

Advertisement

Art

A Moving New Exhibition Pays Tribute to Christina Yuna Lee's Start in the Art World

Harley Wong Apr 11, 2022 5:40pm   



Related Stories





Portrait of Christina Yuna Lee with Li Hongbo, *Tools of Study*, at Eli Klein Gallery, 2014. Courtesy of Eli Klein Gallery.

On February 13, 2022, Christina Yuna Lee was followed into her apartment in New York’s Chinatown and murdered. Though anti-Asian violence has a long history in the United States, we’ve witnessed an alarming rise in attacks against individuals of Asian descent since the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020.

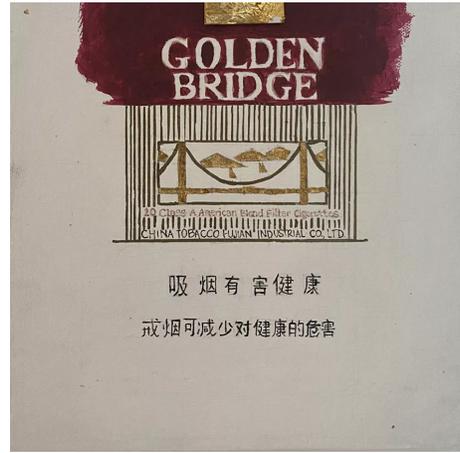
Opening April 13th, exactly two months after Lee’s murder, the memorial exhibition “with her voice, penetrate earth’s floor” will both mourn Lee’s death and commemorate her presence in the art world. Borrowing a line from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee* (1982) for its title, the exhibition carries grief’s immense weight, as well as the heavy truth that racialized and gendered violence against Asian American women is not a foreign concept—even to supposedly cosmopolitan cities like New York.

The upcoming group show will be on view from April 13th through June 5th at New York’s Eli Klein Gallery, where Lee worked from 2010 to 2014. She was one of the gallery’s first employees, joining at an entry-level position after earning a BA in art history from Rutgers University and later becoming assistant director. “She was so instrumental in so much that I did,” gallerist Eli Klein told the *New York Daily News*. “All of my artists, the curators, everyone uniformly universally loved Christina.”





Portrait of Christina Yuna Lee with Li Hongbo's installation for *Hiding in New York No. 8 - Cereal*, 2013. Courtesy of Eli Klein Gallery.



Christina Yuna Lee, *Golden Bridge for Eli Klein*, 2014. © Christina Yuna Lee. Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery.

The week after Lee's passing, Klein approached interdisciplinary artist stephanie mei huang to curate an exhibition in Lee's memory. "I saw how harrowing the loss of Christina was for Eli, and it felt so much that way for me. I felt like I couldn't move on with life unless I was doing something for her," huang said in an interview with Artsy. "Initially, I wasn't sure if I was well enough to do the show, because the timeline is so urgent and this [violence] keeps happening. But it also became clear that it was an avenue to channel grief into something that was a more socialized mourning rather than feeling isolated."

This also rang true for the participating artists, who were confirmed within days after huang and Klein decided to stage the show, just a week or two after Lee's death. Organized while in close communication with Lee's sister Angela, the show will dedicate at least 50 percent of proceeds from sales to the Christina Yuna Lee Memorial Fund, which supports the organizations and places that carried significance for Lee. The exhibition features the work of nine Asian American femme artists—stephanie mei huang, Kelly Akashi, Patty Chang, Maia Ruth Lee, Candice Lin, Astria Suparak, Hông-Ân Trương, Haena Yoo, and Christina Yuna Lee herself.



