

ARTFORUM

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Charles LeDray



Charles LeDray, *Daisy Chain*, 2013–14, fabric and human bone, 1 x 16 1/2 x 15 1/2"

Charles LeDray's miniatures are as enchanting and magnetic as panoramic Easter eggs or the Stettheimer dollhouse, but without the whimsy or windows to peer into. Though, actually, there is an austere glass case displaying treasure among the mysterious objects in this spare, dimly lit installation of his work. Chic little vases or urns—made on a doll-size potter's wheel, one imagines—fill the glass shelves of the vertical vitrine. There are fourteen hundred black porcelain vessels in *Throwing Shadows*, 2008–16, each one unique. LeDray meticulously fabricates his work without assistants, and the time necessary to complete this intriguing sculpture is palpable.

Other works are skillfully and laboriously carved or hand-stitched. *Daisy Chain*, 2013–14, has a whiff of the macabre about it, even before you learn that the brittle white flower crown, laid out on a creased black fabric square, is made from human bone. *Mourning Coat*, 1991, is a beautifully tailored Lilliputian garment displayed like a pressed flower or pinned butterfly. *Overcoat*, 2004—a handsome doll's trench shown upright and open to reveal a cascade, or "body," of even smaller clothing—is charming, and a little horrifying. Shrunken menswear, buttons, the tiniest teacups, and stuffed bears are recurring ingredients in LeDray's condensed, ambiguously antique arrangements. Like the realm of child's play, the almost narrative world of his art does not conform to a uniform scale. Decontextualized elements, rendered in varying degrees of smallness, all make believe together. The fey, particular behemoth who painstakingly created and arranged these objects into fantastical situations feels strangely absent, far away in space and time. But LeDray's commitment to his queer vision suffuses the show. Its quietly strident handmadeness is simultaneously invisible and overwhelming, a totally magical effect.