

ANICKA YI

THERE EXISTS ANOTHER EVOLUTION,
BUT IN THIS ONE

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing
March 22 – June 15, 2025

Esther Schipper

Anicka Yi



Anicka Yi was born in 1971 in Seoul, South Korea. She lives and works in New York City, USA.

Anicka Yi was one of the visiting artists at the Stanford University (2022-23). In 2022 the artist was invited to present a TED talk at the TED2022 Conference in Vancouver. Previously, she held positions of artist fellow at the Berggruen Institute (2019) and at the MIT CAST-Center for Art Science and Technology (2014). Yi has been awarded Tate Turbine Hall Hyundai Commission (2020), Hugo Boss Prize (2016) and The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award (2011).

Known for her multi-sensory approach to art making, Anicka Yi has radically expanded the notion of what an artwork can be and transformed exhibitions into embodied encounters. Drawing on a notion of otherness rooted in scent and taste, atypical sensoria for the visual arts realm, Yi's works allow her audience to viscerally experience complex issues relating to social and racial prejudice, ecology, climate change, biological extinction, machines and artificial intelligence. Yi's practice is cross-disciplinary and presents knowledge from art, science and technology in compelling formal articulations.

Part of a wider political critique of humanity's exceptionalist claim among organisms and its far-reaching repercussions, coexistence and existential entanglements are explored by works that employ biochemical interactions, often using materials in a state of elemental ambiguity. Scent travels through air, microbes color soil, machines mimic insects or float as tentacled amoeba-like shapes through space guided by their moods and motivations. Hybridity, fragility and mutability is inherent to Yi's oeuvre and thought, foregrounding the interconnectness of all things.

In 2023, the artist incubated **Metaspore**, an artist-led nomadic research initiative that aims to generate interdisciplinary "spores" of connection and social trust for 21st century planetary paradigm shifts. The initiative will bring vanguard thinkers from diverse backgrounds and disciplines together in action as new paradigms solidify.

Anicka Yi's solo exhibitions include: **Postnatal Egg**, Newfields Museum of Art, Indianapolis (2023); **Anicka Yi: Metaspore**, Pirelli HangarBicoca, Milan (2022); **In Love With The World**, Hyundai Commission, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London (2021); **Life Is Cheap**, The 2016 Hugo Boss Prize, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2017); **Jungle Stripe**, Fridericianum, Kassel (2016); **7,070,430K of Digital Spit**, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (2015); **6,070,430K of Digital Spit**, List Visual Arts Center, MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2015); **You Can Call Me F**, The Kitchen, New York (2015); **Death**, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio (2014).

Yi's work is held in the collections of various institutions including: Aishti Foundation, Beirut; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland; Dikeou Collection, Denver; Fondation Galeries Lafayette, Paris; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf/Berlin; K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong; Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Pinault Collection, Paris and Venice; Rubell Museum, Miami/Washington DC; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate Modern, London; The Warehouse, Dallas; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Williams College, Massachusetts.

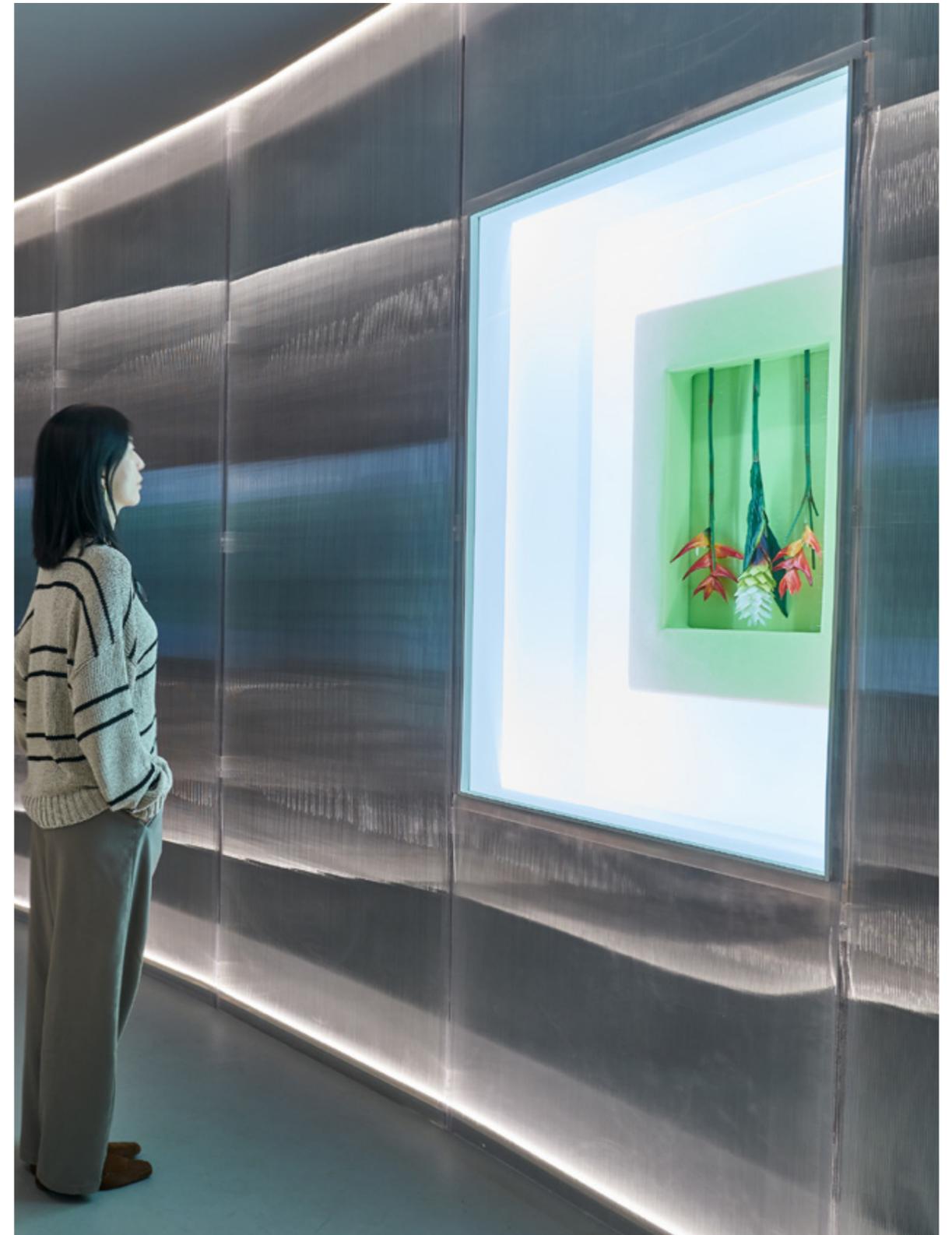
Cover, exhibition view: Anicka Yi, **Each Branch Of Coral Holds Up The Light Of The Moon**, 2024, single channel video projection, duration: 16:04 min, dimensions variable, edition of 5 plus 2 artist's proofs (AY1 055)

EXHIBITION TEXT

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents **Anicka Yi: There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One** between March 22, 2025, and June 15, 2025, the artist's first solo exhibition in China and her most extensive presentation to date. Featuring nearly 40 works spanning her career—including a number of pieces newly commissioned for this presentation—this exhibition offers a unique experience of Yi's constantly evolving practice and multisensory universe of biology, technology, philosophy, and art, in a bold yet nuanced reflection of the human experience against the background of systems in flux. The exhibition is co-organized by UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, and Leeum Museum of Art, and co-curated by Peter Eleey, UCCA Curator-at-Large, and Gina Lee, Curator, Leeum Museum of Art.

As the exhibition unfolds, early works enter into dialogue with Yi's more recent projects, including these algorithmic explorations and immersive environments. Rather than a linear progression, Yi's practice emerges as a series of interconnected experiments, looping back on itself while advancing into unknown futures. Foundational concerns raised early in her career—such as material instability, the blending of organic and synthetic life, and the evolution of intelligence—have remained relevant while continuously being reconfigured through new frameworks, technologies, and conceptual approaches. This dynamic interplay of the organic and the artificial reflects the ever-evolving nature of Yi's creative strategy, where decay, transformation, and interdependence shape the underlying narrative

Through her groundbreaking, multisensory approach to art, Yi reimagines the boundaries between life and technology. "We're at this critical razor's edge," she has said, "where we can either annihilate ourselves with our fear of technology or try to endure and prosper." In a time when rapid advancements in artificial intelligence are provoking both hope and trepidation, Yi offers new possibilities for considering the nature of human evolution, creativity, and emerging forms of coexistence



Exhibition view: Anicka Yi, **There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One**, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2025)

EXHIBITION VIEWS



Exhibition view: Anicka Yi, **There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One**, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2025)



Exhibition view: Anicka Yi, *There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One*, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2025)



Exhibition view: Anicka Yi, **There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One**, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2025)



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Exhibition view: Anicka Yi, **There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One**, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2025)

QUANTUM FOAM PAINTINGS



The **Quantum Foam** works are unique paintings that are UV printed using imagery generated through a custom-made machine learning model. The sculptural facet of each painting is unique and made by milling the acrylic surface. The paintings have an almost holographic effect, their appearance shifts slightly as one moves. Photography cannot properly document this effect.

The imagery was generated by the artist working in dialogue with several machine-learning algorithms, deconstructing and manipulating her past work to prompt and guide the algorithms in unexpected directions. Each of these models started from the original "Anicka Yi" model, but then evolved in new directions by mixing in a profusion of novel imagery from algae, bacteria, and fungi, tissues and cells, flora and fauna, machines and electronics, paint strokes and fluid media, geological formations, and landscapes (aquatic, terrestrial, and cosmic). Yi conceptualized this process as hybridizing her own visual patterns and motifs (her visual "DNA") with those of other ecological entities, living and non-living alike.

Each new machine learning algorithm created by Yi functions as a layer of "paint" and generates unique imagery, from brush strokes and washes of color, to blood cells and fish eggs, scratched and ruptured skin, clumps of algae, polyps and crustaceans, and the undulations of a deep ocean floor. Drawing from this abundant pool of unique imagery, Yi digitally collages the visuals to create an illusion of depth, layering foreground, middle ground, and background to synthesize the final digital painting.

While the images created in this process are at once figurative (referencing real-world objects) and abstract (not reflecting visual reality, but instead concerned with pattern, form, color, shape, etc.), the current series of paintings retains more expressly figurative references to the materials the artist employed to teach the machine learning algorithms.

