



Anne Wu

A Dream Walking
NOV. 18, 2021 – FEB. 13, 2022

About the Exhibit

In *A Dream Walking*, five vibrantly hued sculptures reference familiar architectural forms that evoke both a sense of place and no place at all. A railing grows from the ground, emerging upward before reaching an abrupt end. A door opens, or closes, to nowhere in particular. Stripped of specific characteristics, the forms become framing devices for ornamental objects such as plastic packing rope, incense sticks, garden wire, and cast items. Tied, placed, or held by tension, these elements create patterns against the skeletal structures that suggest themes of growth, ascension, and time. The sculptures signal viewers to walk under, toward, alongside, and around, providing a set of directions that eventually disappears, as if trailing off mid-sentence. While tethered to the existing space, the works simultaneously point elsewhere as they imagine a dimension beyond the purely visible and physically tangible.

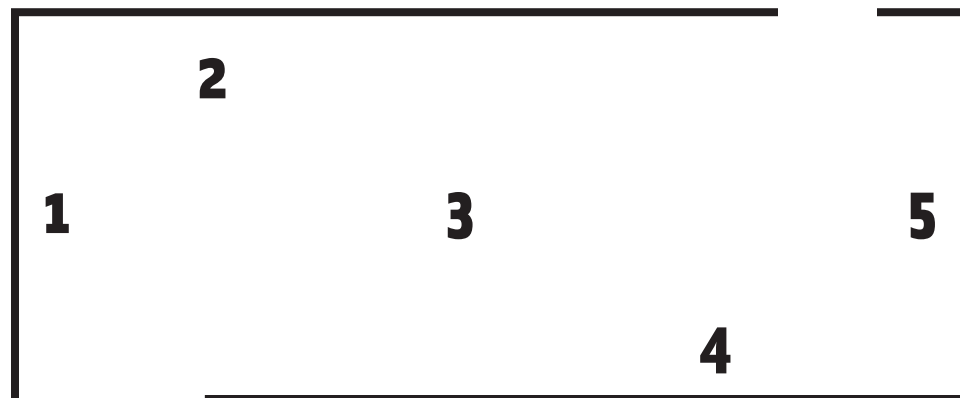
About the Artist

Anne Wu is a New York-based artist working primarily in sculpture and installation. She received a BFA from Cornell University in 2013 and an MFA from Yale University in 2020. Her work has been shown at The Shed (New York, NY), NARS Foundation (Brooklyn, NY), Shaker Museum I Mount Lebanon (New Lebanon, NY), and New York Public Library (New York, NY), among others. She was an artist-in-residence at the BHQFU Residency in 2015 and the NARS Satellite Residency on Governors Island in 2020. Currently, she is a 2021-22 Studio Artist at Smack Mellon (Brooklyn, NY).

About the Real Art Awards

Wu is a recipient of a 2020 Real Art Award. The Real Art Awards are a juried competition open at no cost to emerging artists from the six New England states, New York and New Jersey. The 2020 Real Art Awards were juried by artist and educator Mary Mattingly, Director of the Laundromat Project Kemi Ilesanmi, and Real Art Ways Executive Director Will K. Wilkins. In addition to a cash prize and a solo exhibition, each artist receives logistical and curatorial support throughout the exhibition process. This project is supported in part by awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Edward C. and Ann T. Roberts Foundation.

Gallery Map



1 *Still Point*, 2021

Gypsum, tinting paste, epoxy clay, polystyrene, incense sticks, garden wire, plaster casts, hardware
78 x 35 ½ x 2 in.

2 *Echo*, 2021

Gypsum, tinting paste, epoxy clay, polystyrene, incense sticks, garden wire, plaster casts, hardware
50 x 33 x 6 ½ in.

3 *Slow Motion*, 2021

Gypsum, tinting paste, epoxy clay, polystyrene, incense sticks, garden wire, plastic packing rope, hardware
62 ¾ x 110 x 34 in.

4 *Timekeeper*, 2021

Gypsum, tinting paste, epoxy clay, polystyrene, plaster casts, hardware
46 x 38 x 1 ¼ in.

5 *While Away*, 2021

Gypsum, tinting paste, epoxy clay, polystyrene, hand-cut paper calendars, paper pulp, plastic packing rope, hardware
64 x 76 ½ x 30 ½ in.



