

ART SPIEL

Contemporary Art and Culture



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“Best by 07/21/2026” at Eli Klein Gallery

For artists Clare Hu, Tianyi Sun, and Shaan Ken Rao, their residency-then-exhibition is already well past its expiration date. Entering the group show *Best by 07/21/2026* may feel more like intruding on a gallery’s installation or deinstallation than attending its finished presentation. Moving blankets are spread across the walking path, with splashes of white paint visible on the quilted fabric. Glass tables lean on white walls. Enter the back room, and you may trip over one of many sandbags, or duck your head under the arm of a swinging C-stand.

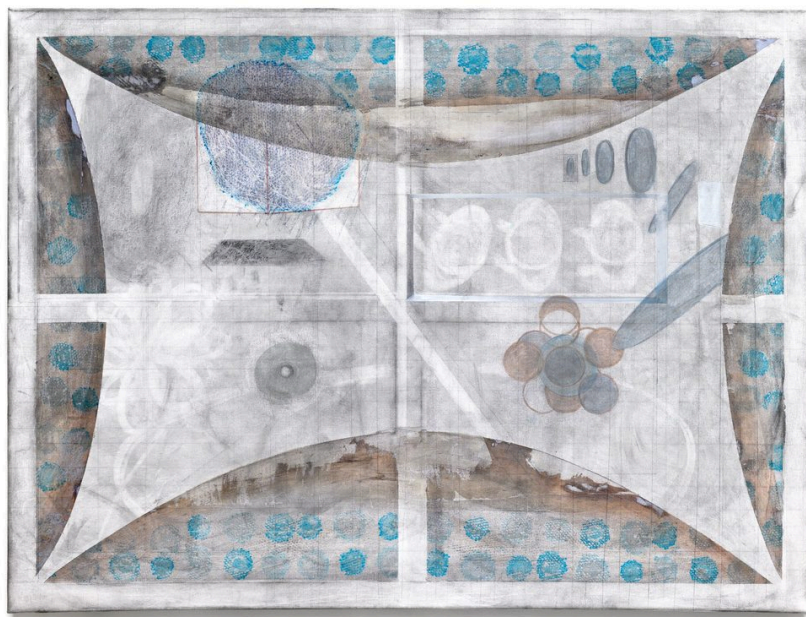
Best by 07/21/2026 is the result of the sophomore residency by Eli Klein Gallery, and the date in the title demarcates its very beginning. Each artist varies in their chosen medium– Hu a weaver, Sun a sculptor and filmmaker, and Rao a painter. The resulting works from the residency however overlap ideas, strategies, and aesthetics in curious ways. Hu’s *table* series includes five “Lazy-Susans,” ubiquitous in Asian culture, sat atop grid paper and graphite screen prints, their geometric rigidity interwoven with digital prints– a reinvention of her quilt motif in mixed media. Sun experiments with digitally printed semi-transparent material as well. The artist’s central installation *Disposable Utensils [Scene 2]*, (2026) appears in diaphanous gradients of lavender and green, interspliced with digitally printed images hung on C-stands. The gradients are generated spectrogram prints on organza and diffusion silk, translating audio recordings the artist took from Mott and Canal, and 71 Henry Street. Sun’s *Pillows*, which dot the floor, also use digitally printed organza, while red beans and sand give them a hefty, obstructive form; one must step around or risk knocking the whole formation over. Shaan Ken Rao’s two-dimensional paintings follow this interest in transparency by layering graphs, pencil, and acrylic. Rao’s imagery floats dreamily above and below the canvas, as seen in *Inside a Pixel* (2026) and *A Creation* (2026), while weaving between aqueous grid lines in *Landscape* (2026), created by a five-line musical staff pen.



Tianyi Sun, *Pillow [Asparagus]*, canvas, digitally printed organza, red beans, sand, embroidery, thread, 30 x 33 x 25 cm, 2026.



Shaan Ken Rao, *A Creation*, ink and acrylic on canvas, 152 x 183 cm, 2026.



Shaan Ken Rao, *Inside a Pixel*, pencil, graphite, and ink on canvas, 76 x 102 cm, 2026.

Across the exhibition, pre-residency works provide the origin of the artists' most recent pieces. Hu's obsidian textile work *Debris* (2025) hangs from a wall ledge, allowing a view of raw embroidered threads from the back or along the front, but denying a view comfortably facing its main surface. By the front window, Sun's resin works *Still 03, TC 03:18:25:18* (2026) preserve impressions of old windows, molds created from found antiques.



Clare Hu, *Debris*, woven textile, moving blankets, digital images printed on cotton, hand mending, 203 x 305 cm, 2025.



Tianyi Sun, Still 03 TC 03 18 25 18, Organix resin, wax, acrylic polymer, steel, embroidery, thread, digital print on organza, 107 x 48 x 1 cm, 2026.

"Best by" labels are used to suggest a date in which quality will peak, then plateau, or else nosedive. The title of this show considers the gallery show's own lifespan and

expiry: installation takes a week, presentation lasts four to six weeks, and deinstallation occurs as quickly as possible. The result is a six-to-eight-week window– roughly the same length as the gallery’s summer residency. The previously teleological and elegant explanation of art production known as “produce, select, and present” rings less true in the increasingly transparent systems of the art world. In a climate of rising costs, contracting budgets, and institutional retrenchment, to remain in the art world is to attend to its mythological being– both its consumption and parturition, and its excretion and decay. The exhibition exists in ephemera, in diaphanous traces, echoes of recorded sound, the transitory play of shadows, the peripatetic arrangement of clamps and moving blankets, film equipment waiting to be used or taken down. *Best by 7/21/2026* seemingly points out a missing verb in the transparent model of ‘produce, select, and present’ –that is, to discard.

If “Best by” marks a peak, it also delineates a period after. “Best by” is also a mere suggestion of quality, not a definitive end; we do not equate it with the imperative “Use by” date. Perhaps what follows “Best,” then, may not be the fall, but a reconsideration, generation, or experimentation beyond the binaries of product/waste, and un/finished work. Picking up after can be creative; it is how old windows, found images, Lazy Susans, and moving blankets become found objects. Rather than continuing a cycle of “produce, select, and present,” *Best by 7/21/2026* makes room for by-products to survive. What comes after the peak? *Best by 7/21/2026* suggests new beginnings; in fact, it may be the most interesting place for artists to land.

Best by 7/21/2026, exhibits Clare Hu, Tianyi Sun, and Shaan Ken Rao at Eli Klein Gallery, 398 West Street, New York, NY 10014. On view from July 21st through October 31st, 2026. Tue – Sat, 10 AM – 6 PM.

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About the writer: Chloe Alto is a New York-based writer and founder of CRITCLUB, an organization holding formal studio critiques for artists. She received her BA in art history from Columbia University. Her writing centers on contemporary art, with a focus on Asian and Asian American artists.

 Clare Hu, Shaan Ken Rao, Tianyi Sun

 **EXHIBITION REVIEW, EXHIBITIONS**

ART SPIEL, ART WORLD, ARTIST RESIDENCY, BEST BY, BEST BY 07/21/2026, CLARE HU, CONTEMPORARY ART, DIGITAL PRINTING, ELI KLEIN GALLERY, EPHEMERALITY, EXHIBITION REVIEW, FILM, GROUP EXHIBITION, INSTALLATION, NEW YORK ART, PAINTING, RESIN, SCULPTURE, SHAAN KEN RAO, SOPHOMORE RESIDENCY, TEXTILE ART, TIANYI SUN, TRANSPARENCY, WEAVING