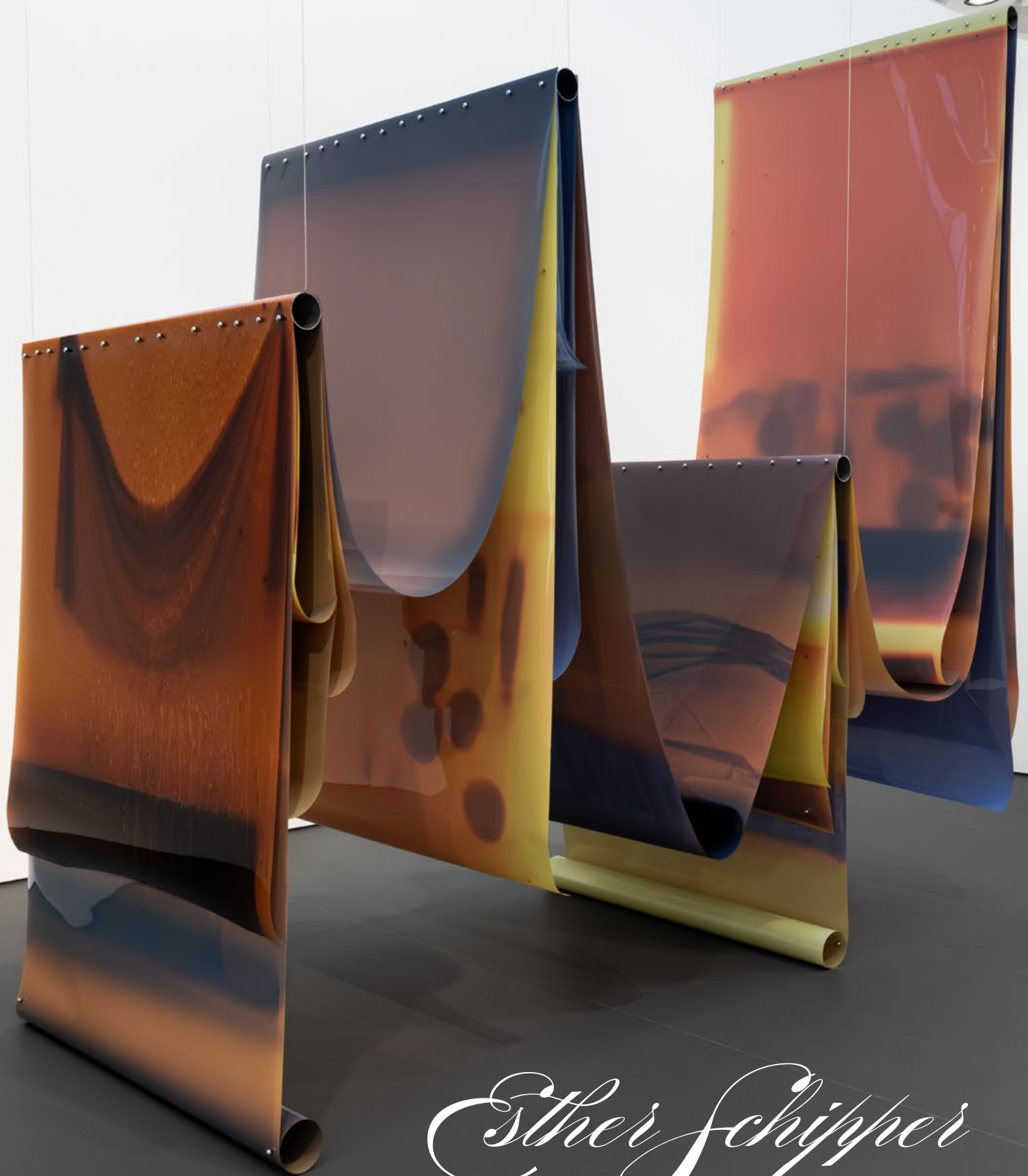


LOTUS L. KANG

BORNE

Esther Schipper, Berlin

November 14 – December 18, 2025



Esther Schipper

Lotus L. Kang



Lotus L. Kang was born 1985 in Toronto. Kang studied fine arts at Concordia University in Montreal (2004-2008), and completed an MFA at the Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard College, New York, in 2015. The artist lives and works in New York.

Lotus L. Kang's practice unfolds across sculpture, photography and site-responsive installation. Using an acute sensitivity towards process and space, her work reflects on impermanence, inheritance, memory, and time. Taking up questions of "becoming" on expansive terms, she often uses unstable and unfixed materials in a visual language that melds structural, organic and entropic forms to explore self and environment as contingent, continuous and inseparable.

Kang often engages these concerns through material misuse and transformation, working with media such as photographic paper and film whose light-sensitive surfaces accrue traces of their environments—architecture, bodies, humidity, light. Lengths of unfixed industrial film—"skins" as Kang calls them—drape over built structures or hang from the ceiling, their shadowy markings creating layered timescales that speak to organic, visceral and leaky forms, rendered in a palette of blood, bruise and bile.

Kang's materially dense, non-linear installations metabolize and translate themes drawn from industrial and architectural forms, familial and social histories, poetry, and non-human figures, among others. Fluid and web-like, her elegantly disordered and continually sensitive scenes refuse to settle or congeal, ever in a state of in-between. They speak to the fundamental instabilities of memory, history, body, identity: What is passed down and what is lost? How is time known in the body? What is preserved and what is destroyed?

Selected residencies include the Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art and Thought, New Orleans (2024), Triangle Arts Association, New York (2022 and 2023), Horizon Art Foundation, Los Angeles (2022) and Rupert Residency, Vilnius, Lithuania (2018).

Selected solo exhibitions: **Already**, 52 Walker, New York (2025); **In Cascades**, CAG Vancouver, Vancouver (2023); **In Cascades**, Chisenhale Gallery, London (2023); **Molt**, MCA Chicago, Chicago (2023).

Selected institutional group exhibitions: **What is Parasite and What is Kin?**, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2025); **Key Operators**, Kunstverein Munich (2024); **After Images**, Julia Stoschek Foundation, Berlin (2024); **A Woman You Thought You Knew**, Kadist, San Francisco (2024); Whitney Biennial 2024: **Even Better Than the Real Thing**, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2024); **GTA Triennial 2024**, Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2024); **We Are Story**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2023); **New Museum Triennial: Soft Water Hard Stone**, New Museum, New York (2021); **In Practice: Total Disbelief**, SculptureCenter, New York (2020); **If I have a body**, Remai Modern, Saskatoon, Canada (2019).

Her work is held in the following collections: Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Fondazione Rivoli Due, Milan; Wrocław Contemporary Museum, Wrocław; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Kadist, San Francisco; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; CC Foundation, Shanghai; RBC Corporate Art Collection, Toronto; TD Bank Art Collection, Toronto; Scotiabank Art Collection, Toronto; and The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal.

Photos: © Andrea Rossetti

Cover image, Exhibition view: Lotus L. Kang, **Borne**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)

EXHIBITION TEXT

Esther Schipper is pleased to present **Borne**, Lotus L. Kang's first solo presentation with the gallery. On view will be a large-scale **Molt** work from her series of photographic sculptures, and a floor-bound sculpture from the series Receiver Transmitter.

Conceived especially for this presentation, the works expands across the exhibition space, inviting visitors into intimate proximity. Lengths of unfixed industrial film—"skins" as Kang refers to them—are draped over and across raw steel tubes suspended from the ceiling. The shadowy impressions on the film create layered, visceral timescales, rendered in a palette of yellow, orange, red, purple and brown. By intentionally misusing the material, exposing it to sunlight and manipulating its exposure in both planned and unforeseen ways, the artist has invented modes of inscribing her process, turning the film into indexes of overlapping durations. The film is "tanned" —or exposed—across multiple sites: her studio, her home, and predominantly, in a greenhouse situated in upstate New York. A structure that is not fully inside nor fully outside, the greenhouse embodies an in-between space that holds cycles of growth and decay.

Wooden pallets, mesh fabric, cardboard cut-outs, cast aluminum objects, splashes of rainwater, and the films' own folding and touching leave the sheets with cryptic, shadowy traces, their glossy surfaces marked by experimentation and time. The reflective quality of the film mirrors the viewer and environment, offering a distorted echo of its surroundings and implicating the viewer. The raw film alludes to early photography's purpose of documentation. However, Kang subverts such associations by deconstructing the medium, emphasizing the alchemical, embodied, and sculptural. For Kang, the unfixed and continually sensitive film resembles various membranes: cellular, plastic, textile, or synthetic. As her term "skins" suggests, the film is akin to the body's largest organ. Worn on the outside rather than inside, it is strong and resistant yet vulnerable and absorptive. Skin is an active vessel: a connective, porous membrane where time is recorded and evidenced both legibly and illegibly. With their associations to bruise, blood or bile, the colors of the cascading film invoke the body's fragility, resilience and leakiness.

Nearby, two tatami mats are folded and stacked, wrapped in industrial rubber, obscuring immediate recognition. Objects such as cast aluminum perilla leaves, yellow cellophane, bottles of spirits and photographs hidden in the tatami's folds are arranged in and around the mats. Continuing the artist's interest in the body without representation, the horizontal mats allude to a modular, migrating body in states of rest, dreaming or death, while speaking to layered histories of multiple origins. A chorus of plaster and metal cast baby birds, crying open mouthed and awaiting nourishment sit atop the sculpture. The birds, exposed and new, are both full of life and yet precarious in their vulnerable state. They show a volatile in-between stage of development, and symbolize inheritance, regurgitation and transformation. They embody a relentless longing for the "mother" body in all its expansive forms.

The exhibition's title is twofold, implying both birth or a new beginning—each finely tied to death and renewal—and to carry, endure or support. With her work, Kang draws attention to the continuity of the body beyond its physical containment, suggesting that we are carriers of multiple durations, in perpetual cycles of life and death.



