

Weekend Arts II

The New York Times

Fine Arts | Listings

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2018 C15

YASUO IHARA

Through Jan. 21. Ulterior Gallery, 172 Attorney Street, Manhattan; 917-472-7784, ulteriorgallery.com.

Yasuo Ihara was born in Osaka, Japan, and started out as an abstract painter. But here in New York, where he arrived in 1963 and found work as a costume designer, his practice took a tilt toward the conceptual. In 1971, he began making latex casts of household objects and preserving the casts in carefully labeled Plexiglas boxes. Ihara died in 2010. Working from a 1973 photo and a typewritten list, with advice from the artist's daughter Mia, the gallerist Takako Tanabe has reconstructed, for its first public showing, Ihara's extraordinary "Explanation 1," which comprises 68 of these stacked boxes.

On their own, the latex casts make any number of different points. The paper-white, easily identified "CARTON OF EGGS," nearly a stand-in for its subject, is pop philosophy, while "DRAWING TABLE," crumpled unrecognizably in the bottom half of its box, is a tart memento mori. A yellowed and drooping mask of Hermes, part of the separate six-box "Explanation," could

serve as an indictment of the insularity of white art history, and an intricately bumpy cantaloupe as a way of isolating a beautiful texture from distracting color.

All together, though, the casts constitute a symphony of magical absurdity, demonstrating both the elasticity and the uselessness of our human faculty for picking out objects and naming them — in this case in block capitals. (Not for nothing did Ms. Tanabe hang Maryam Amirani's tiny black-and-white painting of Jorge Luis Borges in the gallery's office.) But they're also a soothing reminder of the world's supple resistance to being picked apart that way, because as soon as those separate objects are juxtaposed, they knit themselves together again into some new living whole. In "Explanation 1," it's a winning, wistful portrait of a man who ate his fried EGGS with toasted ITALIAN BREAD and drank his COFFEE with MILK and his SCOTCH with COCA-COLA.

WILL HEINRICH