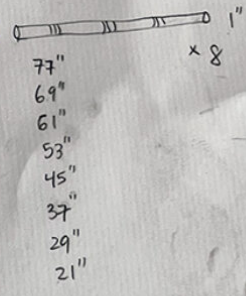
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One vernacular response she has worked with is the phenomenon of stainless steel fences prevalent as status symbols in New York City neighborhoods populated by Asian homeowners. Wu's 2021 Shed "Open Call" installation, *A Patterned Universe*, for example, featured a gleaming and playful splay of such fences arranged across a ten-by-twenty-by-twelve-foot area. Commentators often focus on these and other materials' relationship to the artist's Chinese heritage. But, similar to the reception of other nonwhite artists with a formalist bent, that emphasis can overlook the way in which her works' forms and contents are constituent parts of the same vision. Wu pursues that vision of how one might adapt tradition with an irresistible blend of seriousness and playfulness, calculation and intuition, math and poetry.

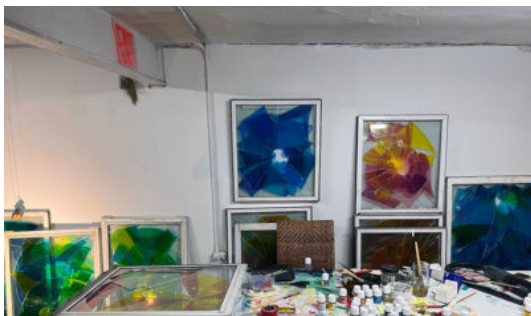
Anne Wu: There Is No Far and No Near is on view at Smack Mellon in New York City until January 28.

Louis Bury is an art writer, author of The Way Things Go (punctum books, 2023) and Exercises in Criticism (Dalkey Archive Press, 2015), and Associate Professor of English at Hostos Community College, CUNY.

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