Exhibition view: Lotus L. Kang, **Borne**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Exhibition view: Lotus L. Kang, **Borne**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)

MOLT (WOODRIDGE - NEW YORK - BERLIN -), 2024 - 2025

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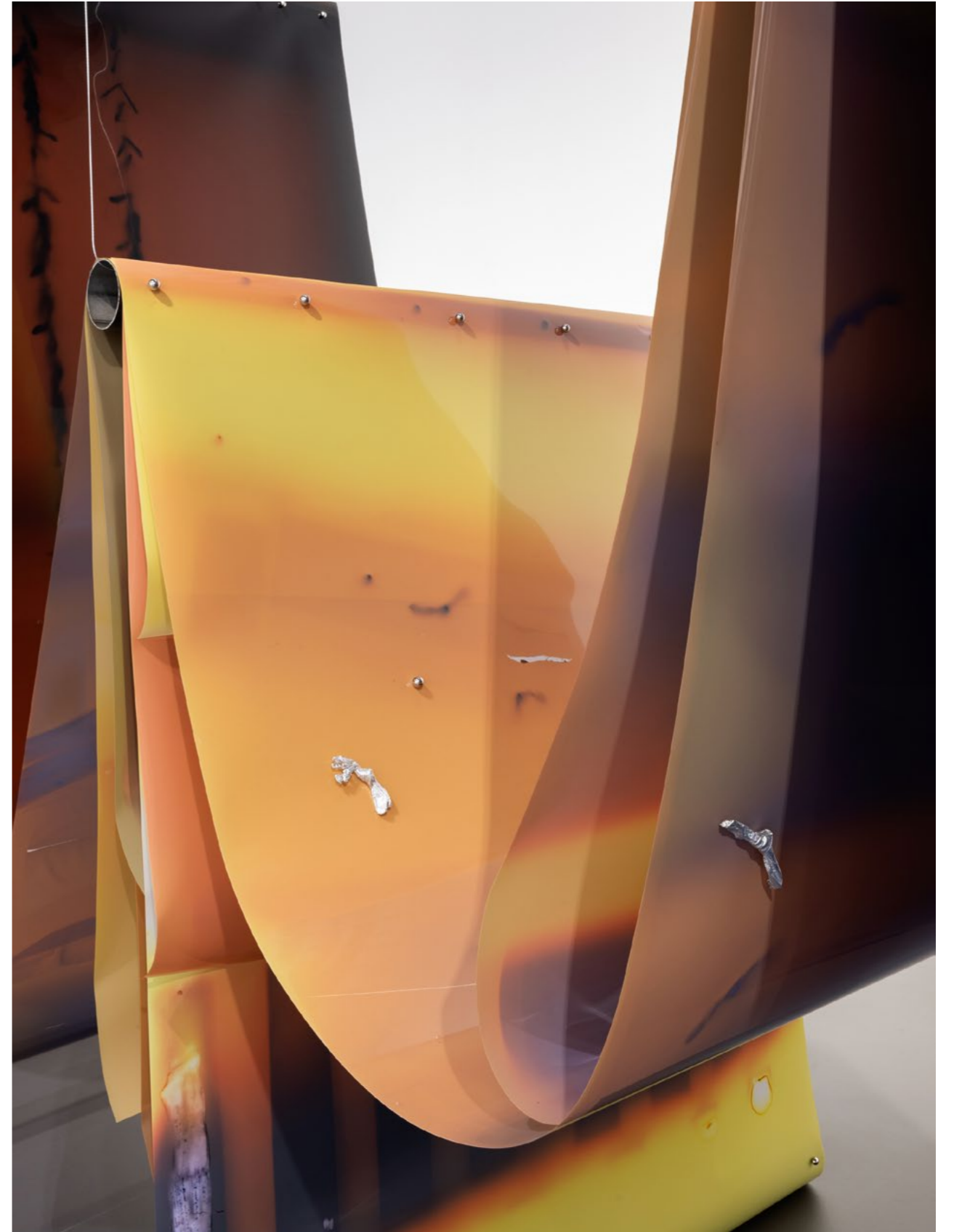
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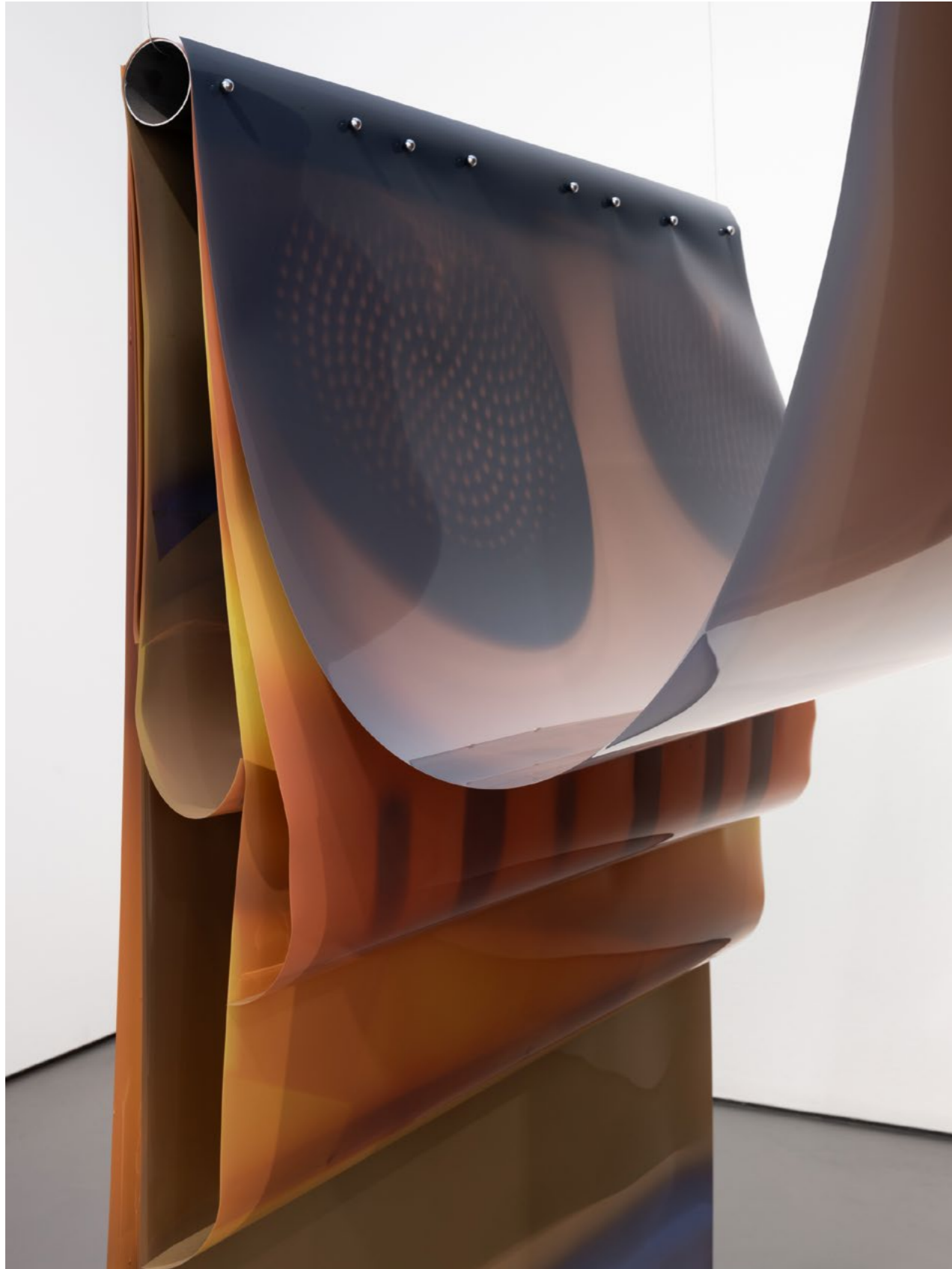
Lotus L. Kang, **Molt (Woodridge-New York-Berlin-)**, 2024 - 2025, tanned and unfixed film (continually sensitive), spherical magnets, cast aluminum kelp knots, photograph, tape, steel wire and steel tubes, 304,8 x 309,9 x 127 cm (120 x 122 x 50 in) (LLK 022)



Detail, Lotus L. Kang, **Molt (Woodridge-New York-Berlin-)**, 2024 - 2025, tanned and unfixed film (continually sensitive), spherical magnets, cast aluminum kelp knots, photograph, tape, steel wire and steel tubes, 304,8 x 309,9 x 127 cm (120 x 122 x 50 in) (LLK 022)