A Dream Walking, 2021
installation view

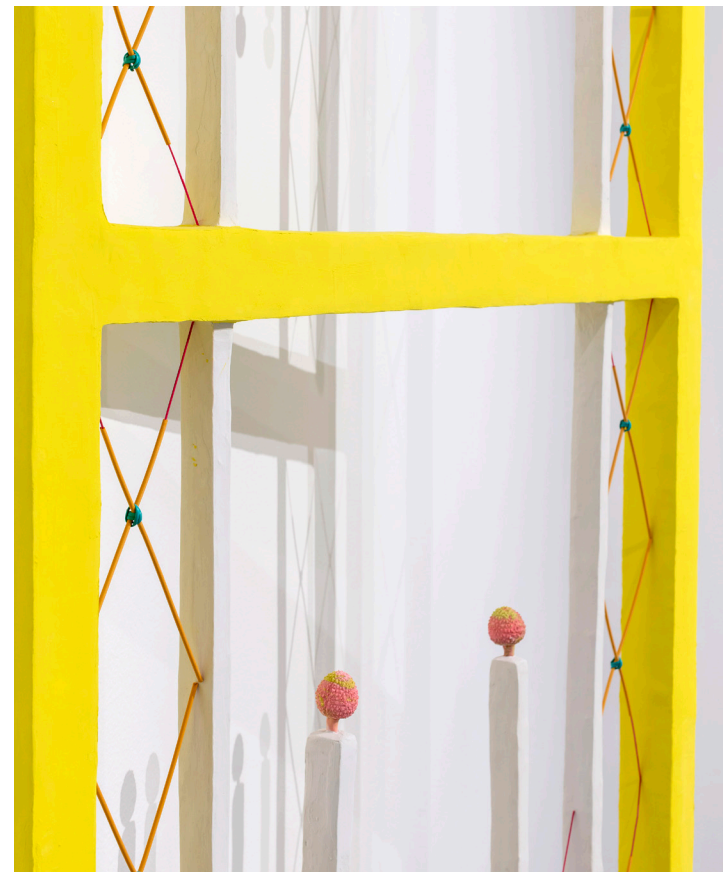
*How does a dream walk?
Something fleeting,
into concrete?
Something ephemeral,
but ever-changing?*

Essay by Danni Shen

A gate with no door, a staircase to nowhere, a balcony in midair. These are just a few of the fundamental building blocks of Anne Wu's exhibition *A Dream Walking* at Real Art Ways in Hartford, Connecticut. Five large-scale, sculptural works inhabit the gallery space. Each draws from architectural and decorative elements that the artist archives throughout her neighborhood of Flushing, Queens. Though Wu's work includes recognizable motifs from a larger material culture—incense, lychee, lotus, colorful plastic rope, architectural designs, pages of a lunar calendar—at the end of the day, the forms as well as found objects in her compositions are intimately personal decisions made around her family home and what she collects in her studio. “Yes, it's my neighborhood, but it's also my mom's house. It's also about how people work within a means,” the artist tells me during a walk-through of her exhibition. And for Wu, the word “culture” itself (Flushing, Chinese American, immigrant diaspora or otherwise) might be a limiting framework. Here, the use of the personal exceeds her locality, from an intimate community that expands into a diverse worldview, or perhaps what Foucault called “knowledge as a way of thinking and feeling, as a sensibility.”¹ Individual and collective imaginations constitute a balancing act that simultaneously creates and destabilizes this built environment.



¹ Michel Foucault, *What is Enlightenment?* in Rabinow (P.), éd., *The Foucault Reader*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 32-50.



Still Point, 2021
(detail)

The work *Still Point* (2021) opens the space with its door and gate-like presence. Perched ajar from the wall, the piece hangs at a lofty height within a bright yellow frame. Arriving closer, I observe six casts of lychee fruit in various gradations that represent a degree of ripeness, light green to pinkish red. Each one protrudes at the bottom or top of a few partially-formed, white bars inside the framework. Wu speaks fondly of the plaster mold of the original unpeeled lychee that she's kept around in her studio for over two years. The fruit indicates many things in this microcosm of a door's threshold — from personal memories of refuge, symbols of medicinal balance (eat lychee in moderation as too many can increase one's body temperature, the artist's mother, an acupuncturist, tells her), to the organic forms that often top suburban columns. And the uniform shadows each one casts behind it indeed render silhouettes of such architectural structures. Between the bars are also arrays of incense sticks cross-tied in pairs by twine, creating the appearance of a patterned gate.