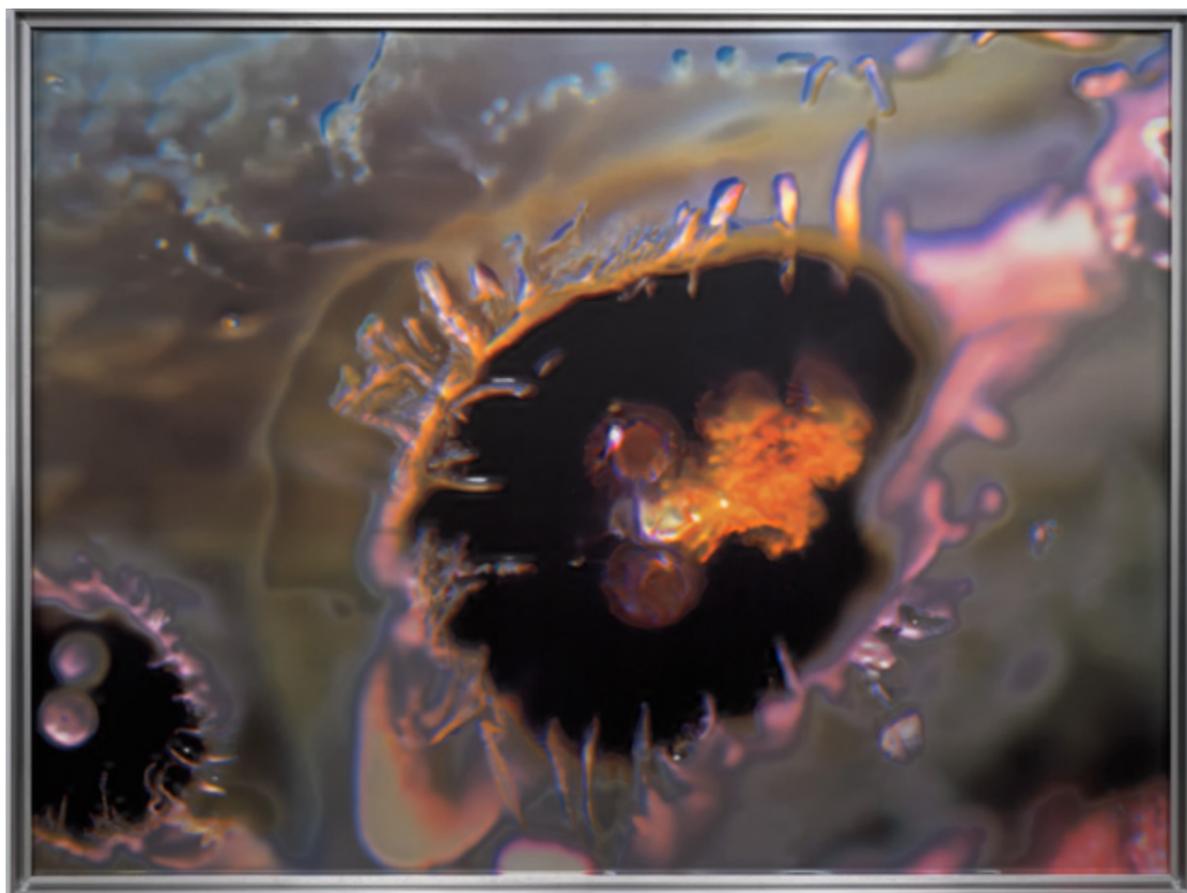
The final physical painting is created by playing with layers of light reflection, distortion, transparency, and color to create an almost holographic effect. Yi's intention was for the illuminated surface of the paintings to evoke an electric alien ocean, where optical physics are scrambled, reflections and shadow become illusory, and light flickers over the pale screen of a machine consciousness.

Painting is a relatively new part of Anicka Yi's practice. Following her early experiments with "soap paintings" in 2013–15, the artist renewed her investigation into painting and imagemaking during 2020. Continuing a trajectory in her oeuvre that explores the concept of "biologizing the machine" (Venice Biennale 2019, In Love With The World at Tate Modern 2021, Metaspore at Pirelli HangarBicocca 2022), Yi wanted to interrogate painting's mythical associations with individual authorship and the physical body of the painter, exploring how machine intelligence might affect the evolution of painting.

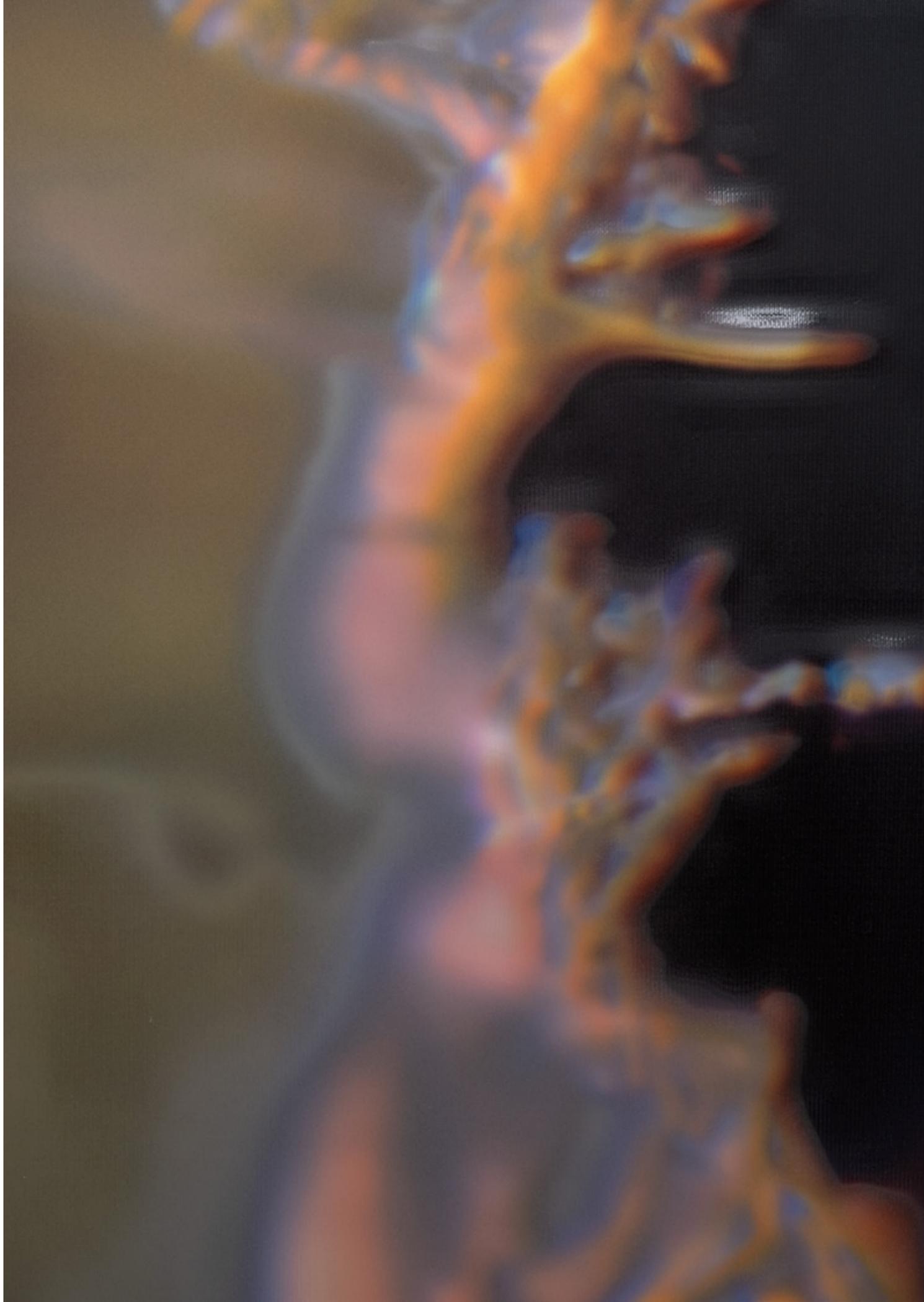


BñtLŞBLñ, 2024, acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame, 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed) (AY1 072)

Бн†LЅBLñ



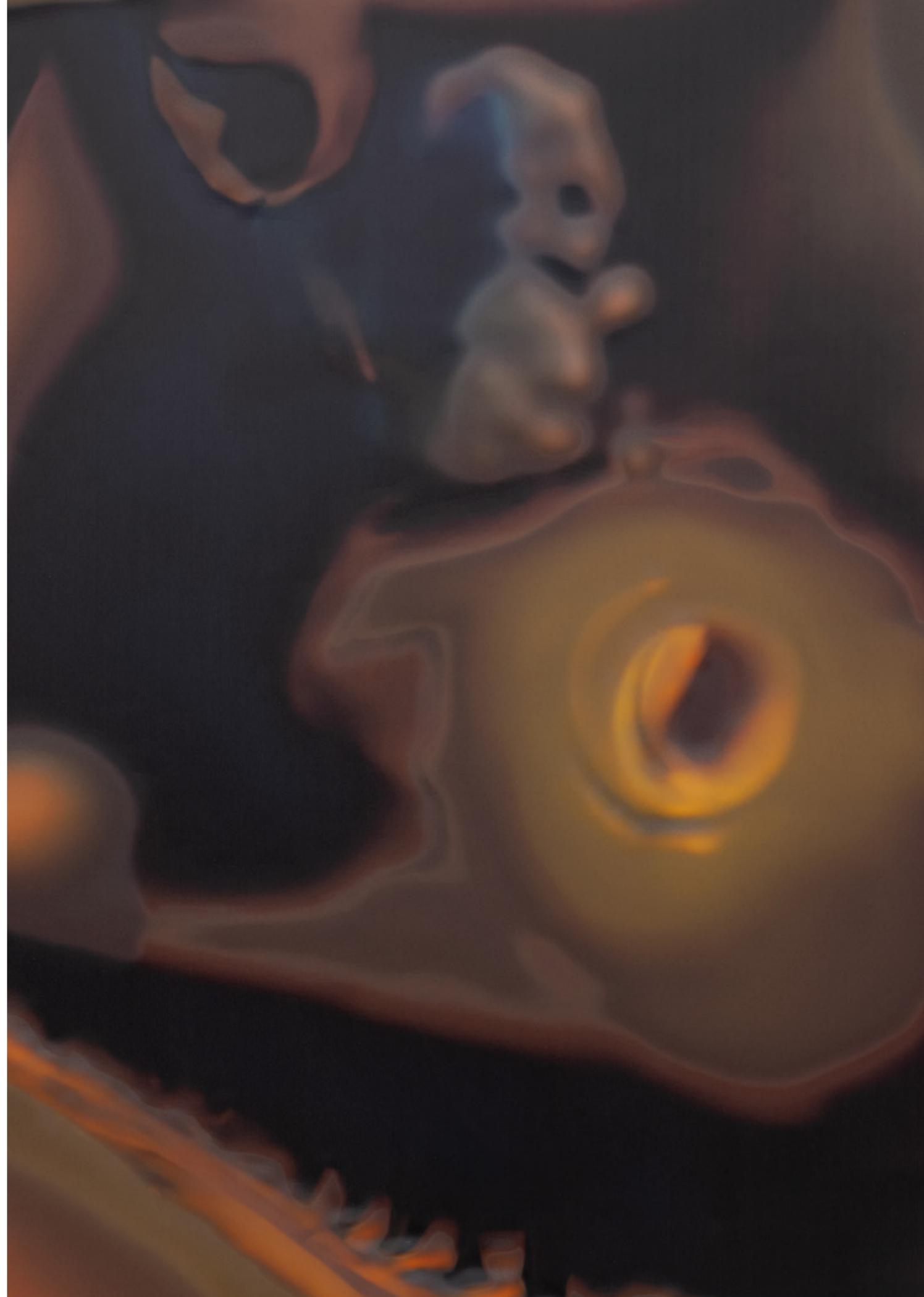
Бн†LЅBLñ, 2024, acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame, 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed) (AY1 072)