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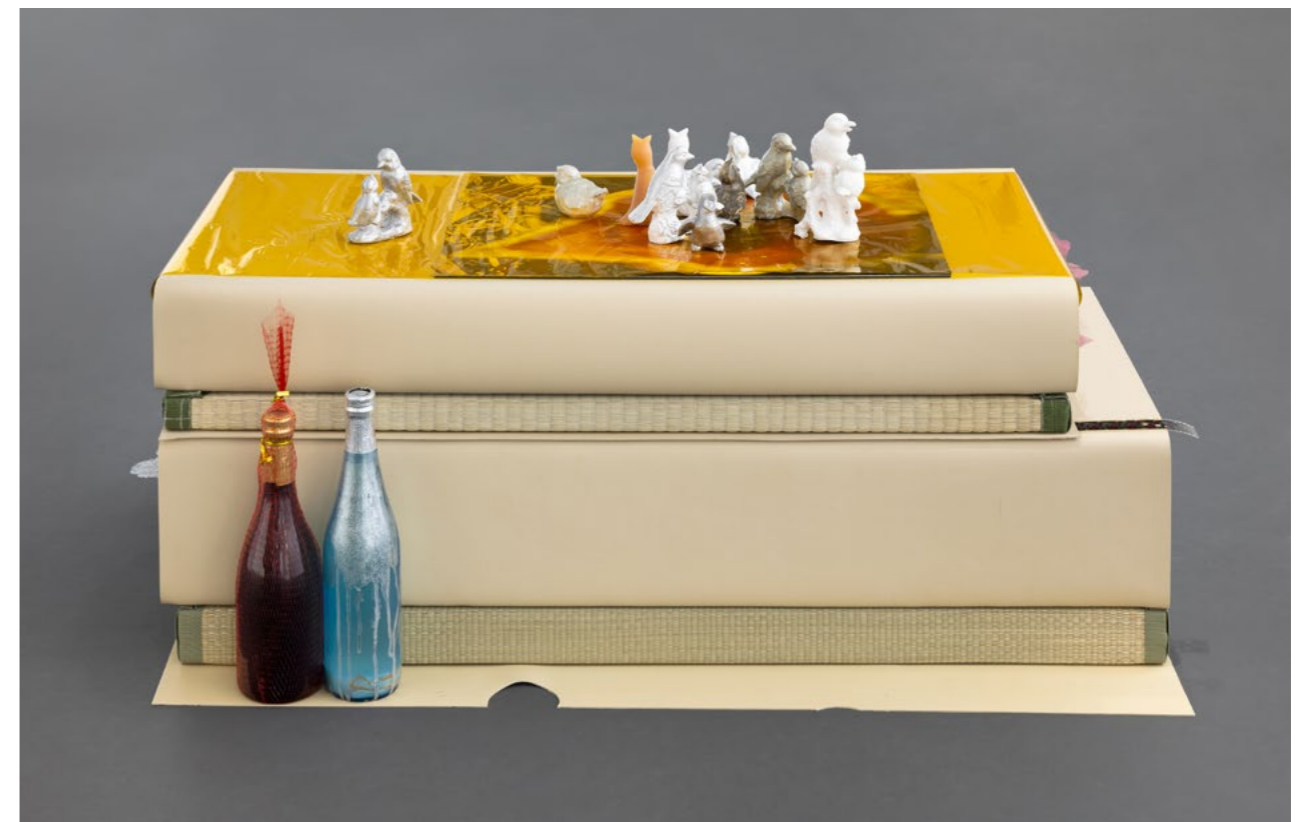
Exhibition view: Lotus L. Kang, **Borne**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)

RECEIVER TRANSMITTER (BORNE), 2025

Two tatami mats are folded and stacked, wrapped in industrial rubber, obscuring immediate recognition. Objects such as cast aluminum perilla leaves, yellow cellophane, bottles of spirits and photographs hidden in the tatami's folds are arranged in and around the mats.

A chorus of plaster and metal cast baby birds, crying open mouthed and awaiting nourishment sit atop the sculpture. The birds, exposed and new, are both full of life and yet precarious in their vulnerable state. They show a volatile in-between stage of development, and symbolize inheritance, regurgitation and transformation. They embody a relentless longing for the "mother" body in all its expansive forms.

The hidden photographs belong to the artist's *Fleshing out the Ghost* (2023) photographic series. Kang created this series during a thirty-eightminute performance on her thirty-eighth birthday, the age of her grandmother when she fled North Korea. In these photographs, Kang's thirty-eight-cycle massages time to extrude interiority as ritual, a loophole communing present and past.



Lotus L. Kang, **Receiver Transmitter (Borne)**, 2025, tatami mats, gum rubber, organza, cast aluminum perilla leaves, 35mm film, photographs from the series *Fleshing out the Ghost*, photograph mounted on Dibond, cellophane, cast plaster, cast aluminum, cast bronze, cast silicone, paint, pigmented silicone, metallic twist tie, polypropylene, and spirits, 50 x 105 x 61 cm (19 3/4 x 41 3/8 x 24 in) (LLK 023)



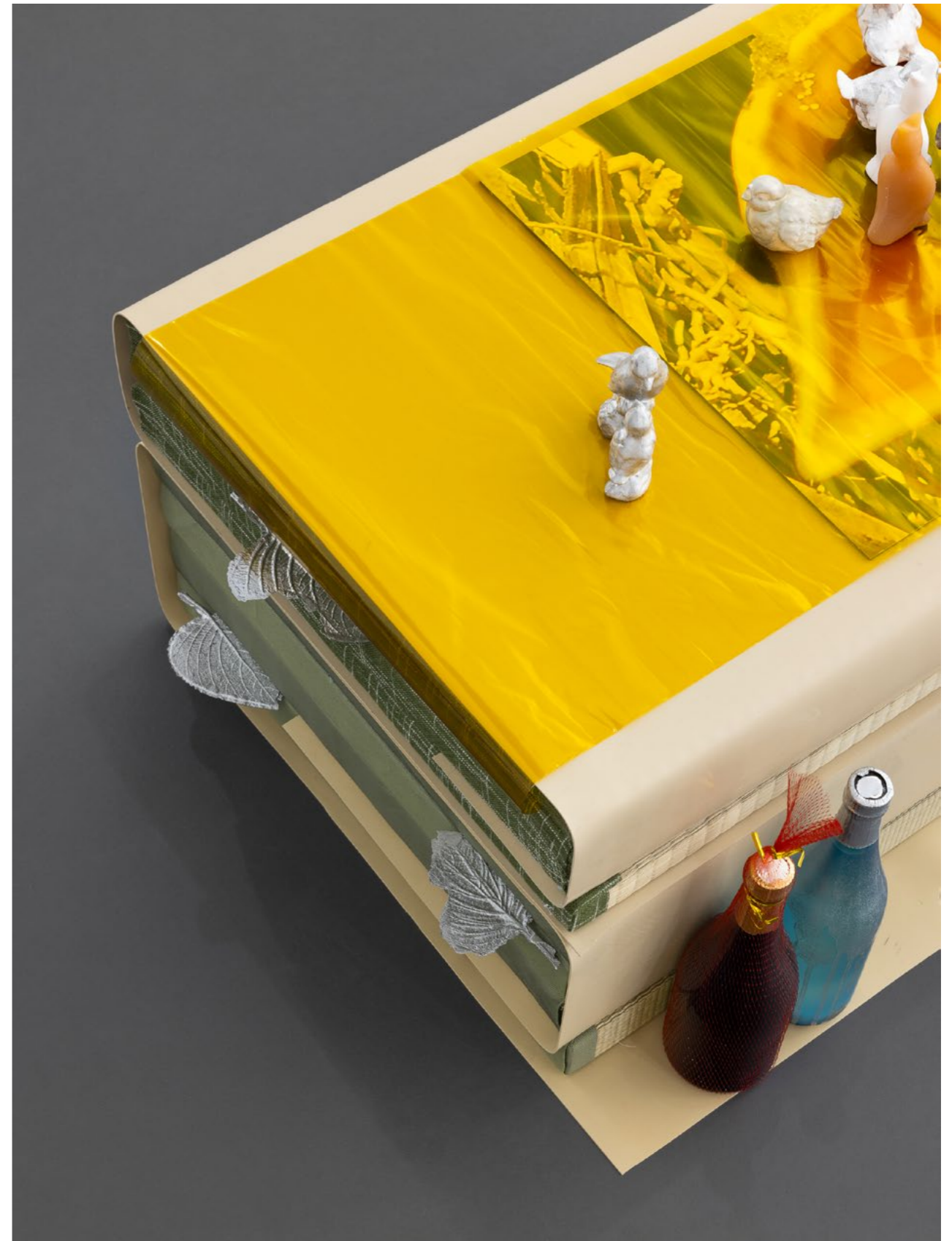
Lotus L. Kang, **Receiver Transmitter (Borne)**, 2025, tatami mats, gum rubber, organza, cast aluminum perilla leaves, 35mm film, photographs from the series *Fleshing out the Ghost*, photograph mounted on Dibond, cellophane, cast plaster, cast aluminum, cast bronze, cast silicone, paint, pigmented silicone, metallic twist tie, polypropylene, and spirits, 50 x 105 x 61 cm (19 3/4 x 41 3/8 x 24 in) (LLK 023)



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Exhibition view: Lotus L. Kang, **Borne**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)

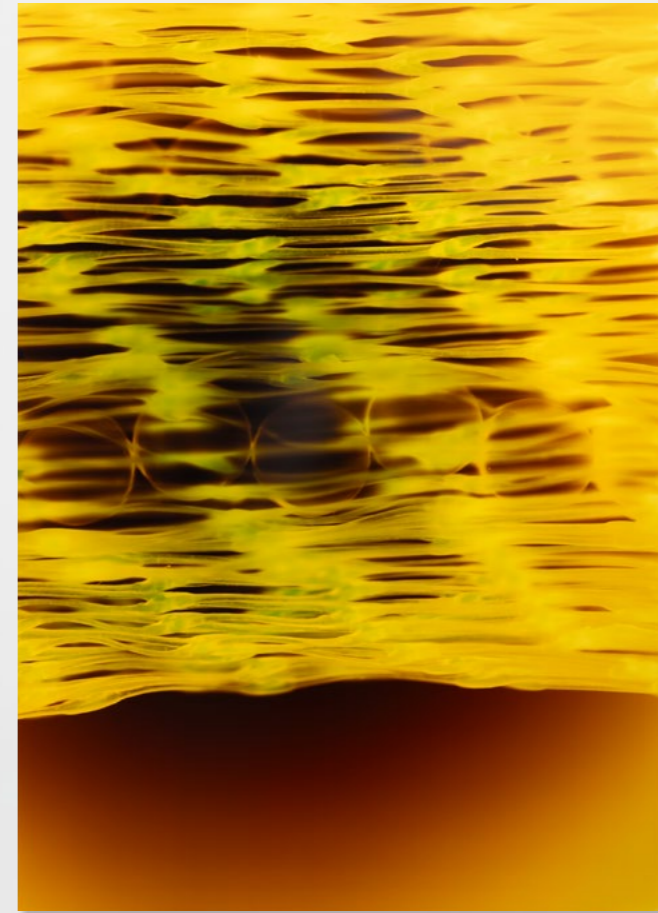


Video: Lotus L. Kang, Greenhouse as Darkroom | Lotus Kang's experiments © The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2025

SYNAPSE 13:26, 2025

Lotus L. Kang's series entitled **Synapse** continues her longstanding engagement with cameraless photography. These works are created through an analogue luminogram process, wherein Kang places nylon produce bags – the type commonly used to package onions and citrus – in the head of a photo enlarger before projecting them onto photographic paper in the darkroom. The colors are created with filters directly in this process, making each work in the series unique.

