

Margaret Lee: *It's not that I'm not taking (this) seriously*
Jack Hanley Gallery
327 Broome Street, New York, NY
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Margaret Lee, *It's not that I'm not taking (this) seriously*, installation view, 2016

A passerby might be forgiven for believing Jack Hanley Gallery to be closed for installation with the crew out for lunch. In Margaret Lee's current show, a never-used aluminum step ladder sits in the center of the floor. A green garden hose, still mostly coiled from the physical memory of its packaging, snakes through an opening in the "Do Not Stand or Sit" caution-yellow landing. The hose quivers as it rinses a can of metal-handled brushes—some for painting houses, some for painting paintings. A narrow stream of water pours from brush can to paint can beneath, both of which are pierced by a short length of pipe at their middles. Overturned containers are platforms here. The water pressure and the angle of that which is poured upon are both variable enough to keep the near ledge of the poured concrete basin and the floor just beyond sprayed slick. "Would you want that in your house?" the press release asks.

On a nearby plinth, another pipe from the same order as those in the fountain penetrates a baby's-first-blanket blue ten-gallon hat, expertly crimped at its crown. Might that be about ten gallons of water churning through the buckets and hose? (The Stetson company maintains that

a ten-gallon hat holds only about 3 quarts.) A similar hat can be seen on the semi-gloss exhibition poster, copies of which are stacked on a radiator near the door. Here, five overlapping cartoon frames depict what might be the aftermath of a shooting. A hand with index extended hovers near the hole in the hat, poised to finger the gap. *It's not that I'm not taking (this) seriously*, Lee twice insists on the poster, seeming to point to her own head now, both knowing and goonish.

At the back of the room sits a medium section of temporary wall on wheels. Wooden bananas are strung from a rope, which hangs from the wall's face in the style of the classic boot camp obstacle. Might this be "a bunch" of bananas? (It's a question with no good answer in a city that usually finds them piled by the dozens on bodega counters.) In the past, Lee has rendered bananas in chrome atop a fox fur blanket. That shimmering fruit came to seem more like high-end sex toys awaiting action. Here, painted and hung to ripen evenly, they are implicated in the show's emphasis on measurement and procedure.

I always find it reassuring when an artist has a day job, and Lee's are well-documented. With Oliver Newton, she is a co-director of the gallery 47 Canal. Off-days, she manages the studio of Cindy Sherman. Surely, her labor in service of the artwork of others must have produced a familiarity with near misses, the risks of a ladder and a few buckets of paint, problems in the plumbing, and the constant erection and destruction of drywall. In a sense, the objects here might have the feeling of side work, of moonlighting. They are imbued with the ease and brevity required to carry a joke.

On the reverse of that wall section, the rope is tied into a narrow noose. This particular punchline lands uncertainly, seeming to leave a missing step in an otherwise quick-footed dance of association. It is also the only component of the show not visible from the front window, although all of the objects here reward closer inspection than that. They are pleasing to look upon for longer than the time it takes to "get it." As Lee's fountain runs the eye cyclically among its components, the mind turns over her symbols and suggestions. The realizations are brief but cascading, like the dropped object that, improbably, continues falling—the grand piano that briefly visits each floor of the apartment building on its way down.