ŞKRİKİ



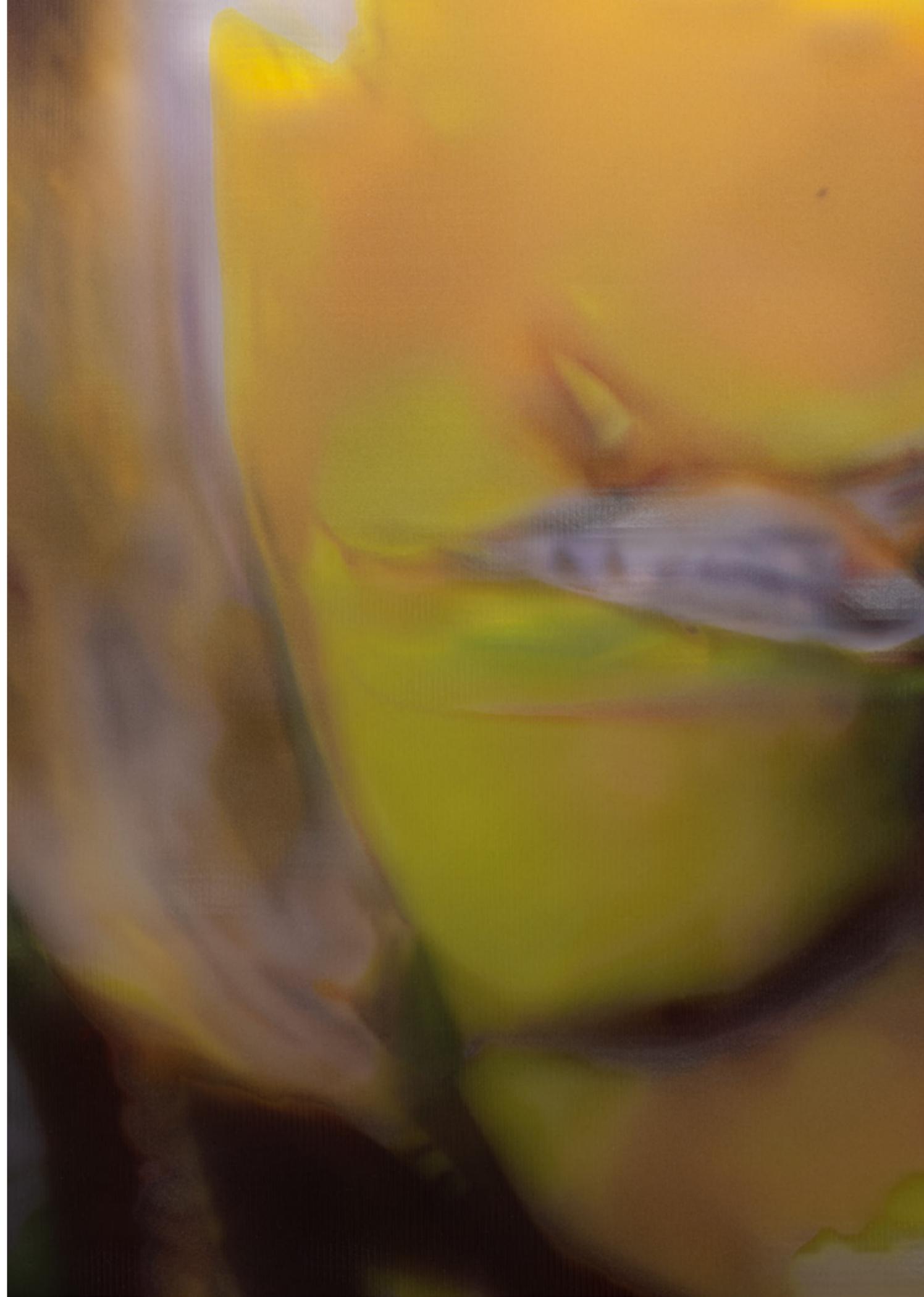
ŞKRİKİ, 2024, acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame, 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed) (AY1 075)



ΕΤΚΣÑ



ΕΤΚΣÑ, 2023, acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame, 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed) (AYI 030)



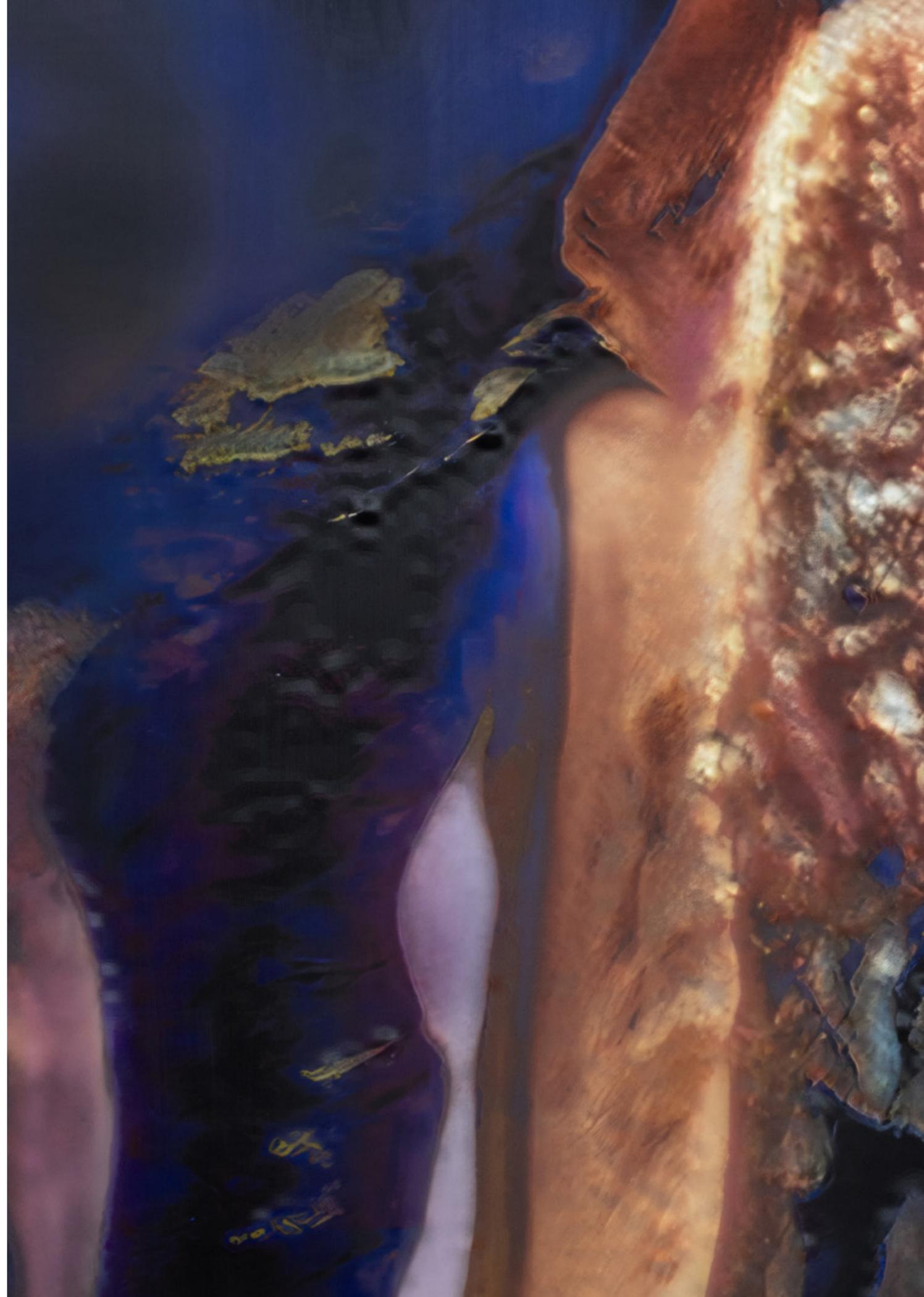


ŠTĚRŤŠŇ, 2023, acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame, 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed) (AYI 034)