The resulting images are both saturated and sensorial, loosely suggestive of bodily forms and functions – sinuous tendons, firing neurons, branching networks of nerves – each a nod to endless processes of regeneration, reproduction, and change.



Lotus L. Kang, **Synapse 13:26**, 2025, Luminogram mounted on Dibond, 177,2 x 126,4 cm (69 3/4 x 49 3/4 in) (LLK 004)



Lotus L. Kang, **Tract XXXI**, 2025, cast brass-bronze kelp knots, chiffon, metallic twist ties, nylon, length: 305 cm (120 1/8 in) (10 ft) (LLK 025)



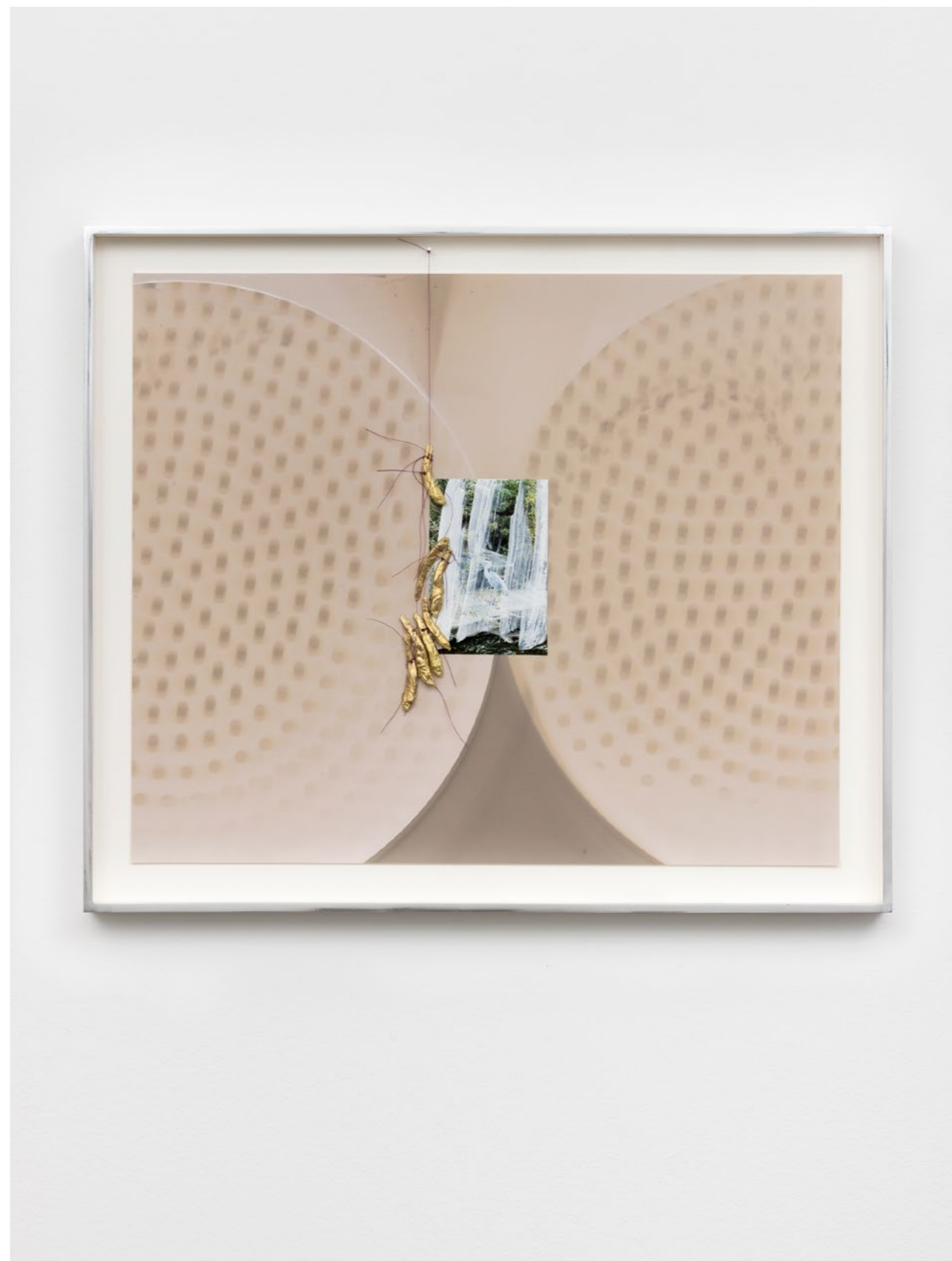
Detail: Lotus L. Kang, **Tract XXXI**, 2025, cast brass-bronze kelp knots, chiffon, metallic twist ties, nylon, length: 305 cm (120 1/8 in) (10 ft) (LLK 025)

MESODERM, 2025

Lotus L. Kang's series of works titled **Mesoderm** are collages made with various silicones and rubbers, photograms, spherical magnets and found or cast aluminum objects. They are rendered in the artist's recognizable color palette associated with the body – marrow and flesh, blush, and bruise. There are also drawings made with photo paper, darkroom chemicals, grease pencils and oil pastels. In thinking of literal and metaphorical acts of tracing and imprinting, lines and lineage, Kang traces onto acetate before tanning onto the sheets of photo paper.

The works contain imagery that is largely abstracted beyond recognition. In keeping with Kang's investment in lineage and recurrence, naming said source material is important regardless of its identifiable legibility: historical photographs of women carrying baskets and vessels, containers in marketplaces, anatomical diagrams of organs, the limbic system in the brain, nerves, as well as some personal photographs. In pursuit of an archive of lineage and influence that continually regurgitates rather than digests, Kang constantly adds to this pool of source imagery, most recently through research into the plants and wildlife endemic to the Koreas.

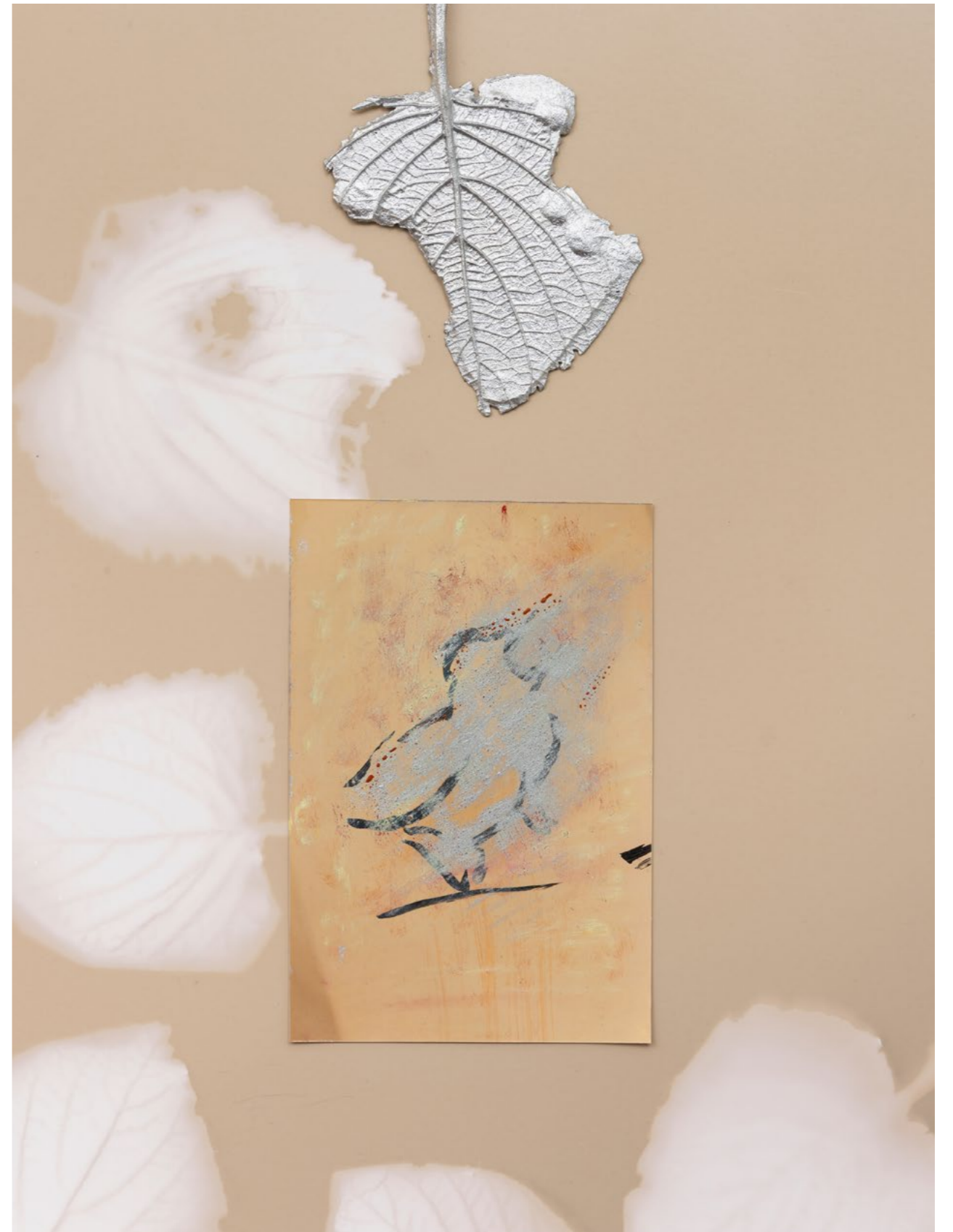
The title of the series, **Mesoderm**, refers to a body's tissue. The mesoderm is the middle germ layer in early embryonic cell development in most animals. Held between the ecto- and endoderm, the middling mesoderm is a group of cells that contain blueprints for the future organism, much like a seed. The mesoderm, Kang notes, eventually becomes fascia, the thin casing of connective tissue that envelops and holds each organ, bone, blood vessel, muscle, and nerve fiber in its place. Fascia is like an interior layer of skin, a bag inside our bodies, providing internal structure. In Chinese medicine, which Kang has begun close study of in recent years, fascia is considered an organ unto itself.



