

# The New York Times

**ART & DESIGN: What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week**  
By Will Heinrich — November 3, 2016



A view of *The Ball*, by Aki Sasamoto, at the SculptureCenter in Long Island City, Queens.

## **Aki Sasamoto: Delicate Cycle**

**SculptureCenter:** 44-19 Purves Street, Long Island City, Queens

It's not easy to make funny art. **What's even more difficult is to achieve what the Japanese-born artist Aki Sasamoto has in her first solo American museum show: to make work whose humor coexists with, and amplifies, its vividly humane sense of tragedy.**

Ms. Sasamoto is best known for performance. And, indeed, the laundry-themed, site-specific pieces with which she has filled the **SculptureCenter's** courtyard, stairwell and complex, crypt-like basement aren't so much sculpted objects as a series of set dressings so suggestive that they work even when she's not in them. (The show does include performances, though the remaining two — one this month and one in December — are sold out.)

In fact, her absence is key. Ms. Sasamoto, like Cosima von Bonin, whose exquisitely sad stuffed-fabric clams and octopuses are on this museum's ground floor, gets a lot of mileage out of the so-called pathetic fallacy. ***Washboard Belt — Maidrite***, an old-fashioned washboard hanging from one corner in the stairwell, with a barbecue fork slung across its back, like some character in a Pixar prison-break movie, is so sweetly doomed that it's hard not to see it as a mirror of all of your own most foolish hopes.

What is most striking throughout is an almost psychotherapeutic sense of receptivity. In the courtyard, five ghostly white twin contour sheets, one of them signed Sasamoto (in all caps) in a Sharpie marker, flap around a double clothesline hung on the diagonal. In the basement, two commercial washers and a double stack of dryers, arranged in step fashion like the most ancient Egyptian pyramids, stand gaping under a video with a heavily accented voice-over lecturing on the sacred significance of the dung beetle. In the hall, in emulation of the dung beetle, the artist constructed a ball of knotted white sheets five feet across. And back in the courtyard again, three cheap aluminum pots and pans, with speakers concealed under their lids, juxtapose recorded washing sounds with the manic construction noise of Long Island City.

The work's studied neutrality, partly down to its color scheme, but mostly because of its careful balance of satire and empathy, creates an empty space in which viewers can, to an unusual degree, hear their own thoughts and notice, maybe for the first time, just how peculiar they sound.