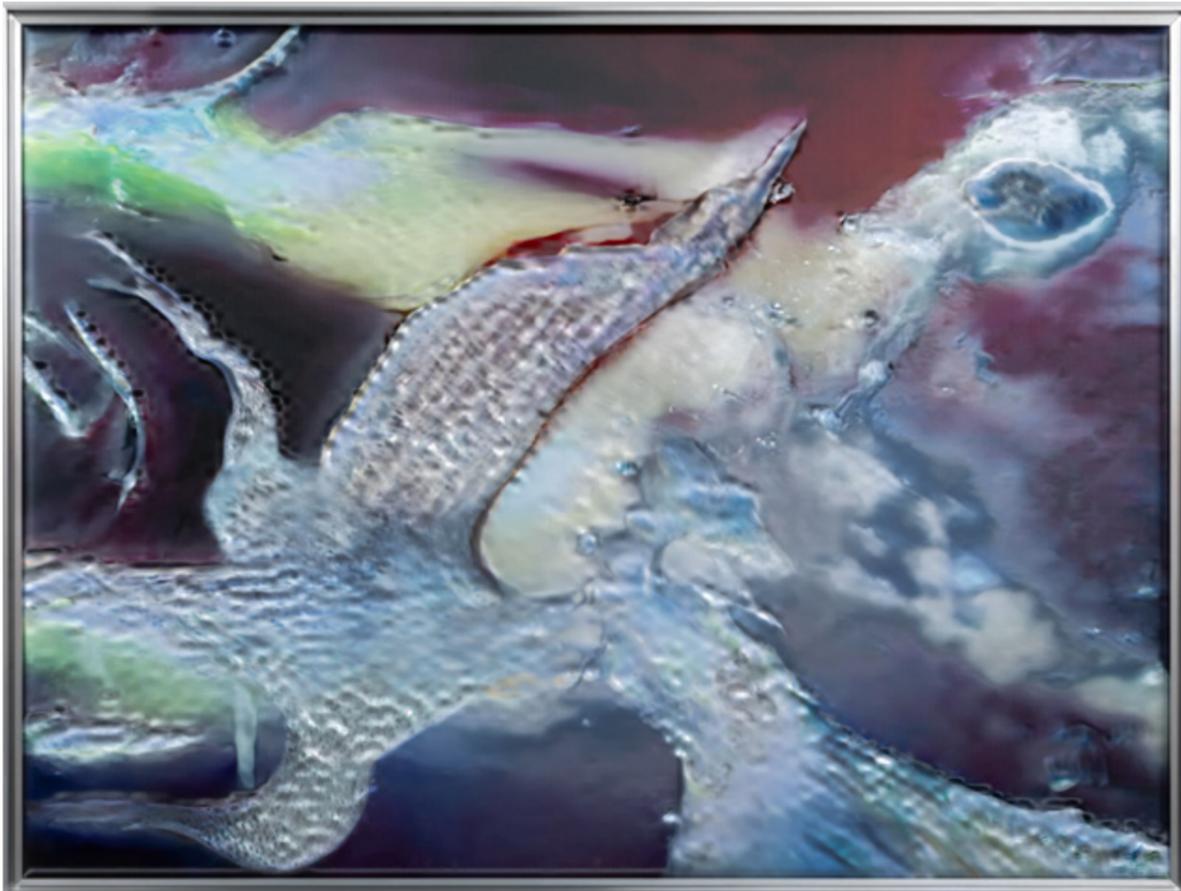




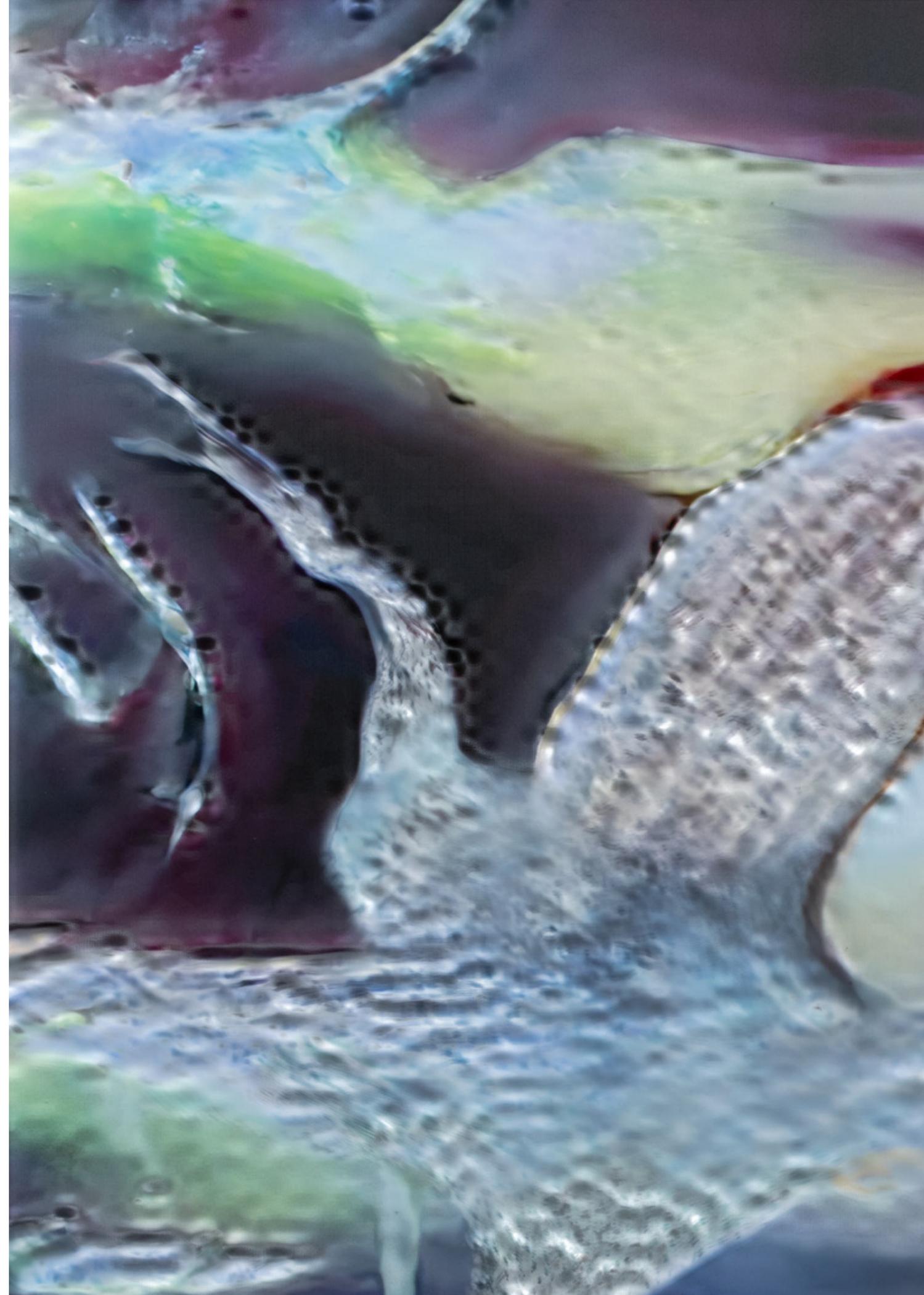
BñOKŞLOR, 2023, acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame, 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed) (AYI 035)



LĪRPRL



LĪRPRL, 2023, acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame, 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed) (AYI 037)



RADIOLARIA SCULPTURES



Suspended from the ceiling (or equivalent suspension points), the sculptures appear to hover in space. Forming a translucent surface around the transparent frame housing the animatronic metal skeleton, optical fibers run along the bodies, sometimes as a fine web, sometimes collected in thick bundles or braids. Modeled on radiolaria—minuscule water-dwelling single-cell micro-organisms dating back to the Cambrian period of Earth’s history, circa 500 million years ago—the sculptures have elongated oval shapes formed by the fine cables aligned vertically along their bodies. Tendril-like mechanical arms made from metal are covered with transparent acrylic elements that echo vertebra and very slowly undulate, subtly recalling the movements of their biological progenitors in deep waters. This sense of watching biological beings is underlined by the flickering light the cables emit, which travels along the delicate bodies animating them.

The different forms of arranging the optical fibers—sometimes aligned in an orderly vertical web, in other places woven in braids or gathered in thick bundles that spread out feather-like—recall the age-old tradition of braiding hair or weaving other organic materials. A meditative, ritualistic practice that has a wide range of connotations across time and cultural realms, weaving endows the technological cables with unexpected organic associations.

The monumentally enlarged shapes of the radiolaria combine a sense of archaic familiarity one intuitively feels with other biological matter with the human fascination of seeing microscopic forms appear in a macroscopic scale. To Yi the formal reference to radiolaria is a reminder of the origin of human evolution, the joint ancestry of human and non-human beings in marine life. Explored in her iconic earlier series of kelp pod sculptures, the artist has further developed this connection in this new series.

Mingling animal forms with robotic ones, the sculptures seek to imagine an evolution in which biological machines fuse in a productive and harmonious ecosystem. As the cables flicker softly and the arms slowly move, the subtle movements evoke a powerful sense of fragility and even vulnerability, encouraging the spectator to perceive the sculptures as autonomous beings, and even to feel compassion for them. The works continue Anicka Yi’s exploration into “biologizing the machine” as the distinctions between plants, animals, micro-organisms and technology are increasingly beginning to break down and the artist explores models to endow machines with the necessary biological tools to evolve physical intelligence and live independently.



Dewdrop Continuum, 2023-2024, PMMA optical fiber, LEDs, silicone, acrylic, epoxy, aluminum, stainless steel, steel, brass, motors and microcontrollers, 149,9 x 78,1 x 78,1 cm (59 x 30 3/4 x 30 3/4 in) (AY1 045)

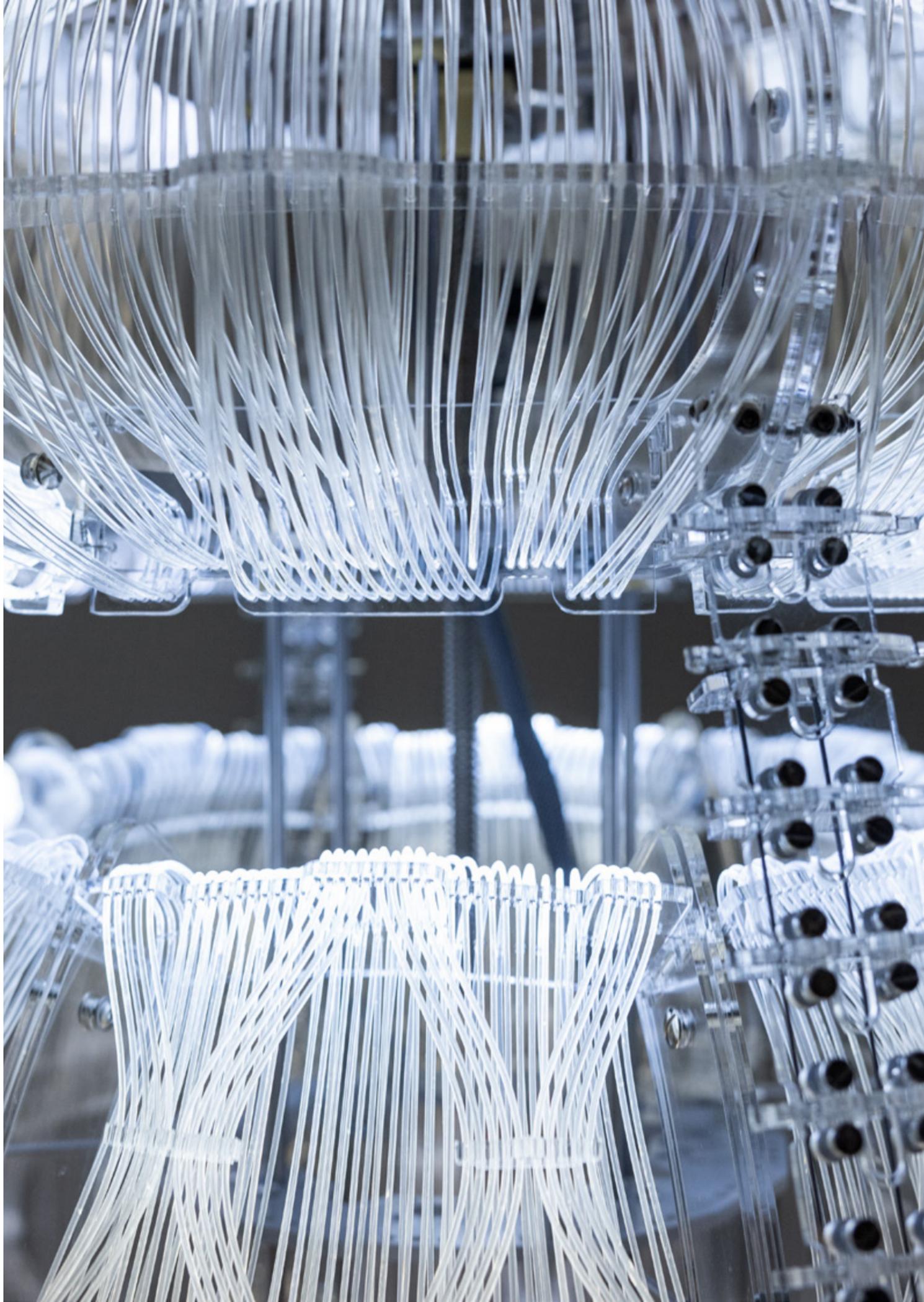


Video: **Spider**, 2023-2024, PMMA optical fiber, LEDs, silicone, acrylic, epoxy, aluminum, stainless steel, steel, brass, motors and microcontrollers, 154,3 x 99,9 x 99,9 cm (60 3/4 x 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in) (AY1 049)