Lotus L. Kang, **Mesoderm (You V)**, 2025, photogram, photographic paper, cast aluminum, 20 x 24 cm (7 7/8 x 9 1/2 in) (unframed) (LLK 029)



Lotus L. Kang, **Mesoderm (Chora)**, 2025, photographic paper, cast aluminum, oil pastels, 20 x 24 cm (7 7/8 x 9 1/2 in) (unframed) (LLK 028)



Detail: Lotus L. Kang, **Mesoderm (Chora)**, 2025, photographic paper, cast aluminum, oil pastels, 20 x 24 cm (7 7/8 x 9 1/2 in) (unframed) (LLK 028)

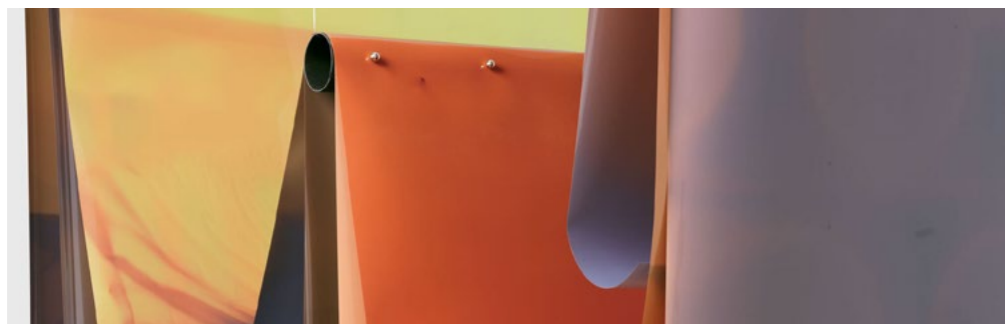


Lotus L. Kang, **Mesoderm (Chora II)**, 2025, photogram, photographic paper, darkroom chemicals, 20 x 24 cm (7 7/8 x 9 1/2 in) (LLK 030)



Detail: Lotus L. Kang, **Mesoderm (Chora)**, 2025, photographic paper, cast aluminum, oil pastels, 20 x 24 cm (7 7/8 x 9 1/2 in) (unframed) (LLK 028)

frieze



Since 2022, Lotus L. Kang has used greenhouses to tan her 'skins': great sheets of unfixed, light-sensitive film that she bruises into blues, purples and oranges under the sun. Normally handled in darkrooms or used for advertisements in lightboxes, Kang employs these skins in works such as *Molt (New York-Lethbridge-Los Angeles-Toronto-Chicago-)* (2018–23), where, suspended from the ceiling, they form fleshy, synthetic panels resembling walls, portals or scrolls. They index light from multiple locations and change in appearance depending on the site's conditions. Look closely and they appear like slivers of sunrise, folds of skin or dark gums over teeth. Now, Kang's attention is turning deeper into this process for her new work.



Lotus L. Kang, 2025. Image commissioned for *frieze*; photograph: Strui Ma

Selected Press: The Liminal Words of Lotus L. Kang, *Frieze* Magazine, April 23, 2025

'It was always a kind of private performance,' Kang tells me when I visit her studio in DUMBO, Brooklyn, where a greenhouse sits in the middle of the room as a mock-up for her current show at 52 Walker. 'And it made sense that the process would become a part of the work.' Greenhouses are neither entirely outdoors nor indoors. Their steel armatures and polycarbonate walls make them artificial, yet their contents are organic. The plants within them are alive, but likely not in their natural habitat. For Kang, this makes them 'architectures of becoming' – spaces that facilitate transformation and process.

The greenhouses cannot be entered, placing the viewer in a limbo between inside and outside, like her own version of a Dan Graham pavilion. I walk around the one in her studio. The *gestalt* of Kang's large installations is often punctuated by many smaller, detailed moments. Cut fragments of mesh produce bags sitting atop the greenhouse appear as red splashes that have bled through the translucent polycarbonate roof, creating splashes of colour on the mirrored floor. Yellow foam pear holders, looking like petrified jellyfish, sit in small groupings alongside ceramic casts of baby birds. Elsewhere, objects are frozen in states of transformation: dried anchovies, napa leaves and lotus tubers cast in aluminium and bronze hang from the ceiling, rest on the floor or languish in metal bowls.



Lotus L. Kang, *Receiver Transmitter (Butterfly)*, 2023–24, installation view, MOCA Toronto. Courtesy: © Lotus L. Kang and MOCA Toronto; photograph: LF Documentation

Kang wonders whether greenhouses could also be 'diasporic vessels'. Placeless and liminal, they share qualities she associates with diasporic experience. Born in Toronto to Korean parents and now based in New York, Kang's practice often draws from her family history, as well as from the histories of colonization and imperialism in Asia. Yet, rather than work autobiographically or with recognizable cultural symbols, she prefers to denature identity into the material processes and physical choreography of her installations.

For her first greenhouse as artwork, titled *Receiver Transmitter (Butterfly)* (2023–24) – shown at Greater Toronto Art 2024 – Kang lined the four-metre hot house with gum rubber and arranged an unfolded tatami mat holding various objects in the centre. Used historically in Japan as sites for sleeping, eating and living, tatami mats are so personal, so synonymous with a person's being, that they are occasionally burned along with an individual at their funeral. Kang uses them as stand-ins for a body carrying layered histories and geographies, but also as a plinth for an aluminium cast of an enlarged knot of kelp – a plant whose rootlessness inspired Kang to use it as a substitute for a body. The tatami mats in *Receiver Transmitter (Perilla Frutescens)* (2023), featured in her 2023 exhibition 'In Cascades' at Chisenhale Gallery in London, nodded to a historical detail about Kang's grandmother, a grain and seed shopkeeper who would sometimes sleep at her shop to work extra hours to make enough to provide for her family. This work presented a stack of tatamis covered in a silicone sheath, with aluminium perilla leaves tucked between each mat, like joists between vertebrae. A gathering of aluminium sculptures of cabbage leaves, lotus roots, shiitakes and torn mesh bags was tucked between the tatamis and the wall, like an accumulation of dust or a hidden loot, titled *Leak* (2023). Each plant holds cultural significance to her upbringing, operating as coded signifiers that some will recognize and some will not. Even when her references are personal or historical, they are often so abstracted that they are alienated or torqued from their roots. 'I'm doing diaspora rather than showing it', Kang tells me. 'I'm inhabiting a state of being in-between.'



Selected Press: The Liminal Words of Lotus L. Kang, Frieze Magazine, April 23, 2025

When we first met, back in 2018, I had just seen her installation *Channeler* (2018) at Brooklyn's Interstate Projects: a set of snaking metallic walls hung with fleshy photographic skins. I moved in and out of the porous partitions of *Channeler*, looking through their openings, and I could not discern a clear distinction between inside and outside. I peered down into a black plastic bag filled with pink silicone and read the press release, which described how Kang considered the spindly walls as 'mutated gardens' and 'frayed double-helices'. Citing Trinh T. Minh-ha and Donna Haraway, Kang referred to her process as an inheritance 'from her familial matriarchs' – a kind of diasporic, body-centric feminist theory. Then, like now, Kang can distil tomes of theory into eloquent sound bites, while the work itself often remains open-ended, even oblique in its references.

That same year, I invited Kang to install *Channeler* as part of 'Formula 1', a group exhibition at CUE Art Foundation in New York that I co-organized with writer and artist Mira Dayal. Kang, who had relocated to Toronto after graduating with an MFA from Bard College in 2015, returned to New York for the show, arriving with her partner and installing the work in the gallery herself. What drew us to her practice – along with that of the other two featured artists, Nikita Gale and Amanda Turner Pohan – was a shared interest in developing a material vocabulary that could approximate a new wave of body-based art. It was the germ of an idea that would be explored more fully by curators Chrissie Iles and Meg Onli in the 2024 Whitney Biennial.



Lotus L. Kang, *Channeler*, 2019, installation view, Interstate Projects, New York. Courtesy: © Lotus L. Kang and Interstate Projects, New York

During the pandemic, Kang stayed in Toronto. She began to study acupuncture and Chinese medicine, logging two years towards a degree before she dropped out to move back to New York. Now, she studies acupuncture mostly informally, through her interest in Daoist texts, performing it only on friends and loved ones. But the benefits of her healing practice clarified her artistic ambitions. 'It helped me understand what art can do and what applied medicine can do,' she tells me. 'Art is less direct – which is its strength – and learning acupuncture alleviated some of the demands that I had placed on my art.'

Over the past two years, Kang's sculptural grammar has expanded across major installations. At the 2021 New Museum Triennial, she presented *Great Shuttle* (2020–21), a flexible track of steel studs and aircraft cable dressed with film, photograms, spherical magnets and various cast-aluminium objects – a noticeable continuation of themes explored in *Channeler*. At the 2024 Whitney Biennial, she showed the third iteration of 'In Cascades', in which sheets of tanned skins hung in modular labyrinths through which viewers could move – the most visible presentation to date of her best-known body of work. She also received a 2024 Guggenheim Fellowship, as well as a shout-out in *The New York Times* in December as one of their ten 'breakout stars' of the year. With her latest solo presentation having opened at 52 Walker in April, she has had a big three years.



Lotus L. Kang's studio, 2025. Image commissioned for *frieze*; photograph: Sirui Ma

Selected Press: The Liminal Words of Lotus L. Kang, *Frieze Magazine*, April 23, 2025

At 52 Walker, Kang responded to the symmetry of the gallery by leaving the space mostly open and raw, with no walls built or major architectural interventions. In addition to two greenhouses, there are some lushly hued luminograms, which transform plastic bags to look like muscle or tendons, a selection of tanned skins and both floor-based and suspended sculptures. Downstairs, however, Kang has transformed an entire room into a version of an installation drawn from her 2024 exhibition 'Azaleas' at Commonwealth and Council in Los Angeles. A rotary dryer – another 'architecture of becoming' used to stretch and dry freshly processed, still-wet 35mm film – is synchronized to the metre of several texts, including works by two Korean poets: 'Azaleas' (1925) by Kim So-wol and 'Already' (2018) by Kim Hyesoon. In the version at 52 Walker, a light shines through a film of orchids stretched around the dryer. Standing inside this work, the viewer is subsumed entirely by the projection of the film, as if the walls of *Channeler* or the panels of *In Cascades* have become immaterial.

