

When Our Containers Can't Hold Us

Kay Kasparhauser's sculptural habitats, in which live isopods and springtails, hint at the necessity and limitations of care.



Louis Bury March 5, 2025



A handful of small isopods and springtails live in Kay Kasparhauser's gritty Entrance gallery exhibition, *New Decay*, but, unusually for bio art, these creatures aren't the stars of the show. What stands out instead are the makeshift habitats the artist has fabricated for them. One terrarium is embedded in a precarious foam tower ("Bonkio," all works 2025). Another is wedged inside an orange traffic barrier, whose other openings contain trash and stagnant water ("Every time i think I'm absolutely going to die I love you so much I love you so much"). Various foam assemblages, pocked with odd apertures, dangle from the basement gallery's ceiling and walls. These dilapidated sculptures evoke a subterranean city built for critters.

From a small animal's point of view, that's probably how most human basements appear anyway. But from Kasparhauser's perspective, the installation constitutes a material exploration of what she calls, in an artist's statement published late last year on Substack, "[the anxiety of inadequate containers](#)." The stakes are existential for all beings, but keenly felt by Kasparhauser, whose unspecified chronic illness "affords [her] an intimate understanding of decay, rupture, and repair." On her social media accounts, [she unflinchingly documents aspects of her treatments, posting images of her scarred stomach](#) and [joking that her longer term hospital stays are artist residencies](#). But you don't even need that context to grasp *New Decay*'s argument that all containers are in some way inadequate to the task of preserving their contents from harm.



Kay Kasparhauser, "Bonkio" (2025), foam, latex, plaster, burlap, expanding foam, silicone, plexiglass, bioactive substrate, leaf litter, cork wood, zebra isopods, springtails, tradescantia, lighting device (photo by Stephen Faught, image courtesy the artist and Entrance gallery)

Small details throughout the show hint at the necessity and limitations of care. A vinyl strip door has been installed behind the wooden entryway door, as if the gallery itself were a container requiring an extra protective layer from the outside world. The bricolage sculptures, riddled with nooks and crannies, and bearing the imprints of their fabrication, double as human decor and animal shelter. The isopods Kasparhauser cultivates inside those structures could be mistaken for bugs but are actually crustaceans, whose exoskeletons shield their vulnerable bodies. The artist depicts these literal and metaphorical containers with coarse realism; they may not always provide the comfort our species or others desire, but they're what's available, which is better than nothing.

Kasparhauser's willingness to reckon with the world as it is, rather than pine for how we might wish it to be, takes on additional, allegorical meaning given Entrance's location and history. Gallerist Louis Shannon grew up near the Lower East Side and has operated Entrance's basement space since he was a teenager, initially hosting underground music shows there before eventually converting it into a gallery. Like the artist and her isopods, creatives find ways to persist despite adverse conditions, often by occupying interstitial urban spaces that nobody else wants or knows about. *New Decay* contains, but doesn't pretend to secure, that kind of life for those who understand its necessity.



Installation view of Kay Kasparhauser, "Every time i think I'm absolutely going to die I love you so much I love you so much" (2025), traffic barrier, plexiglass, bioactive substrate, cork bark, sphagnum moss, pothos, milkback isopods, spring-tails, lighting device, assorted trash (photo Louis Bury/*Hyperallergic*)



Drawings by Kay Kasparhauser (photo by Stephen Faught, image courtesy the artist and Entrance gallery)



Kay Kasparhauser, "Untitled (Container)" (2024), foam, latex, steel plaster, image transfer, expanding foam, cotton thread, orange powder isopod, plexiglass (photo by Stephen Faught, image courtesy the artist and Entrance gallery)



Kay Kasparhauser, "Je suis belle" (2024), foam, latex, steel plaster, image transfer, expanding foam, cotton thread, orange powder isopod, plexiglass (photo by Stephen Faught, image courtesy the artist and Entrance gallery)

Kay Kasparhauser: New Decay *continues at Entrance Gallery (Storefront R, 48 Ludlow Street, Lower East Side) through March 15. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.*
