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Sprouts and Bugs: Mimi Park at Lubov

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April 11, 2022 1:01pm

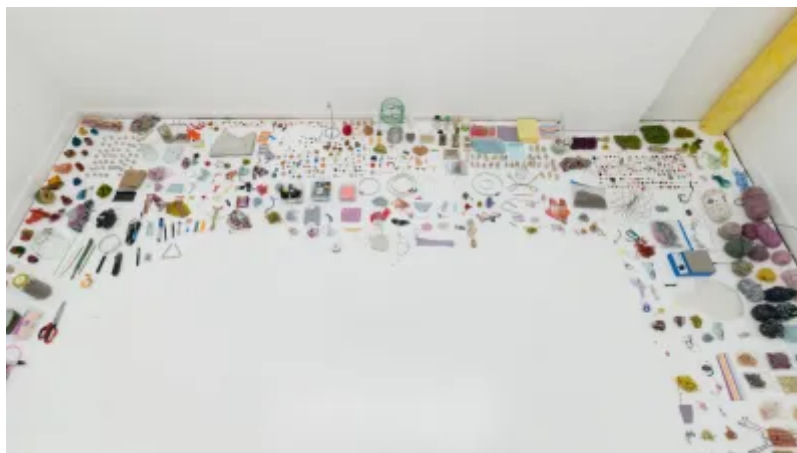


View of "Dawning: dust, seeds, Coplees," 2022, at Lubov, showing *Play Humming Planting*, 2022.
Photo Charles Benton/Courtesy Lubov

A fuzzy green carpet of radish sprouts covers large expanses of the gallery floor in Mimi Park's exhibition "Dawning: dust, seeds, Coplees," at **Lubov** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/lubov/>) in New York. Planted as seeds in recycled

paper during the show's installation in February, the sprouts appear lush in some places and bedraggled in others. The seedlings' pulpy white substrate lend the whole arrangement, enthusiastically titled *Play Humming Planting* (all works 2022), a craft-like feel, as though it were a scale model of parkland. Inside and around it are congeries of homespun, sometimes zoomorphic, sometimes kinetic sculptures: a creature whose body is a bowl filled with water, with feet made of circuit boards affixed to toilet scrubbers (*Bristle Bot*); a tall plastic rod adorned with a hand-knit sweater and topped with a baseball, evoking a torso and a head (*Long Person*); a group of tiny insectile widgets whose bodies are fabricated from toothbrush heads, pipe cleaners, and motors, the last of which cause the sculptures to skitter across the floor like warming popcorn kernels (*Coplee Swarm*).

These varied, irresistible droids are the exhibition's titular Coplees: unexplained fictional beings that populate Park's wide-eyed artistic world. Though not alive like the radish sprouts, the whimsical sculptures animate the exhibition; yet for all their playful charm, the Coplees exist in a curious state of disrepair. Their repurposed materials, as well as their DIY construction, lend them a provisional, threadbare feel. Their circuitry is exposed, from the coverless battery packs strapped on their bodies to the skeins of wire connecting them to wall outlets. Indeed, among the dozen or so kinetic sculptures, dysfunction turns out to be the rule as much as the exception: when I visited the show, half the creations were temporarily out of commission. The most prominent functioning one, *Duet Dance*—in which vibrations picked up by a microphone cause a small motor to clatter inside a plastic goblet, as a headless toy robot sways atop a shared platform—regularly emitted a tinny death rattle.



Mimi Park, *Studio Room*, 2022, dimensions and materials variable.

Photo Charles Benton/Courtesy Lubov

The installation's malfunctions, as well as its maintenance, are part of Park's master plan. In an adjacent room, she installed the remarkable *Studio Room*, an array of materials and tools laid out on the floor, quasi-taxonomically, in a manner that recalls the ready-at-hand way unlicensed street vendors display goods on the sidewalk, as well as the tradition of artists, such as Gala Porras-Kim, riffing on the conventions of museological display. The items encompass everything from glue guns to tweezers, yarn balls to battery chargers, and their layout on the floor is consistent with how Park organizes supplies in her actual studio. Throughout the exhibition's run, the artist has visited regularly to patch up the main installation—fixing mechanical breakdowns, mending rips and tears—using the auxiliary installation as her toolkit. This reparative bent makes her scrappy artistic world feel all the more poignant.

Park's dual roles as the installation's demiurge and maintenance staff encapsulates the work's humility. *Dawning* operates primarily at knee height or below, which, from another artist, might have conveyed deific omnipotence, as if the Coplees and their environment were mere playthings, but from Park conveys a down-to-earth outlook. Unlike so many other artists engaged in world-building projects, she makes no lofty claims for the endeavor's importance, only shoestring affirmations of tenderness and care. Park's background in expressive arts therapy (since 2020, she has led workshops under the auspices of the Hetrick-Martin Institute, the largest LGBTQ youth service agency in the United States) no doubt informs her sense of compassion. It also helps account for the disquieting gravity of such a fanciful-seeming installation. Everything it contains is in the process of coming apart or being put back together, such that, as in the real world, it is hard to tell which parts are in what state.