'Lately, I've been thinking about my sculptural language as akin to making a poem,' Kang tells me. 'If the materials and the objects I work with are "words" that have social and personal associations and meaning, they create syntaxes when put into relation via installation, collage, assemblage, etc. These syntaxes then shift shape and order as the body moves around them in space.' The studio, then, is filled with poems, translated into material vignettes. We discuss the title of the 52 Walker show, 'Already', taken from Hyesoon's eponymous poem and meant to refer to a cyclical, non-linear time. 'Can you define the word "already" without using the word already?' Kang asks. The short poem, from Hyesoon's 2018 collection *The Autobiography of Death*, reads: *You are already born inside death (echoes 49 times)*.



Lotus L. Kang, *Molt*, 2022. Installation view, Horizon Art Foundation, Los Angeles. Courtesy: © Lotus L. Kang and Horizon Art Foundation, Los Angeles; photograph: Ed Mumford

In some forms of Buddhism, 49 days represents the length of time a soul spends in an intermediate space between death and rebirth. 'Already' appears as day 28 of Hyesoon's *Autobiography of Death*, where each chapter is structured around one of the 49 days. Both of Kang's greenhouses at 52 Walker translate this poem: one through 49 objects, a physical manifestation of this liminality; the other through an installation containing the traces of a ritual-performance Kang enacted. In the studio, Kang asks me to stand outside of the greenhouse as she rotates a bare lightbulb slowly around a roll of film. The light undulates across the polycarbonate walls, making the entire structure pulsate like a jellyfish or an otherworldly egg. The film comes from *49 Echoes* (2025), a ritual-performance Kang enacted at Fort Tilden Beach in New York, where she walked in a large circle 49 times, holding the camera at gut-level, lens pointing out to film the environment as she moved, rather than depict her body.

Kang tells me that Kim Hyesoon wrote *Autobiography of Death* in response to the 304 deaths that occurred in the Sewol ferry incident in 2014, where the boat capsized while travelling from Incheon to Jeju Island in South Korea. The government initially reported that everyone had been rescued and then downplayed the severity of the disaster to save face. For Kang, Hyesoon's book speaks not only to the South Korean situation and the history of American military involvement in the region, but also to the global rise of authoritarianism. Suddenly, the cast-aluminium anchovies, fermented cabbage and ceramic birds take on a different pallor, while the mirrored floor of the greenhouse looks almost spiritual. If her earliest explorations investigated the liminality of the body in space, that interest has only naturally expanded into the historical and the cosmic. The greenhouses feel like futuristic shrines, as if each object were an offering to try to understand this purgatory. Kang has even placed bottles of 'spirits', both beneath and in each greenhouse – specifically, bottles of 'American Soju', whose logo, incredibly, features the American flag transposed on top of part of the Korean flag.



Lotus L. Kang, *Receiver Transmitter (Born inside death)*, 2025, tatami mat, mirrored plexi, porcelain, cast plaster, cast aluminium, cast bronze, polyester and photographs from the series 'Fleshing Out the Ghost', dimensions variable. Courtesy: © Lotus L. Kang and 52 Walker, New York

Selected Press: The Liminal Words of Lotus L. Kang, Frieze Magazine, April 23, 2025

For all of her recent reflections on death, Kang is equally interested in rebirth. 'Orchids are epiphytes,' she tells me in reference to the film in her 'Azaleas' installation, 'which means their roots grow in the air.' I looked it up. Orchids often grow on the stems of other plants but, surprisingly, not in a parasitic way. They exist in a system of mutuality where they derive their moisture and nutrients from the air, rain and water accumulating around them. As we stand amidst the waves of light from the film, I am struck by how corporal the process of translation seems in Kang's practice. I imagine her holding the Hyesoon poem in her mind, selecting materials and arranging them around the greenhouse, her body a sieve through which experience is filtered and processed, as sensitive as photographic film or as obdurate as the steel beams on the wall.

This article first appeared in frieze issue 251 with the headline 'Lotus L. Kang'

Lotus L. Kang's 'Already' is on view at 52 Walker, New York, until 7 June

Main image: Lotus L. Kang, Molt (Toronto-Chicago-Woodridge-New York-) (detail), 2022–25, installation view. Courtesy: © Lotus L. Kang and 52 Walker, New York

Lotus L. Kang on Channeling Poetry, Memory, and Spirits Into Her New Work

Her new work, now on view at 52 Walker, is inspired by the writing of Korean poet Kim Hyesoon.



Lotus L. Kang photographed by Sara Cwynar for BLAU International, 2025.

Selected Press: Lotus L. Kang on Channeling Poetry, Memory, and Spirits Into Her New Work, artnet, May 21, 2025

Lotus L. Kang is a channeler of memories—both collective and personal. In her latest exhibition, “Already,” (on view at 52 Walker through June 7, 2025), the Brooklyn-based Canadian artist layers the gallery’s loft-like space with dualities. Spanning two floors, the installation incorporates steel greenhouses, mixed-media paintings, sculpture, and found objects, guiding viewers through a diasporic memoryscape textured with hyper-specific references: oversized kelp knots, rootless flora, and soju bottles arranged like sentries.



Lotus L. Kang, Documentation, ‘9 Echoes’ (2025) © Lotus L. Kang. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York.

The exhibition takes its title from a poem in *Autobiography of Death* (2016) by celebrated Korean poet Kim Hyesoon, translated into English by Don Mee Choi in 2018. Taking inspiration from Kim’s poetry, Kang’s installation operates as a series of translations building on her ongoing investigation into the transmutative and ephemeral qualities of photography and film.

In a recent conversation, Kang spoke about the gulf between presence and absence, and how memory, like the body, moves in cycles.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

The exhibition—and its title—is inspired by the Korean poet Kim Hyesoon's *Autobiography of Death*. What initially drew you to her poetry?

I've been reading Kim's poetry, through the English translation, for close to three years now. I was drawn to her writing because it has this visceral, surreal, almost grotesque quality to it.

The poems respond to the 2014 Sewol Ferry disaster, which speaks to the Korean government's failure to properly care for its society. That, in turn, connects to South Korea's status as a neocolonial state with a continued U.S. military presence. So, the book contains many times and spaces, and I became interested in contemporary and historical Korean poetry as a way of understanding my own origins. In some ways, poetry feels like a more accurate historical document in the way that it embodies.

As a Korean-Canadian *gyopo* myself, I'm interested in the promises—and limitations—of translation. What role does translation play in your work?

Kim's poetry in Korean is very rhythmic, which is lost in the English translation. That's why the rotation pattern I made for *Azaleas II* is derived from the Korean syllabic meter. I also think of the two greenhouses upstairs as material translations of Kim's poem "Already."

I've often described my work as a "regurgitation," but I'm now thinking of it more as a "translation-regurgitation." Translation is always a kind of transmutation—it's never a direct one-to-one. Being someone who doesn't speak Korean fluently, it can feel more freeing to embrace this understanding of translation, but there are inevitably still things that are lost, and this loss itself is inscribed in the work.



Lotus L. Kang, *Azaleas II* (2025) installed at 52 Walker, New York © Lotus L. Kang. Courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker, New York

Selected Press: Lotus L. Kang on Channeling Poetry, Memory, and Spirits Into Her New Work, artnet, May 21, 2025

Lately, there's been a lot of attention to translation as an artistic and creative act of resistance, especially at this moment shaped by miscommunications.

Totally. I'm really inspired by Kim's frequent translator, Don Mee Choi. She took [Walter] Benjamin's quote "translation is a mode," and expanded it into "translation is an anti-neo-colonial mode." I think it's politically important that the act of translation and awareness of the 'who(s)' in the translator's body continues.

The two greenhouses upstairs only allow glimpses of the objects inside, while *Azaleas II* downstairs is more immersive. Can you expand on the relationship between the two floors?

I see both conceptual and formal relationships. One of the main aims of this show is to situate the viewer's body in a space that continually fluctuates between inside and outside.

Structurally, the greenhouse is a container of development, a space for cycles of life and death, cultivation, and permeability. In some ways, I think of the greenhouse that contains 49 echoes or objects as a film still, while the other greenhouse presents literal film stills in a static state, and a moving bulb rotating within. With *Azaleas II*, the form is based on a rotary film dryer, which is a filmmaking tool used to dry film or to bring an image into being. Downstairs, you're immersed in shadows and projections, which feels like a kind of underbelly, a motor driving it all. *Azaleas II* is a kind of root, and the works upstairs are the sprouts. My work often attempts to create something that simultaneously congeals, condenses, and disperses.



Installation view "Lotus L. Kang: *Already*" 52 Walker, New York, April 11–June 7, 2025. Courtesy 52 Walker, New York

Many of the objects in the installation felt culturally evocative to me: the cast anchovies reminded me of yellow corvina drying in the countryside, while the grouping of the cast fruit, tatami mats, and liquor call to mind traditional funerary rites. How important is it for you to unpack these references for the viewer?

In general, my work never lands in one place and stays there. I do feel that artists are channelers, and I'm often channeling something that I'm not always aware of.

Some of the things, like the bottles of spirits, are very specific. I always list them as such in the checklist to make it clear I'm playing with dual meanings: spirits as alcohol, which alters one's state, but also spirits as ancestral presences or beings we might be carrying with us.

