Lynn Aldrich
Biophilia
2007
Brightly colored sponges, rubber gloves, scouring pads and scrubbing brushes pile together in the lively sculpture Biophilia. Artist Lynn Aldrich describes this work as a “miniature explosion” created to reflect the many diverse life forms of a coral reef. She bends, cuts, and links these everyday cleaning tools, shaping them into representations of vibrant sea creatures.

Aldrich has loved the natural world her entire life. As a child, she wanted to be a marine biologist. She was also influenced by reading Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring. Written in 1962, the book made a big impact on the environmental conservation movement. Today, Aldrich approaches her sculptures much like the way a scientist approaches her study subjects. To start, Aldrich looks for specimens in her surroundings. To make Biophilia, Aldrich went on a shopping spree in home goods stores and neighborhood markets in her home city of Los Angeles. She then brought everything back to her studio. Next she piled it all on the floor and spent time observing the materials until she saw relationships of shape and color that suggested underwater life forms. Finally, she transformed the variety of parts and assembled them together to create something evocative and new.

Biophilia is both fun and serious. The title itself is a compound noun that joins the Greek root words “bio,” meaning life, and “philia,” meaning love. The title can be read as “love of life,” and the sculpture is certainly a joyful tribute to the abundance of creation and the awesome variety of life forms. The artist also connects her work to important environmental issues, especially the plastics that pollute oceans and landfills. By replacing delicate living creatures with artificial objects, this work asks us to think about how our actions endanger the reefs and the oceans. Aldrich also points out that the harmful presence of plastic waste in the ecosystem results from our contemporary consumer culture built on cheap, abundant, and disposable goods. Nonetheless, the artist is drawn to these “worthless” materials (as she calls them) and transforms them into an artwork that captures the imagination. The sculpture makes a sharp statement by using cleaning tools to depict an ecosystem that needs to be cleansed and repaired of human-caused damage.