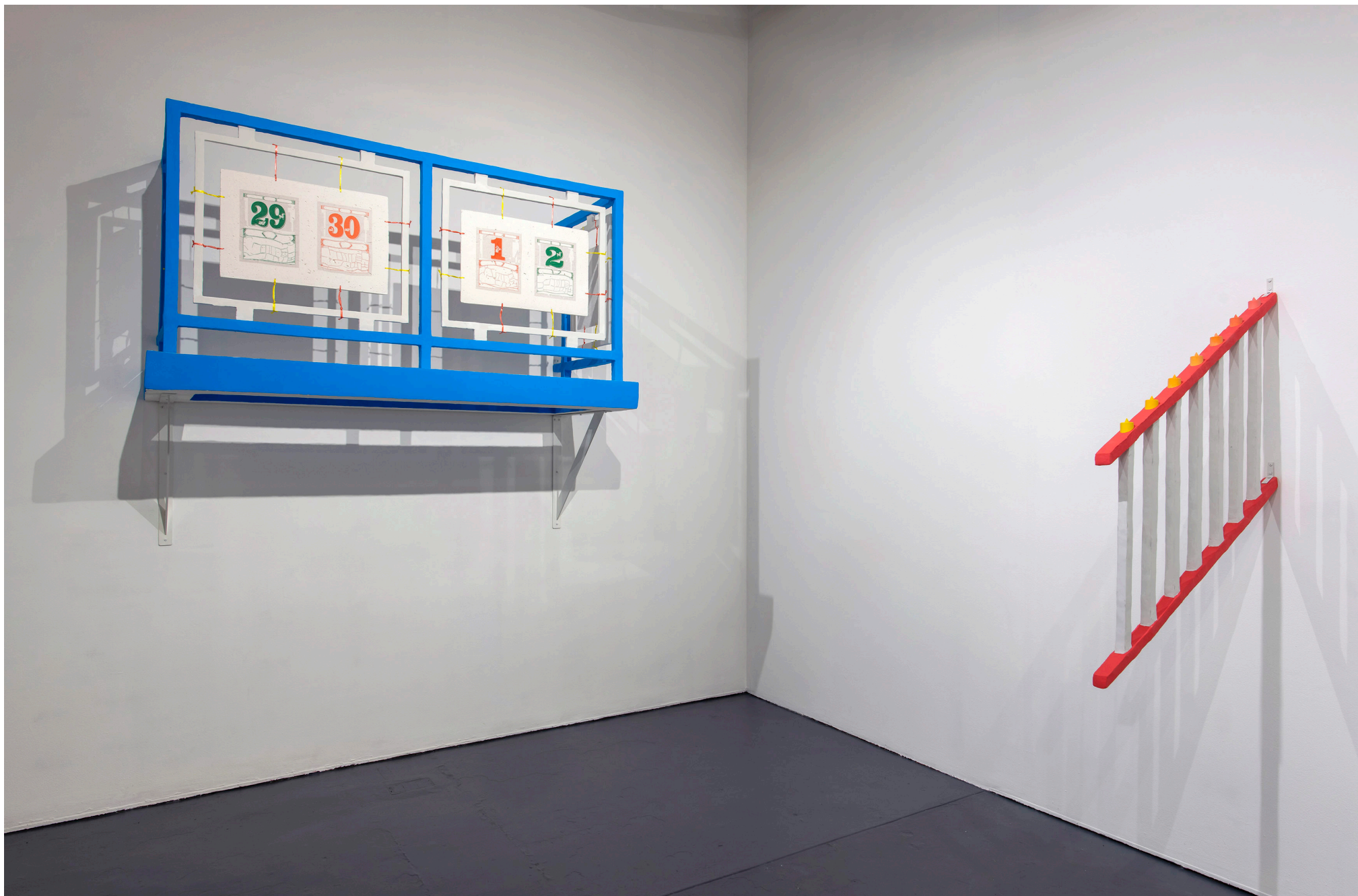
The use of these incense sticks is curious. With a sweeping glance of the rest of the exhibition, it appears again and again as a subtle motif. Though extremely delicate, such objects in their recurrence seem to connect the larger, concrete structures together. Upon even closer inspection however, they are only just holding on; each X of incense is propped up by tension between various beams and frames, all delicately so. In the next work *Echo* (2021), which evokes a window grate in pink and is hinged just above the floor, the posts here ascend vertically at increasing intervals. Each one is topped with casted lotus flowers in various stages of bloom. As with the lychees, the shadowplay serves a similar doubling effect that is also transformative, amplifying the sculptural elements in ways that fill the gallery with more than just their physical materiality. Like the lotus which emerges from the murky depths of mud, shadows here represent the ways in which negative space and darkness can create parallel, nonmaterial worlds.