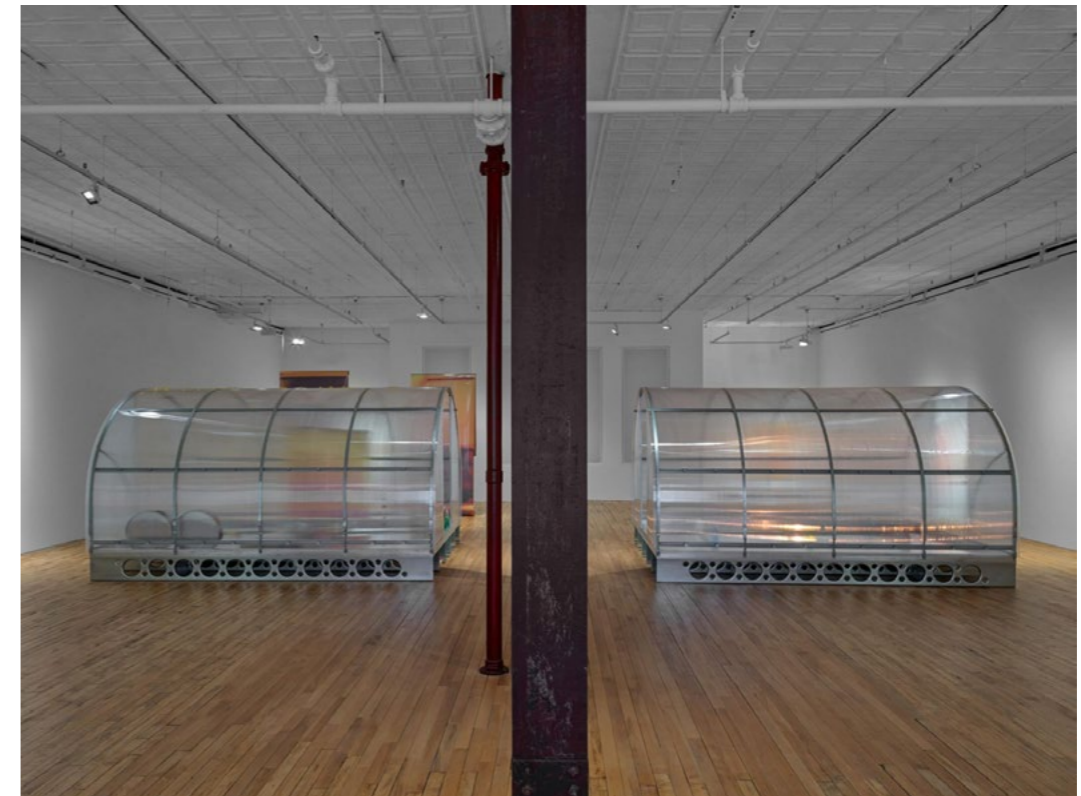
For example, there's a bottle of soju underneath one of the greenhouses that's printed with the American flag superimposed on top of the *taegukgi*, the Korean flag. That bottle is very much confronting the layered histories of being a diasporic person who was born in North America. It also points to the past and present conditions of US occupation and military presence in South Korea and so many other regions of the world. Most viewers won't see the object or reference, but it's important to me that it's there. On the checklist, I clearly demarcate it as "American Soju" rather than "spirits".

Many of the objects I use have this ability to be hyper-specific and non-specific, and they place the responsibility on the viewer to form their own embodied understanding.

Do you see the checklist as an extension of the installation?

I do. I almost wrote a poem for one of the greenhouses, but I don't think I'm quite there yet in my poetry journey. Still, I feel like if someone takes the time to read the checklist, there's a lot to be gleaned from it in terms of "understanding the work."

Selected Press: Lotus L. Kang on Channeling Poetry, Memory, and Spirits Into Her New Work, artnet, May 21, 2025



Installation view "Lotus L. Kang: Already" 52 Walker, New York, April 11–June 7, 2025. Courtesy 52 Walker, New York

What about space? Is the work shaped by the structural and spatial limitations of the gallery itself?

52 Walker has these very assertive pillars that bisect the gallery. For me, that became an invitation to play with mirroring and doubling, to explore binaries and then undercut them. The space between the two greenhouses is this strange non-space—you're both and neither inside and outside.

Speaking of dualities, one theme that stands out to me is the tension between bodily presence through absence.

One of the things I wanted from the greenhouses was this sense of recent presence—or absence. As if we just missed an activity and we're encountering its residue. I find that there's more energy in absence—you can sense the body more clearly when it's not physically present.

We often think the body is defined by the limits of the skin, but I'm interested in how the body extends on both an energetic or spiritual, and a quantum level into space and the environment.



Lotus L. Kang, *Receiver Transmitter (49 Echoes I)* (2022-2025) (detail) © Lotus L. Kang. Courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker, New York

Selected Press: Lotus L. Kang on Channeling Poetry, Memory, and Spirits Into Her New Work, artnet, May 21, 2025

It feels like the installation generates a kind of potential energy that's bubbling just beneath the surface.

Totally.

Finally, what's next for you—in terms of new media you're exploring or ideas you're hoping to develop?

I'm having my first major show in Seoul next year, which feels really special. I'm still thinking through poetry and trying to push the boundaries of film. There's a long-term idea I hint at throughout this installation: one of the greenhouses contains a photograph of a mudflat in South Korea, and *Azaleas II* includes another. So I'm thinking about mud and time, and these in-between spaces of tidal flats where two ecosystems overlap.



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LOTUS

L. KANG

Selected Press: Lotus L. Kang, Mblau Magazine, Summer 2025

If right now
LOTUS L. KANG
 is composing
 history, it's a score
 to be played not in
 a major but a minor
 key. Looking at
 all the little things,
 the Canadian artist
 gives form to that
 which is in between:
 tubes, channels,
 conduits—all that
 cannot quite contain.
 A poetic portrait
 by *Qianfan Gu*

LOTUS L. KANG photographed in her studio in Brooklyn
 by SARA Cwynar for BLAU International

Opening spread: Installation view, MOLT (NEW YORK-LETHBRIDGE-
 LOS ANGELES-TORONTO-CHICAGO-), at MCA Chicago, 2024

When I visit Lotus L. Kang's studio in Brooklyn, she has only just recovered from a bad case of the flu. But with a major solo exhibition mere weeks away, she is already deeply immersed in her preparations. Over by the window, a long table holds an assortment of tools, small cast sculptures, and colorful coils of sewing thread. Drawings and photos are pinned to the walls, while works in progress are laid out on the floor, each at different stages of becoming. There is a lot to take in. Kang's work, centered on sculpture, installation, and photography, is intricate and expansive, dense with interwoven ideas and processes. Yet she navigates it all with an acute attentiveness, orchestrating every detail with the utmost care. There's a distinct steadiness about her—neither haughty nor overly humble but completely at ease, self-possessed in a way that is both assured and unforced.

Kang guides me, under dangling dried-fish sculptures, past readymade bird-shaped ornaments, toward the largest piece in the room—her “greenhouse” installation, a real four-meters-long greenhouse, filled with objects and design elements. Among her studio's multi-species narratives, I squat in reflection, mimicking how I imagine the artist must often crouch next to the work.

First presented last year at the Greater Toronto Art Triennial, Kang will install this second iteration of the greenhouse at 52 Walker, New York. This time around, nearly every surface of the structure is covered with mirrors, even the tatami mattress that lies within. An array of silvery items is also scattered throughout, both found objects and cast sculptures—steamers, strung-up anchovies, an enlarged kelp knot lying on the tatami, which the artist refers to as her “placeholder”—all echoing the metal purlins and trusses that frame the structure. As the elements interact under plastic UV diffuser panels, I begin to pick up on a peculiar atmosphere, one that blends sci-fi futurism with the tranquil nostalgia of the courtyard in a traditional Korean house. Hard and soft, exterior and interior, emptiness and wholeness, illusion and reality come together, fully charged. Much like Kang's signature installations, in which metal joists suspend sheets of film, hung floor to ceiling like room dividers, the greenhouse carves out a space for the most tender things—one that remains provisional, allowing fleeting transformations to unfold within the open-ended container.





Selected Press: Lotus L. Kang, Mblau Magazine, Summer 2025

REVUE

Lotus L. Kang



BODIED II (detail), 2019, stainless steel mixing bowl, rubber, polymer clay, cast pewter
Left: Installation view, EARTH SURGE, at Helena Anrather, New York, 2021

The notion of the container, both literally and conceptually, is something Kang returns to again and again. In Ursula K. Le Guin's renowned essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, published in 1986, the author celebrates journalist Elizabeth Fisher's idea that it was containers, not hunting weapons, that were humanity's first cultural tools—carrier bags rather than spears. A keen reader of Le Guin, Kang has instilled the foundational motif of the container in her work in the form of black plastic bags in her *Carrier* series (2018–19), stainless-steel mixing bowls in *Mother* (2019–20), and onion skins that cradle sand and silicone in *Glean* (2020). These are ephemeral vessels that, beyond merely storing and preserving, are constantly transmitting ideas.

In her studio, Kang turns to me and says, "I'm interested in the anti-monumental, in seeing all sorts of things that aren't doing what they're 'supposed' to do." In choosing her materials, she resists permanence, gravitating toward tubes, channels, and conduits, as well as toward porous objects that might be considered failures in their ability

to contain, such as fragile meshes, single-use food wraps, voids, holes. One particularly important element is the lotus root, which the artist calls "a nourishing tuber rhizome living in the mud." The mud, meanwhile, is "a horizontal carrier of time," which bears witness to historical upheavals: population migrations, the circulation of commercial goods, wars, pollution, and climate change.

During the summer of 2022, Kang erected a small greenhouse among the flora on a friend's farm, using it to "tan," as she puts it, her "skins"—the industrial-grade photogram film material she likes to use as a setting for her imagery. Hung in succession like bedsheets left out to dry, the lengths of film were exposed to the shifting rhythms of the day, absorbing and translating their surroundings into a language of light and shadow, growth and decay.

Having majored in photography in an undergraduate fine art program in her native Canada, the artist approaches the medium with both fresh innovation and deep understanding. "We live in a world where we now experience life through

"We live in a world where we now experience life through images and the medium of photography. It's so ubiquitous that it's beyond our conscious awareness."