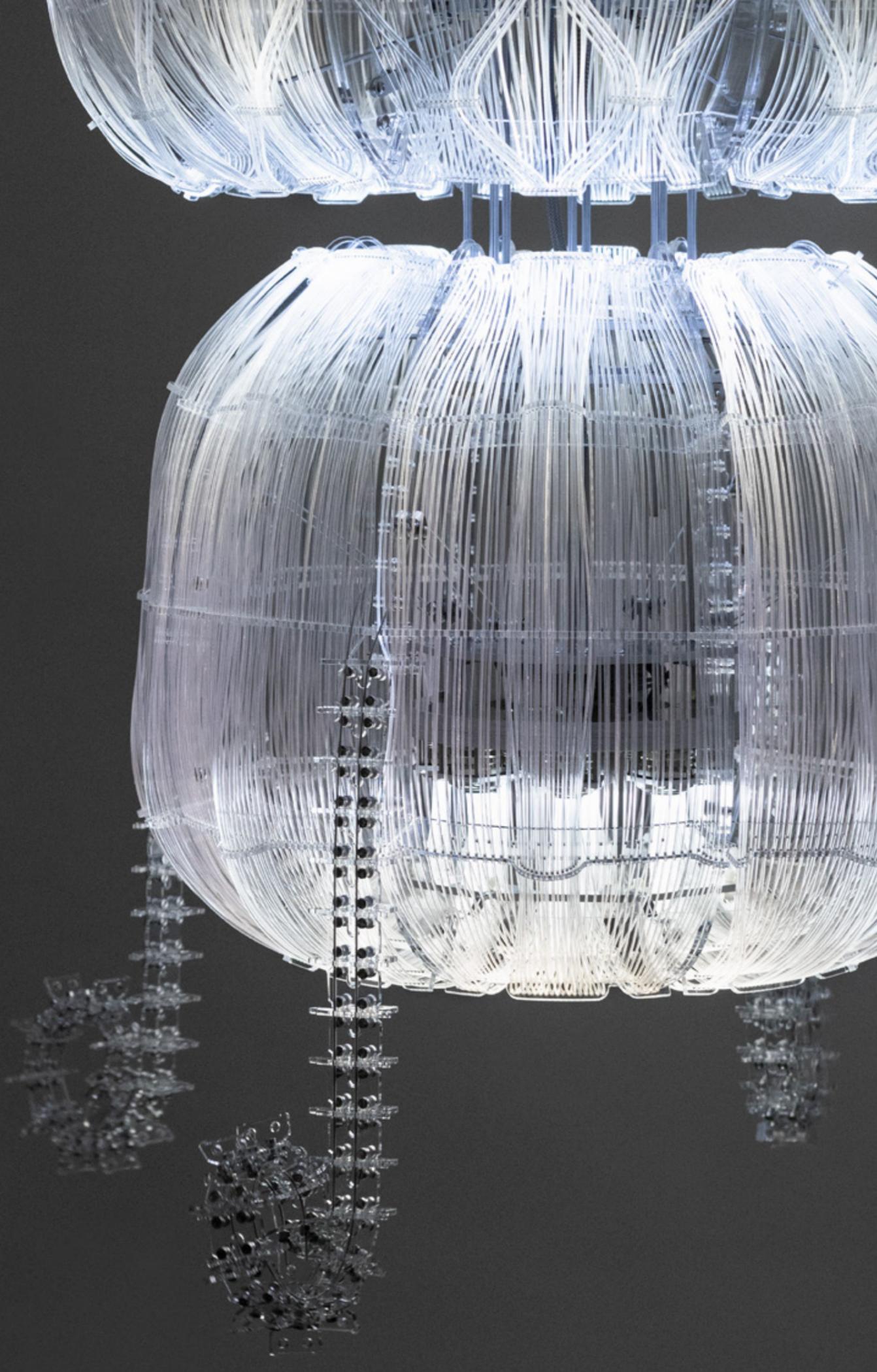


Video: **Moon Jelly**, 2023-2024, PMMA optical fiber, LEDs, silicone, acrylic, epoxy, aluminum, stainless steel, steel, brass, motors and micro-controllers, 134 x 74,9 x 74,9 cm (52 3/4 x 29 1/2 x 29 1/2 in) (AY1 050)





Video: **Lionfish**, 2023-2024, PMMA optical fiber, LEDs, silicone, acrylic, epoxy, aluminum, stainless steel, steel, brass, motors and microcontrollers, 168,8 x 70,6 x 70,6 cm (66 1/2 x 27 3/4 x 27 3/4 in) (approx.) (AY1 052)



BIOFOULED SCULPTURES



Continuing her earlier use of tempura-fried flowers as a medium, Anicka Yi's **Biofouled Sculptures** have a pronounced figurative quality becoming almost like characters who are aggressively tactile and abject, emphasizing material processes and technique.

The term "biofouling" describes the formation of a biofilm, a complex community of microorganisms, plants, algae, or small animals, on a wet surface, resulting in mechanical damage or other malfunction. In this way, the "biofouled" sculptures represent the natural world grafting itself onto anthropogenic structures and systems, sabotaging human aspirations towards lab-like cleanliness and industrial functionality. The **Biofouled Sculptures** also include a network of glass vessels and aquarium tubing, channeling mysterious liquids and reminiscent of intestines and internal organs.

In Yi's tempura works, the romantic connotations of floral arrangements meet with revulsion, as the beautiful organic matter of flowers becomes greasy, decayed, and progressively pungent. The threat of formal and even chemical instability means that the works themselves will never behave like polite, eternally fixed objects. Throughout her oeuvre, Yi's works emphasize the presence and agency of the materials she uses, undermining the logic of the author as its unique activator, since so many other forces (environmental, bacterial, entropic) affect her forms.

Past works with tempura-fried flowers include **Early Classical** (2014), **May Contain Nut Traces** (2009), and **Sister** (2011). Of particular influence are her "corpse flower" sculptures which debuted at Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland in 2015 and have a voluminous presence, suggestive of monstrous hybrid characters enclosed in Yi's signature "quarantine" inflatable structures. The "corpse flower" sculptures include **Maybe She's Born with It** (2015), **Lapidary Tea Slave** (2015), and **ALZ/AZN** (2015).



Detail: **Vinegar Fissure**, 2024, foam, plaster, paint, tempura fried flowers, glass, tubing, 205 x 110 x 100 cm (80 3/4 x 43 1/4 x 39 3/8 in) (AYI 067)



Anicka Yi, **Primate Visions**, 2024, foam, plaster, paint, tempura fried flowers, glass, tubing, 170 x 195 x 135 cm (66 7/8 x 76 3/4 x 53 1/8 in) (AYI 068)





Vinegar Fissure, 2024, foam, plaster, paint, tempura fried flowers, glass, tubing, 205 x 110 x 100 cm (80 3/4 x 43 1/4 x 39 3/8 in) (AY1 067)