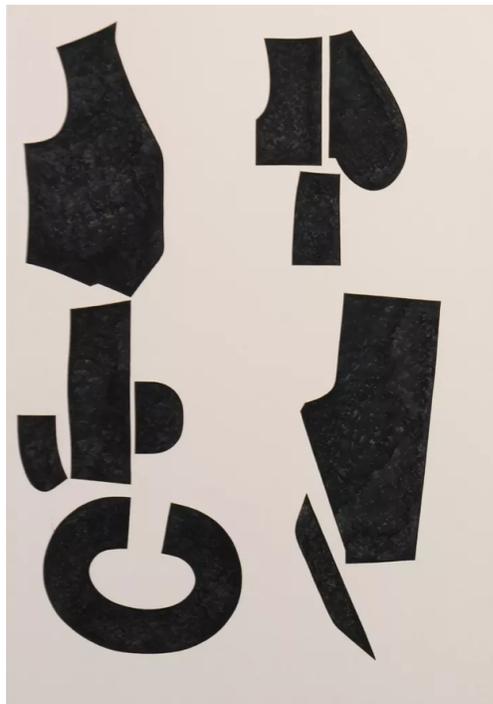


stephanie mei huang
eschatology of intimacy i, 2022
Eli Klein Gallery
Contact for price

Advertisement

Lee had made a painting as a gift for Klein that depicts the Chinese cigarette brand Golden Bridge in acrylic and gold leaf. In response to this work, *Golden Bridge for Eli Klein* (2014), huang created a woodblock print on mulberry paper with gold leaf of Daqianmen (大前门) cigarettes—the favorite brand of huang’s late grandfather. “I really wanted to be in dialogue with [Christina’s] work, because her presence in the art world is a little bit

“I want to bring the quotidian nature of offering, ancestral worship, and remembrance of the dead, because we have been so far removed from the nature of grieving in Asia and how daily that is,” huang explained. “I hope we can transmute the gallery space into this very alive space of active grieving and active mourning.”



Maia Ruth Lee
Language of Grief 06, 2021
 Eli Klein Gallery
 Contact for price



Kelly Akashi, *August 4-6*, 2020. © Kelly Akashi. Courtesy of the artist, François Ghebaly, and Eli Klein Gallery.

This sentiment can be felt in the artworks on display. Akashi’s *August 4-6* (2020) is from a series in which the artist casts the remnants of a paraffin candle burned to mark a recent tragedy. Akashi has created bronze sculptures in memory of George Floyd and to mourn the deaths in the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings. *August 4-6* specifically references the 2020 explosion

in Beirut. Meanwhile, Maia Ruth Lee's abstract paintings from her "Language of Grief" series suggests that the gravity of certain losses cannot be expressed through words alone.

Trương will be exhibiting a series of photographs appropriated from archival film footage shot by American and Australian soldiers in Vietnam in the late 1960s and early '70s. Trương focuses on the video stills in which the soldiers momentarily fixed their lens on women on the street, and extracts the women from the frame of voyeurism. The 2017 works feel especially relevant today as women of Asian descent continue to experience a hypervisible and racialized gaze. "For a lot of Asian American people, we don't have control over how much our body is seen, or by whom it is consumed," huang remarked.



[Skip to Main Content](#)

Hong-An Truong

01:29:48:21, 2017

Eli Klein Gallery

Contact for price



These circumstances feel inescapable, even in death and mourning. Lee's memorial outside her home was vandalized on more than one occasion, and Asian American femmes have experienced stalking while visiting the site. In the hopes of creating a safe space to grieve, the exhibition at Eli Klein Gallery will include an altar for Lee that most of the exhibiting artists have chosen to contribute to.

Among the offerings are a prayer bell and seashells from Maia Ruth Lee that she's collected over the years; and mugwort incense and cherry blossoms from huang. These will be catalogued as a collective tribute to Lee, and visitors are encouraged to engage with the altar and leave their own contributions, mourn, or pay their respects. "As I navigate this grief, I've been learning that this is lifelong," huang said. "A space of mourning doesn't necessarily have to be a space of pain."

Harley Wong is Artsy's Production Editor.

Further reading in Art



6 AAPI Artists Reflect on the Spike in Anti-Asian Violence

Artsy Editorial Mar 30, 2021



Michaela Yearwood-Dan's Lush Abstractions Are Strikingly Intimate

Charlotte Jansen Apr 11, 2022



15 Benefit Sales Supporting Relief Efforts in Ukraine

Artsy Editorial Apr 8, 2022



Artists to Be N

Ayann