Slow Motion, 2021



Echo, 2021
(detail)

In similar off-kilter ways, all of the works in this exhibition seem to pause in the midst of creating or stretching themselves. Submerging into or emerging from the central floor of the gallery, *Slow Motion* (2021) appears to balance precariously between a zigzagged stair railing, or perhaps a partially-formed gate that has fallen over. The use of primary-colored, plastic ropes alongside more incense render a vibrant texture of overlapping lozenges that disrupt their cartesian frames. The lengthy structure seems to undulate while walking around it, and makes clear how the use of robust geometric scaffolds also serve as elaborate pedestals that host a particular selection of found, domestic objects. In *Timekeeper* (2021), a succession of electric devotional candles ascend in a warm gradient from yellow to red atop a railing. The use of colorful casts parallels the lychee and lotus. Though the mixture of rigid foam, plaster, and tinted joint compound grant each of the five sculptures an industrial materiality, their hand-applied surfaces in yellow, turquoise, pink, red, and blue radiate a playful, yet worn quality. What might suggest commercially-colored, fabricated objects also gives way to a kind of wonkiness manifest from the artist's hand. If anything, there is a kind of un-making or "un-fabricating" at work here.



While Away, 2021 (left)
Timekeeper, 2021 (right)



A Dream Walking, 2021
installation view

Considering Wu's practice as a whole, the artist is certainly no stranger to highly fabricated forms. Right after graduating from Yale MFA, she made a splash return to the NYC art scene with the work *A Patterned Universe* at The Shed's 2021 Open Call. The immersive installation included numerous stainless-steel rods fabricated with New Tengfei Stainless Steel, similar to those that adorn many of Flushing's residential façades. Though there are many overlaps in the structural designs, the exclusion of sleek surfaces in this exhibition *A Dream Walking* was thus an intentional choice by the artist in order to return to the labor-intensive process of hand-building. As Wu tells me: this way, the process of creating from raw materials sets the limits for this body of work. Relating them together constitutes a kind of intuitive balancing act, or push and pull for harmony.

Traversing the space, I note that what also makes Wu's work so powerful is her rendering of pattern or ornament as objects themselves. Inverting and thus foregrounding what might historically have been considered only decorative, backdrop elements lends a new kind of appreciation to such complex facets. For example, when structural beams are arranged in certain formations, they create patterns and decorative motifs of their own. I'm momentarily



Echo, 2021



While Away, 2021
(detail)

perfect grids representing the months have been dissolved in the solidifying process. The leftover lines warp like cracks in a worn stone wall. A few tiny zodiac animals, which further represent specific years, remain intact inside of each number. It seems apt to end the exhibition on this dissolution of perfectly-manufactured lines and grids.

Looking back into the space, I imagine what it would be like to piece all of these works into a conjoined structure, or really any number of variations for a larger, interconnected composition; the unfinished railing leading up to the raised door, flanked by gates, the balcony overhead speculating on time with the lychee ripening and lotus blooming. However, the combined vision of the works together reaches past what one can even perceive. “We hammer wood for a house, but it is the inner space that makes it livable. We work with being, but non-being is what we use,” recalls a chapter from the *dao de jing*, a seminal cosmological text from 400 B.C. China. In *A Dream Walking* by Anne Wu, it is the liminal planes between structures and objects that provide pauses or blanks for imagining greater dimensions beyond the purely visible and physically tangible, such are those that make for the dreams-become-worlds-become-homes that we walk into being.

reminded of certain structural elements in traditional Chinese temple architecture, where the sensibility lies in a functional multiplicity of often simple elements that visually synthesize an entire construction; structure and decoration are not mutually exclusive. For the artist, the modular and foundational also often translate to everyday household items infused into the architecture itself. In the last work *While Away* (2021) at the end of the gallery space, this use of functional aesthetics manifests in a high-hanging, blue-framed balcony held together by plastic rope and flanked on the front and sides by Chinese calendar pages that have been cast into four tablets. The calendar pages separated day-to-day by the enlarged numbers 28, 29, 30, 1, 2 to 3, become an architecture of time that cycles between the last and first days of an unknown month. What were once the

Danni Shen is an independent curator and writer based in New York. Recent curatorial projects include *Beast, Chimera, Kin* at the Hessel Museum of Art (2022) and *Collaborative Survival* at 601Artspace (2021). Previous curatorial roles include at The Kitchen (NYC), SPRING/BREAK Art Show NY/LA, and Empty Gallery in Hong Kong. Shen was also Critic-in-Residence at MICA, Curatorial Fellow at Wave Hill, Curator-in-Residence at Residency Unlimited, and Guest Critic at NYU Tisch-ITP. She is a contributor to various publications including BOMB Magazine, Art in America, Heichi Magazine, The Brooklyn Rail, Hyperallergic, Rhizome, and onscreen today 介面. Shen is the recipient of the Art Writing Workshop and the Art Critic Mentoring Program in collaboration with CUE Art Foundation x the International Association of Art Critics (AICA-USA).



Real Art Ways is a contemporary arts organization with a record of linking artists, innovation and community. Programs include visual arts, with exhibitions, public art projects, and artist presentations; cinema, with independent and international films; music; performance; literary events; community and educational programming.



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