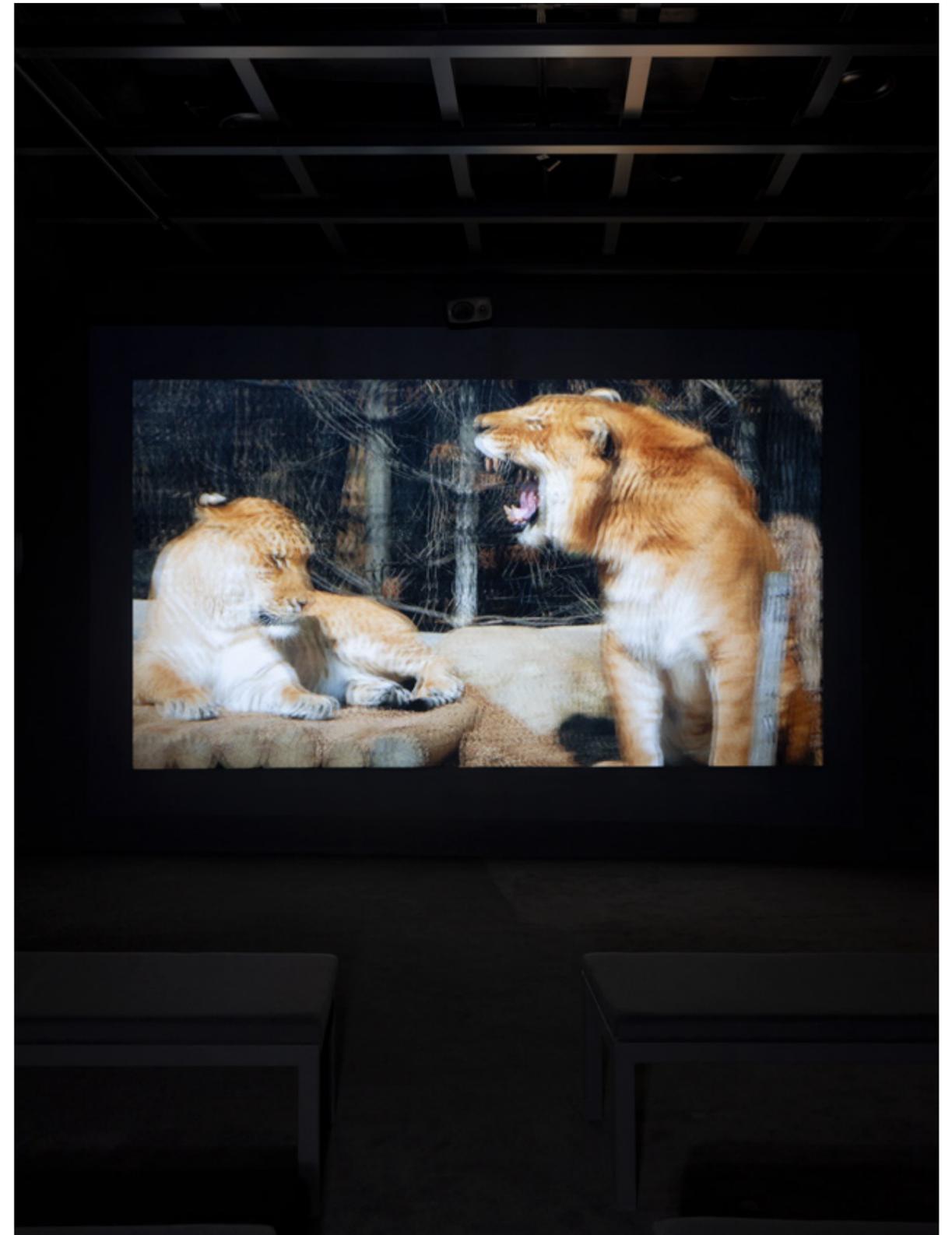




Anicka Yi's film **The Flavor Genome** takes a journey into the unexplored threshold of adaptation, mutation and hybridization of living organisms. Shot on 3D video the film complicates technological obsolescence in contemporary visuality by deploying both 3D video and 3D animation systems. Set in the Amazon rainforest and renegade laboratories the narrative is told through a commercial flavorist who is on the hunt for a mythical orchid which has miraculous properties in the jungles of the Amazon. Events go awry in the jungle as scientific procedures attempt to merge with unforeseen realities leading to unimaginable sensorial outcomes. Under the conceptual premise of the "flavor genome" the video performs a mapping of perceptual worlds, taking reality as matrices of perceived unique essences which could enable the potential for bio diverse intelligence sharing.

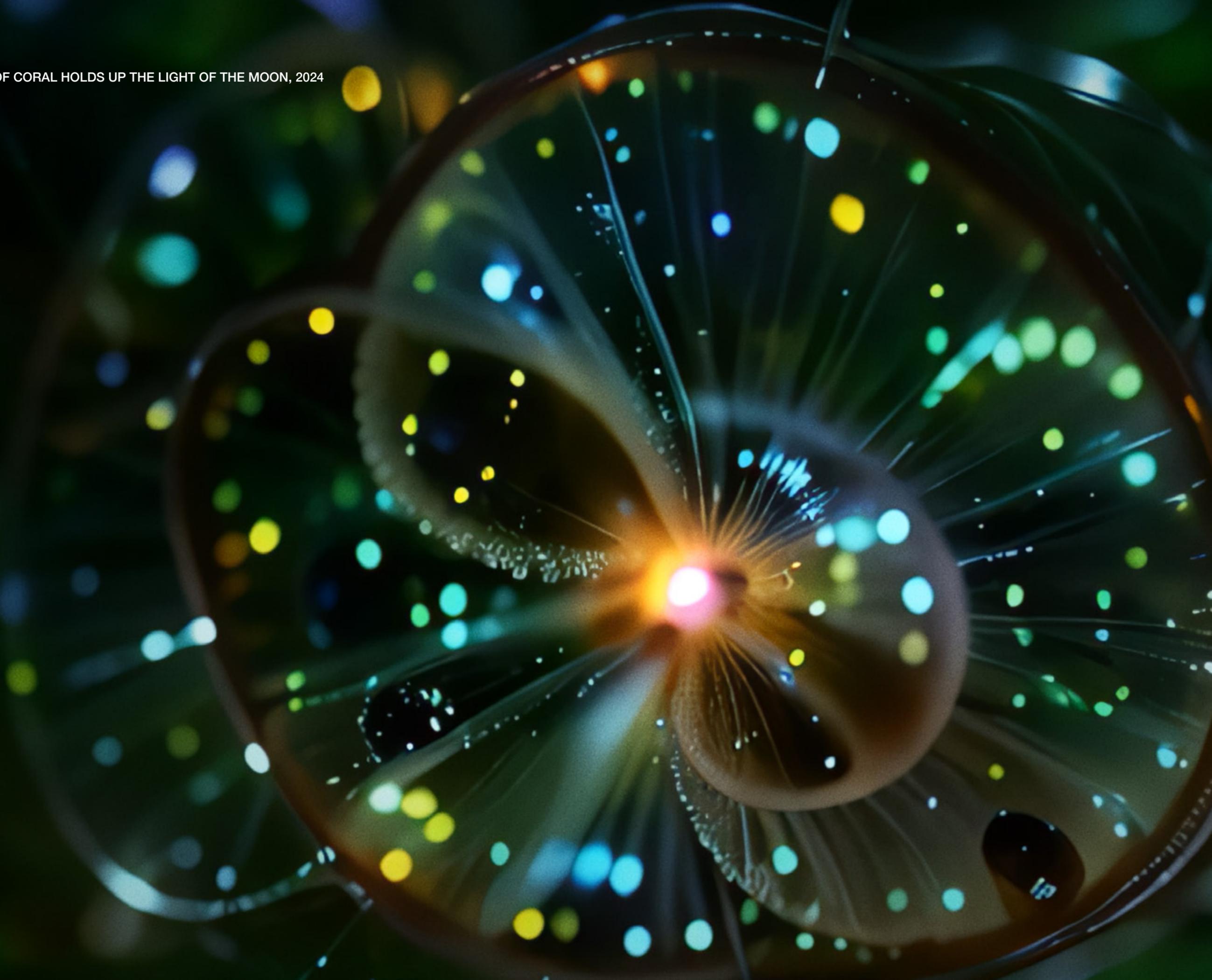


Video: Anicka Yi, **The Flavor Genome**, 2016, single channel 3D video, dimensions variable, duration: 22 min, edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs (AYI 056)



The Flavor Genome, 2016, single channel 3D video, dimensions variable, duration: 22 min, edition of 3 (AYI 056).
Exhibition view: Anicka Yi, **There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One**, Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul (2024)

EACH BRANCH OF CORAL HOLDS UP THE LIGHT OF THE MOON, 2024



Anicka Yi's **Each Branch of Coral Holds Up the Light of the Moon** (2024) is a video work crafted with her innovative **Emptiness** software, which the artist is developing, and introduces the idea that art can transcend the physical and temporal boundaries of the artist's existence. Serving as the inaugural piece of her broader **Emptiness** project, this video showcases the software as an algorithmic "digital twin" of her studio—an evolving archive that has been trained on over a decade of her work, capturing the studio's hybrid and collaborative approach to creativity.

The **Emptiness** software utilizes a blend of simulation and machine learning techniques to mimic, remix, and reinterpret Yi's artworks as living virtual creatures. Drawing on Buddhist philosophy, the concept of Emptiness reflects a state of pure consciousness, free from the narratives that typically define human experience. The software functions as a bridge between 3D and 5D spaces—connecting the tangible, sensory world with the quantum field of infinite possibilities. This duality reflects Yi's engagement with somatic and quantum meditation practices, exploring the intersections between physical experience and the limitless potential of the quantum realm.

This symbiotic relationship between Yi and the software extends beyond the physical exhibition, acting as a digital reflection of her artistic practice. It probes how new dimensions can be accessed through algorithmic-based expressions—creating an artificial life simulation that functions as an artistic collaborator, a code-based thinking partner, an archivist, and a digital storyteller. The video's immersive soundtrack, featuring a formidable gong sound bath punctuated by the glassy tones of bells and crystal singing bowls, further deepens this experience. Through this innovative approach, Yi not only preserves and evolves her artistic practice but also challenges the boundaries between physical reality and higher states of consciousness, exploring how art can continue to exist and evolve independently of the artist.



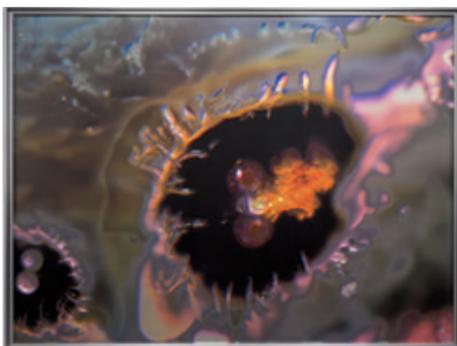
Video: Anicka Yi, **Each Branch Of Coral Holds Up The Light Of The Moon**, 2024, single channel video projection, duration: 16:04 min, dimensions variable, edition of 5 plus 2 artist's proofs (AY1 055)





Each Branch Of Coral Holds Up The Light Of The Moon, 2024, single channel video projection, mirrors, glycerin, duration: 16:04 min, dimensions variable, edition of 5 (AY1 055).
Exhibition view: Anicka Yi, **There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One**, Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul (2024)

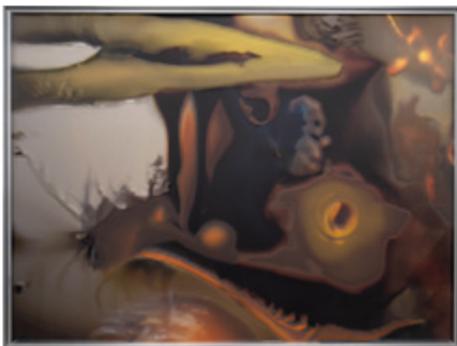
AVAILABLE WORKS



Anicka Yi
Bñ†LŞBLñ, 2024
 Acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame
 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed)
 (AYI 072)



Anicka Yi
BñOKŞLOR, 2023
 Acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame
 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed)
 (AYI 035)



Anicka Yi
ŞKR†K†, 2024
 Acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame
 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed)
 (AYI 075)



Anicka Yi
LñRpRL, 2023
 Acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame
 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed)
 (AYI 037)



Anicka Yi
£†KŞñ, 2023
 Acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame
 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed)
 (AYI 030)



Anicka Yi
Lionfish, 2023-2024
 PMMA optical fiber, LEDs, silicone, acrylic, epoxy,
 aluminum, stainless steel, steel, brass, motors and
 microcontrollers
 168,8 x 70,6 x 70,6 cm (66 1/2 x 27 3/4 x 27 3/4 in)
 (approx.)
 (AYI 052)



Anicka Yi
Ş†£R†Şñ, 2023
 Acrylic, UV print, aluminum artist's frame
 121,9 x 162,6 x 3,8 cm (48 x 64 x 1 1/2 in) (framed)
 (AYI 034)



Anicka Yi
Spider, 2023-2024
PMMA optical fiber, LEDs, silicone, acrylic, epoxy,
aluminum, stainless steel, steel, brass, motors and
microcontrollers
154,3 x 99,9 x 99,9 cm (60 3/4 x 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in)
(AYI 049)



