

Over the past three years Anna Sew Hoy has generated families of projects—"tumbleweeds," "dream catchers," "scholars' rocks," among others. The titles are accessible shorthand to evoke forms and objects that have specific associations— clichés that have been overworked and usurped by popular culture. Tumbleweeds are symbols of the Western landscape, the nineteenth-century frontier of open lands. Dream catchers are Native American fetish objects to protect children during their sleep. Scholars' rocks are ancient stone fragments that evoke landscape and were objects of meditation for Chinese artist-scholars. About the forms and the titles, Sew Hoy has written: "I trust the complexity of the works to unfold over time, and the nick-naming serves as a hook, a marker."¹

Each project is worked out over a limited time period, in which the artist is thinking about a particular set of ideas, and those ideas hold the works together. Then the artist moves on, but themes, materials, and processes remain linked. The tumbleweeds are made of beer cans collected after a

single night's party, a memoir of collective celebration. The dream catchers are ceramic webs which have been woven or hung with "old things," collected from second-hand and thrift stores, so that the lives of their previous owners may linger. The scholars' rocks are the newest and most traditional sculptures, complex structures made from carved single blocks of clay, glazed and fired, with "pedestals" of other materials, evoking abstract time and process and anthropomorphic fantasies. All of Sew Hoy's sculptures are amorphous, open, rounded, undulating—ambiguous in their relationship with gravity, ill at ease with stillness, absorbing and reflecting light so that surface and substance erotically embrace and lose their separation.

The artist has described her works as "complex and conflicted." They "don't really look like anything specific." "I want to present too many physical details, to create an overload of image and texture.... The detritus of modern life is organized into something dynamic, energetic, moody, and turbulent. I work by smashing, slapping, and cobbling things together

by collage. Any object or material may be used.... I have an eye toward the awkward, the asymmetrical and the irregular, and the will to bring these forms into a disharmonic beauty."

Sew Hoy's works are like garden sculptures, crafted from fragments of cultural memory, cobbled together from the flotsam and jetsam of contemporary civilization. The creative imagination is unencumbered by the seduction of elaborate fabrication. They do not seem hardened by history or blighted by failure or cynicism. Instead, their life force is immanent and regenerative.

1. All quotes from the artist in "Artists' Statements," brochure for *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now* (New York: Asia Society and Museum, 2006), unpaginated.

Anna Sew Hoy