Selected Press: Lotus L. Kang, Mblau Magazine, Summer 2025

images and the medium of photography,” she says. “It’s so ubiquitous that it’s beyond our conscious awareness. It is the means of how we operate. There’s something political in subverting its function, in continuously challenging its ability to depict with legibility or clarity.”

Last spring, the artist installed one of her most ambitious works to date, the room-sized installation *In Cascades* (2023–24), as part of the Whitney Biennial. The scene at the time was full of hurried, overlapping crowds, their fleeting silhouettes reflected in Kang’s suspended film skins, which transformed into a blurry backdrop over the duration of the exhibition. Details gradually revealed themselves to me as I moved through the space: kelp knots, lotus-root slices, and anchovies, all cast in metal, sometimes draped alongside the skins, sometimes embedded in joists, and sometimes punctuating the open space. Then there were cast-aluminum cabbage leaves, perforated with worm holes, unfurling like tongues from a neat stack of tatami mats, almost as if they were about to speak. Their silent gestures felt like an invitation from the artist, a call for viewers to come together in a corner and whisper little secrets to each other.

Back then, I didn’t realize that, hidden within the tatami, there were indeed secrets, or photos—“a photograph is a secret about a secret,” as Diane Arbus once said. The images documented Kang’s ritual performance in her studio in 2023, on her 38th birthday—a 38-minute act honoring her paternal grandmother’s daring escape from North Korea to the south at the age of 38, crossing the 38th parallel. “It was a one-time alignment that I felt called to work with,” Kang later reflected.

With this, the entire history of the Korean Peninsula’s division, tracing back to the Japanese occupation (1910–45), was delicately abstracted into the quiet folds of Japanese tatami. Along with the photos, dried goods such as beans covered the makeshift bed—a reference to the modest grain and seed shop Kang’s grandmother opened, upon arriving in the south, in a bid to make a living. Unlike the protagonist of *The Princess and the Pea*, who, despite sleeping on 20 mattresses, is still bothered by a single pea, Kang’s grandmother had to sleep among hard beans, gathered with her rough hands and cherished as the means by which she would sustain her family of seven. Her



TRACT XIV (detail), 2024, cast-aluminum anchovies, cast-bronze anchovies, cast-bronze kelp knot, nylon, polypropylene
Previous spread: Installation view, RECEIVER TRANSMITTER (BUTTERFLY), 2023–24, mixed media, at MOCA Toronto

Lotus L. Kang

grandmother’s past is something Kang only holds a fragmented account of—like a broken net, scattered and drifting, revealing uncertain details, yet remaining dispersed, untethered.

In contrast to the grounded horizontality of the beans and the tatami, Kang’s film skins always hang from high above. Their imagery may appear elusive, even clouded, but they always carry the indelible imprint of the places to which they’ve been exposed. The title of *Molt* (*New York-Lethbridge-Los Angeles-Toronto-Chicago-*) (2018–23), for instance, commissioned by Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, chronicles the journey the skins have taken through multiple cities. And due to the impressionable nature of the film lengths, the journey never stops. Remaining in a perpetual state of becoming, the material persistently gathers new light information, beginning with each unboxing and continuing throughout every exhibition.

Categorizing her film skins by color, Kang at the same time personifies them: violet blue is labeled as “raw,” pinkish purple as “bruise,” reddish brown as “blood,” and amber yellow as “bile.” She perceives the material as visceral, with a texture akin to fascia, tendons, or membranes, suggesting an interchangeability between humans and photographs. It’s as if she’s asking—since we’re already so heavily immersed in a world flooded by photographic data—why not treat images humanely? Rather than attempting to create new monumental pictures, she delves into the formality of photography, enlarging images beyond life-size while meticulously examining their bruises and, in turn, their pain. Studying the mechanics of photography, Kang suggests, might be a way for us humans to better understand ourselves.

If it’s beginning to sound like Kang’s methods are clinical, it’s because they are. Since the pandemic, she has been studying Chinese medicine and acupuncture, frequently referencing acupoints and meridians in her works, such as in *Great Shuttle* (2020–21), presented at the New Museum Triennial in 2021, titled after the English translation of *Dazhui*, an acupoint located on the back, and *Origin Gate* (2021), after *Guanryuan*, a point on the lower abdomen. Both pieces take on vertical forms and feature intricate shapes that evoke hook-like bones, fleshy humps, and distorted spines.

Kang tells me she sees the body as “a changing web, an ongoing constitution of both what’s inside and outside of it.” Partly informed by her study of acupuncture, her perspective is further

shaped by her experience as an identical twin—“the first relationship in my life.” She says that her default state is “doubled,” or “togetherness,” while boundaries are a concept she only learned over time. As both a twin and a Korean Canadian, her sense of self has always been hybrid, complex, and imbued with layered, co-existential, leaky, and indefinable aspects. The multifaceted reflective surfaces in her work, therefore, constitute more than a mere aesthetic choice. Looking at or through them, they become portals where Self and Other meet and intertwine.

Kang wholeheartedly embraces the fluid, ever-evolving nature of her identity. Born as Hanju—a beautiful Korean name that proved difficult for English speakers to pronounce—she first adopted “Laurie” after Laura, the name her mother chose for herself. Then, a few years ago, “Lotus” sprang to mind, marking yet another chapter of selfhood. Looking back, it’s hard for Kang to pinpoint which came first: the lotus as a visual metaphor, or as a name that crystallized her artistic identity. “It’s something that happened inside of me,” she says. “As an artist, your work is you—more you than you think it is—because it’s often already ahead of you in time.” The lotus appears in countless forms in her art: dried, cast, sliced, dispersed, lined up, strung up like wind chimes, in tubes, imprinted on film skins like tattoos, hidden in cracks like coins, drawn on photographic paper in the style of literati painting, or enlarged as if belonging to the non-human realm. The lotus serves as a signifier, an abstract self-portrait, and an acknowledgment of the unformed. “I think because I’m porous, I just became it.”

Boundaries, again, for Kang are a concept learned over time, and many ideas—especially those that begin with a capital letter—are not inherent but acquired. They function more as artificial constructs that impose limitations, yet remain slippery and questionable. The artist also extends this skepticism to cultural symbols, including that of the lotus, which in East Asian traditions such as Ruism has long been a loaded emblem, often representing a *junzi*, or noble man—a figure who rises from the mud unstained, open within and upright without. Against this moralizing symbolism, Kang engages both the lotus and the “dirty” mud, highlighting the root’s intricate configuration and the mud’s existential

“I’m interested in the anti-monumental, in seeing all sorts of things that aren’t doing what they’re ‘supposed’ to do.”



Selected Press: Lotus L. Kang, Mblau Magazine, Summer 2025

“It’s something that happened inside of me. As an artist, your work is you—more you than you think it is—because it’s often already ahead of you in time”

essence. Reimagined as existing in an entropic state, the two symbols mirror the instability and dissolution that permeate contemporary life.

Kang’s fondness of verse, particularly Korean poetry, is telling in this regard. “A better history lesson—the history with a lowercase H,” is how she understands it. Among the poets she returns to most is Kim Hyesoon, whose opening line to her 2018 poem “Face,” “Inside you there is another you,” not only became part of the title for Kang’s installation at Commonwealth and Council last year, but also emerged as a crucial motif—one that prompts the artist to further explore how the essence of things can be turned inside out.

Another collection by Kim, *Autobiography of Death*, has guided Kang’s thoughts while she has been preparing for the show at 52 Walker. Composed of 49 diary-like poems, Kim’s elegy is dedicated to the spirits of the 304 victims of the 2014 Sewol ferry disaster, approximately 250 of whom were high-school students. In Buddhist, Taoist, Shamanistic, and folk traditions throughout Asia, a period of 49 days marks the cycle of reincarnation after death. The 28th poem in the collection, “Already,” consists of just two lines: “You are already born inside death / (echoes 49 times),” giving Kang the title of her new exhibition—*Already*, its conceptual status existing somewhere between arrival and departure, coming and going. As the artist told me, “It’s a word so difficult to define, full of happenings that are ungraspable. I mean, how else can you say ‘present within a past within a future?’” Primarily engaging with Kim’s poetry through translation, as Kang continues to work on regaining fluency in her lost mother tongue, the artist experiences translation as an almost guttural process—one that resonates deeply with her affinity for transit mediums such as tubes and conduits. “But no conduit is passive,” she affirms. She deeply values what Don Mee Choi, Kim’s English translator and an accomplished poet herself, has proposed: “Translation is an anti-neocolonial mode.”

To my surprise, as our conversation nears its end, Kang recommends Le Guin’s translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. In her introduction, Le Guin reflects on just why she chose to translate the text despite the wealth of existing scholarship. “I wanted a *Book of the Way* to be accessible to a present-day, unwise, unpowerful, and perhaps

‘un-male’ reader, not seeking esoteric secrets, but listening for a voice that speaks to the soul.”

“Speaking to the soul” through the body, is precisely the kind of embodied experience Kang’s works evoke. Distinct from dry, research-based installs, egocentric lyricism, vinegarish criticism, and bitter cynicism, her art resists confinement within popular notions like identity politics or the East–West binary. Instead, it possesses an abundant and delicious plainness—like lotus roots.

Lotus L. Kang’s work is profoundly cerebral and conceptually intricate, yet it places great trust in the labor of making. She invites viewers to do as she has done: to stay low, bend down, lean in—to engage with the many pieces displayed at floor level. Thought, experimentation, and translation are transformed into fluid, labor-intensive processes, with intellectual and emotional labor becoming the graceful contents of the work. But Kang redirects credit. She guides us toward the many forces at play: wind, mud, light, and time, as well as worms, fungi, mice, and chattering birds, understanding that human existence is not separate from, but enmeshed within, a non-anthropocentric network of active conduits. We are here, in a moment both tender and fleeting, and it’s not always clear what’s going on.

Lotus L. Kang’s solo exhibition, *Already*, at 52 Walker, New York, closes June 7, 2025.

Installation view, GREAT SHUTTLE, at the New Museum Triennial: *Soft Haze, Hard Stone*, New Museum, New York, 2021
Previous spread: AZALEAS, 2024, mixed media



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