Anicka Yi
Moon Jelly, 2023-2024
PMMA optical fiber, LEDs, silicone, acrylic, epoxy,
aluminum, stainless steel, steel, brass, motors and
microcontrollers
134 x 74,9 x 74,9 cm (52 3/4 x 29 1/2 x 29 1/2 in)
(AYI 050)



Anicka Yi
Primate Visions, 2024
Foam, plaster, paint, tempura fried flowers, glass,
tubing
170 x 195 x 135 cm (66 7/8 x 76 3/4 x 53 1/8 in)
(AYI 068)



Anicka Yi
Vinegar Fissure, 2024
Foam, plaster, paint, tempura fried flowers, glass,
tubing
205 x 110 x 100 cm (80 3/4 x 43 1/4 x 39 3/8 in)
(AYI 067)



Anicka Yi
The Flavor Genome, 2016
Single channel 3D video
Dimensions variable
Duration: 22 min
Edition of 3
(AYI 056)



Anicka Yi
Each Branch Of Coral Holds Up The Light Of The Moon, 2024
Single channel video projection
Duration: 16:04 min
Dimensions variable
Edition of 5
(AYI 055)

Live Forever

ANICKA YI
WORDS BY
DEAN KISSICK

01



02

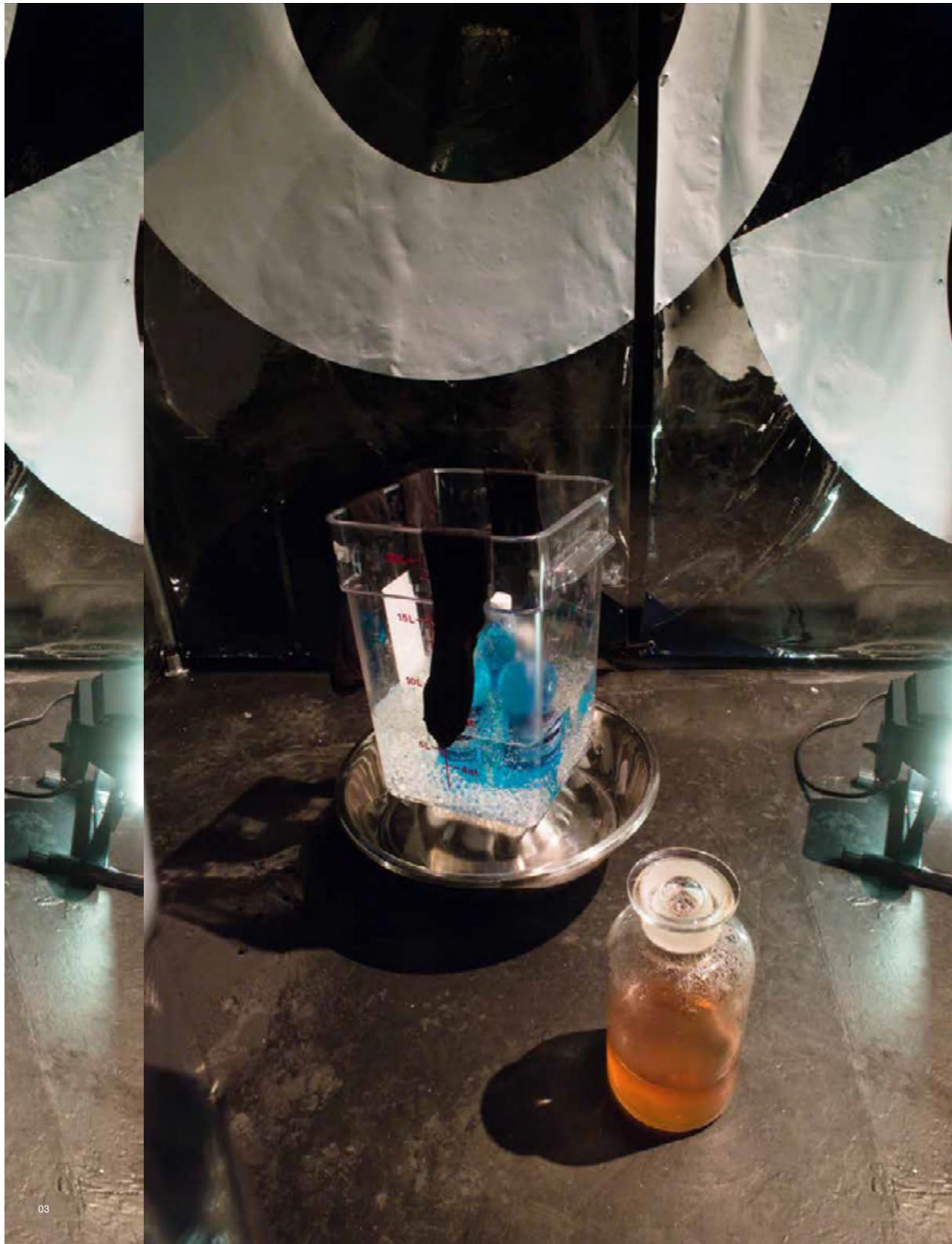
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YOU HAVE TO LET GO OF THE PAST

Anicka Yi often collaborates with biologists, chemists, engineers, and other specialists. For her 2019 line of fragrances for Dover Street Market New York, *Biography*, she worked with French super nose Barnabé Fillion. One scent, *Radical Hopelessness*, was inspired by Hatshepsut, the second female pharaoh of Egypt. Another, *Shigenobu Twilight*, by female Japanese Red Army militant Fusako Shigenobu. The third, *Beyond Skin*, which Yi has described as “the AI one,” has notes of myrrh, indole, rose, civet, cloves, and red seaweed and was designed to evoke an AI network synthesizing all female experience. This is also, in a sense, Yi’s project today: to build a new subjectivity.

“I was obsessed with the future,” she once recalled of the mid-2010s. During that time, for her 2015 Kunsthalle Basel exhibition, “7,070,430K of Digital Spit,” she had catalogues made from handmade incense paper laced with an aroma she and Fillion had developed to smell of “forgetting,” which was ritually burned in the space every day. It was a show where you went to forget. “I had convinced myself,” she continued, “that I was brought from the future to compost our present, so that we could transition to the future.” I appreciate this approach very much, especially now, a decade on, when the contemporary art world has become so backwards facing, traditional, and nostalgic.

This September, Yi will open a major retrospective, “There Exists Another Evolution, But in this One,” at the Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul, later travelling to UCCA in Beijing. She does not like survey shows, because there’s not much for a living artist to do, so around half of this one is comprised of new works. “That’s what excites me, what really ignites my imagination,” she says, “wanting to work and to be in the present. I don’t really like looking back too much into the past.”





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EACH BRANCH OF CORAL HOLDS UP THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

The show opens with a new fragrance, for which she asked Fillion to imagine dark primordial soup, biologized machines in the deep, a bioluminescent tree blooming underwater. It brings notes of citrus and algae, accents of gasoline and petrichor. It smells like the beginning of the world.

The exhibition's centerpiece is *Each Branch of Coral Holds Up the Light of the Moon* (2024), a digital animation of what looks like lifeforms and artworks evolving together. To help make it, all fifteen other bodies of work included in the exhibition — among which are contact lens aquariums, tempura-fried flowers, kombucha-skin sculptures, quarantine tents, kelp lanterns containing animatronic moths, neural-network paintings trained on her archive, hanging radiolaria machine-sculptures, bioluminescent bacteria sculptures, biofouled sculptures, the new fragrance itself — have been transformed into generative characters and used to visualize ideas for new artworks, morphing, mutating and at times coming alive as a sea slug or a leafy vine, butterflies, internal organs or a bunch of flowers, accompanied by a shimmering soundtrack of bells and gongs. As the video is formed from all the works in the survey, it is also a survey itself, a meditative world as retrospective.

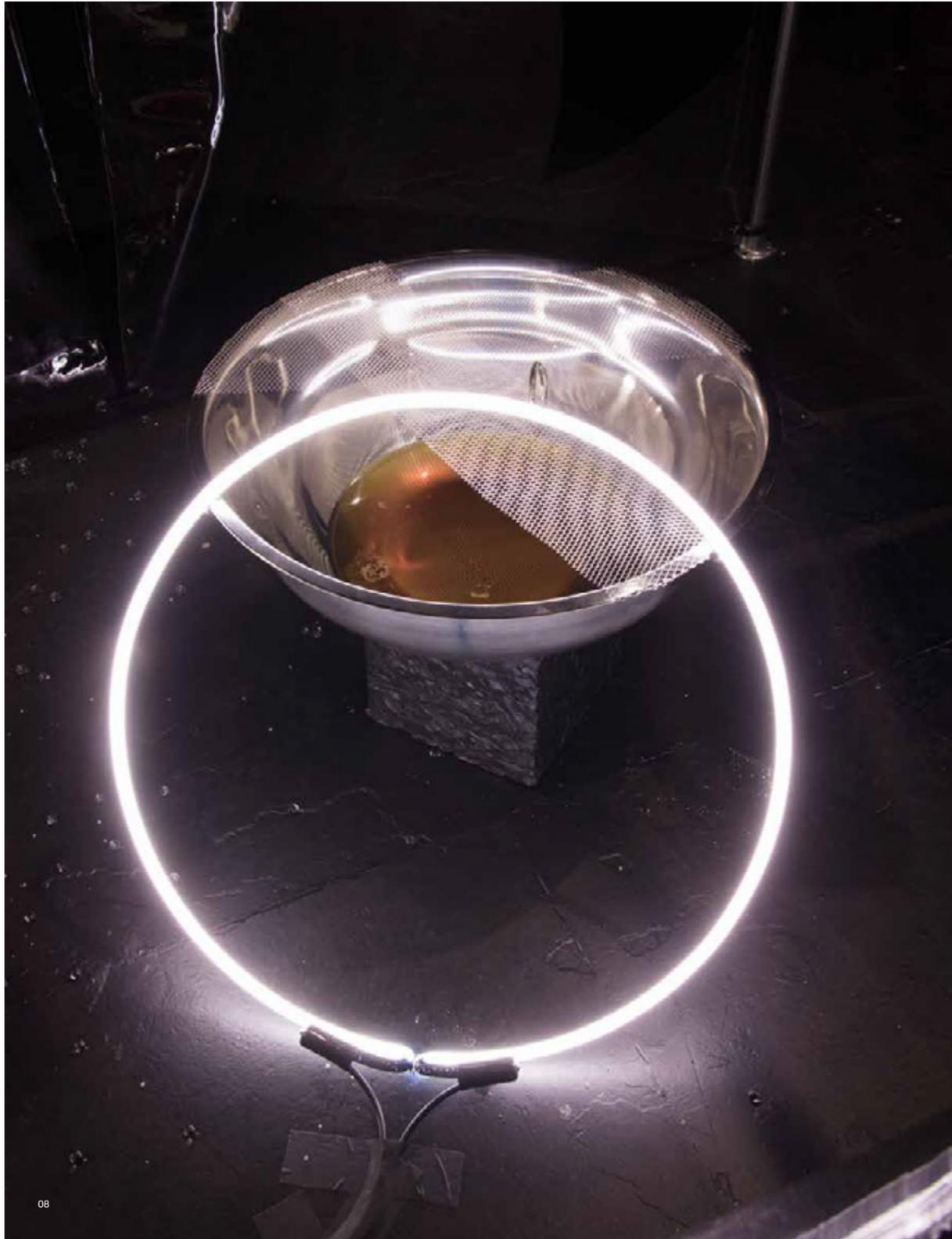
Artificial intelligences and machines, Yi believes, are also part of our evolution as humans. "We're at this critical razor's edge," she has said, "where we can either annihilate ourselves with our fear of technology or try to endure and prosper." In support of the latter, she has designed companion species for us, AI daemons that might be our friend. For "In Love with the World," her 2021 Tate Modern Turbine Hall commission, she created a colony of large floating jellyfish-like "aerobes" powered by drone technology and piloted by algorithms. When they sensed the warmth of visitors below, they often came down to greet them, hovering low over their heads like robotic angels. She hopes biologized machines like these might someday live among us. Her new beings, however, are not designed for the natural world but for game-engine space, for forests of coral with the light of the virtual moon. They are also the first manifestation of a project that's far bigger, and her most ambitious yet. It's called *Emptiness*.



