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Art in Review

By ROBERTA SMITH

'Handmade Readymades' Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery Hunter College of the City University of New York Lexington Avenue at 68th Street Through March 16

Cleverly titled yet far too small to do its subject justice, this show barely scratches the surface of the widespread interest among contemporary artists in replicating everyday objects, or what might be called three-dimensional appropriation. Jeff Koons's 1985 bronze casts of a snorkel and snorkel vest -- their new material rendering them both useless and valuable -- look especially prescient in the present company.

Reality is faithfully replicated in the painted polyurethane oranges and cookie box by the Swiss art team of Peter Fischli and David Weiss, and Rachel Whiteread's plaster cast of the inside of a hot-water bottle, which yields a pinkish bodylike form aptly titled "Torso."

Otherwise, all kinds of adjustments are made, usually with with intensified emotional or political implications. Beverly Semmes's six-foot-high organza dress, "Flowered Friend," evokes the powerful imaginary companions that children often conjure, while Brian Tolle's "Gentleman's Writing Desk? (Early Classical Revival)" slyly mimics the male anatomy while leaving little room for actual writing. Robert Gober and Renee Green insinuate new meanings into the familiar formats, creating, respectively, a newspaper ad with a portrait of the artist as a young bride, and an 18th-century-style fabric that takes a hard look at colonialism.

The other artists here include Haim Steinbach, Richard Artschwager, Robert Watts, Catherine Havemeyer and Francis Cape, whose installation piece appropriates the building's lobby. Although the exhibition's organizer, Thomas Weaver, invokes Duchamp a bit too relentlessly in his essay (and pays no attention to more recent, less theoretically fashionable precedents like Jasper Johns and Photo Realist sculpture), he has sent up an interesting trial balloon on the curatorial front. ROBERTA SMITH