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THE ARTISTS CREATE LIFE AND DEATH

Yi once described the role of the artist as: "to define what life is and what life can be." That's a great definition. But lately she has been going further, like Orpheus with his lyre descending into the underworld, beyond life and into the realms that come after. "In 2018," she says, "my sister passed away of colon cancer, and I went to go see my lawyer when I came back to New York for the funeral. I had started thinking about my own mortality. So, I went to my lawyer, and I asked, 'What do I need to do to form an estate? I don't want to leave this burden to my family, to have to sort through my archives and all of the leftover work.' He convinced me to form a foundation, and we created a board. And then I said to him, 'Well, here's the thing. I don't really want to stop making art after my biological body ceases to function.'" If the secret of this life is to have multiple lives, she realized these could be extended into further future lives as well. "I told him, 'I have ideas for hundreds of lifetimes, and I don't want to stop.' And he said, 'Well, legally there's really nothing stopping you from doing something like that. But it's not the legal hurdle that you should be concerned about. It's a cultural one.' He encouraged me to start articulating and communicating my wishes while I'm still alive to legitimize this project." So here we are, talking on the phone, noting down desires in the pages of this magazine.



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YOU WILL NEVER REALLY DIE

A couple years after that conversation with the lawyer, in 2020, after she suffered a personal and professional burnout, Yi became a student of Tibetan Buddhism, which has led to a spiritual turn in her life and her art. She became familiar with the concept of the bardo, meaning the transitional stage after death before rebirth. She also began, with her research studio and in collaboration with some engineers, developing *Emptiness*, which she hopes will continue her practice long after she's moved on through other realms.

Emptiness is an algorithm for a post-death studio. It is a life simulation that will be able to work as an artistic collaborator, a thinking partner that thinks in code, a studio archivist, a storyteller, everything. The dream is for the project to grow into an artificial consciousness that makes surprising choices, evolves along unexpected paths, and even generates artworks independently, hallucinating the sorts of creative decisions a human being never would. Yi has long held an interest in "decentering the human" — by working with microbial life or her friendly, artificially intelligent machines, for example — and wished that all these different sorts of beings might coexist harmoniously and learn from one another. So, to train *Emptiness*, she and her team are working with it in the studio: the artwork is starting out as their apprentice. To start, they have been detailing all their processes and activities, studying how the studio works and thinks, and they are now experimenting with ways of synthesizing and interpreting that data, so that their simulation can learn from it. This is a new kind of conceptual art: an artwork that remakes its maker's artwork forever, and makes and remakes its own artworks too, long after the artist and everyone that works in the studio and everyone that has written about it is dead, or has been reborn as something else.

This spring, AI ethicists suggested that deadbots — meaning digital recreations of the dead — are soon going to become very convincing and in urgent need of regulation. *The Guardian* warned that these deadbots could "cause psychological harm to, and even 'haunt,' their creators and users." But Yi is not worried about *Emptiness* haunting the world: "We're trying to steer that present and that future by building this algorithm," she says. "I do think that this notion of regenerative ghosts is very real and will be normalized in a few years. Your best friend dies, and you can take all their text messages and their emails, and you can create a sort of generative entity. There is an impulse for us as a civilization to want to preserve a memory or an idea through these new emergent technologies. It's a motivation I understand. Will I or my studio be haunting the world in the future? We will be creating our own."



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01. *ÄMhKwRLL (Amniotic Water Lily)*, 2023. Acrylic, UV print, and aluminum artist's frame. 122 x 163 x 3.8 cm. Photography by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of Esther Schipper, Berlin / Paris / Seoul. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

02. *Bubble Coronation*, 2023. Kelp, aquazol, glycerin, crepe, acrylic, LED, and animatronic insect. 164 x 71 x 61 cm. Photography by David Regen. Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

03. *We Are Water*, 2015. Vinyl, steel pipes, motorcycle helmet, scent diffuser, fragrance, viscopearls, stainless steel mixing bowls, mouthwash, plastic bottles, socks, clear glass marbles, glass jar, black tea, plastic bucket, water, work light, plexiglass, plywood, and gear motor. 198 x 310 x 127 cm. Photography by Jason Mandella. Courtesy of 47 Canal, New York. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

04. *Your Hand Feels Like a Warm Pillow That's Been Microwaved*, 2015. Vinyl, steel pipes, metal bowls, beeswax, dried shrimp, glycerin soap, hair gel, metal pins, seaweed, foam, plasticine, pigment powder, and worklight. 198 x 310 x 127 cm. Photography by David Regen. Courtesy of 47 Canal, New York. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

05. *The Possibility of an Island III*, 2012. Custom glass perfume bottle, saline water, colored contact lenses, vinyl tubing, and air pump. 135 x 36 x 36 cm. Photography by David A. Brichford. Courtesy of The Cleveland Museum of Art. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

06. 07. *The Flavor Genome*, 2016. Video stills. Single channel 3D video. 22". © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

08. *Home in 30 Days*, 2015. Vinyl, steel pipes, metal bowls, wire mesh, nylon string, DVD, black tea, foam, plasticine, neon light, hydro gel beads, plexiglas, sponge, and worklight. 198 x 310 x 127 cm. Photography by Jason Mandella. Courtesy of 47 Canal, New York. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

09. *LtPpRL (Lunar Pearl)*, 2023. Acrylic, UV print, and aluminum artist's frame. 122 x 163 x 3.8 cm. Photography by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of Esther Schipper, Berlin / Paris / Seoul. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

010. *The Tacit Dimension*, 2019. Acrylic, UV print, LEDs, glass, resin, and tubing. 127 x 102 x 13 cm. Photography by Jeff Wells. Courtesy of the artist. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

011. *£7KŞñ (Photic Zone)*, 2023. Acrylic, UV print, and aluminum artist's frame. 122 x 163 x 3.8 cm. Photography by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of Esther Schipper, Berlin / Paris / Seoul. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

012. *Galvanic Quartz*, 2023. PMMA optical fiber, LEDs, silicone, acrylic, epoxy, aluminum, stainless steel, steel, brass, motors, and microcontrollers. 125 x 71 x 64 cm. Photography by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of Esther Schipper, Berlin / Paris / Seoul. © 2024 Anicka Yi / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



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YOU ARE A NON-SELF

If I were training a machine-learning art-critic apprentice to write about Yi, I would train it on lists of her materials that become a sort of poetry: panko flakes, Prada moisturizer, moths (live), deer urine, antidepressants, Korean thermal clay — the stuff of modern life, the world. Her latest material is herself and her team and the work that they do in the studio; in order to train *Emptiness*, they are turning themselves into a dataset. They are making a simulated Anicka Yi, much like the new network made by AI from her fragrance *Beyond Skin*.

While art is very centered on the individual, Yi does not believe in this autonomous, sovereign self. The human being does not exist. With recent AI research, the self is being moved into datasets and algorithms. On the microbiological level, we are comprised of a multitude of microorganisms. In Buddhist spirituality, there is no unchanging, eternal true self: there is only the non-self. For years She has been trying to dismantle her own artistic subjectivity. "I recognize that's a huge, probably lifelong, project," she has said, "that whole myth about the genius, lone artist working away in some crazy studio lab and then six months later showing the world this incredibly personal, subjective, unique individual thing." Yi is living a version of that myth now, working with her assistants in their crazy New York studio laboratory for years, assembling this incredibly personal simulation of her subjectivity — but once the project is working, it will also deconstruct and disseminate that subjectivity and move it into the realm of code.

Recalling the early days of her career, Yi once said, "I wanted to feel I was one with art. I know that sounds almost religious, but at the time I was actually talking and thinking like that." By remaking herself as a simulated-consciousness-as-artwork, she finally is becoming one with the art. This is a form of transcendence. Art, for her, is philosophy by different means; it might be understood as a search for enlightenment, as it often has been before, for many artists.

The Buddhist concept of "emptiness" tells us that the universe is not as it appears to be. Reality is illusory. However, it is possible to reach a state of clarity and awareness, free from all the misleading stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and the world, through deep meditation. "That is where you start entering into non-conceptual spaces," says Yi, "where thinking about an idea of where you are is not the goal, is not where you want to be. You want to be, or at least I want to be, in a space of just pure existence."

Anicka Yi (1971, Seoul) lives and works in New York. Through her multisensory approach to art making, Yi has radically expanded the notion of what an artwork can be and transformed exhibitions into embodied encounters. Drawing on a notion of otherness rooted in scent and taste, atypical sensoria for the visual arts realm, Yi's works allow the audience to experience complex issues relating to social prejudice, racism, ecology, climate change, biological extinction, machines, and machine learning. Recent solo exhibitions include: Gladstone Gallery, New York, Brussels and Seoul; Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan; Tate Modern, London; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Fridericianum, Kassel; Kunsthalle Basel; The Kitchen, New York. Her work has been included in groups shows at MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge; Nahmad Contemporary, New York; Aspen Art Museum; Zabudowicz Collection, London; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; 47 Canal, New York; Bortolami Gallery, New York; ZERO..., Milan; 59th Venice Biennale; MoMA – Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gagosian, San Francisco; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Esther Shipper, Berlin. Yi's solo show "There Exists Another Evolution, But in this One" is on view at Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul, from September 5 until December 29, 2024.

Dean Kissick (1983, Landstuhl) lives in London, but wishes he didn't. He's a contributing editor of *Spike Art Magazine* and a director of Earth in New York.

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