

Tianyi Sun, *Disposable Utensils [Scene 2]*, 2026. Spectrogram print on organza, Mott and Canal; spectrogram print on diffusion silk, 71 Henry Street; Avenger C-stand, Berkey ColorTran Pro-Stand, Impact C-stand, glazed porcelain cucoloris, glazed porcelain cast props, disassembled boom arms, flange mounts, truss clamps, knuckles, grip clips, velvet weights with red beans and stainless steel spheres, organza weights with sand and red beans, construction sack, embroidery thread, zip ties, stainless steel ribbon, galvanized steel wire, magnets, Dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Eli Klein Gallery.

A “best by” date promises disposal.

Printed on consumer packaging, it marks the boundary after which a product loses its intended utility. Eli Klein Gallery stamped this premise onto its exhibition *Best by 07/21/2026*, referencing a calendar date that passed nearly two months before the public opening on September 17th. July 21st marked the end of an intensive summer residency, the second iteration of a residency-then-exhibition model the gallery began in 2024. For two months, Clare Hu, Tianyi Sun, and Shaan Ken Rao occupied the gallery as a shared studio, engaging in critiques with thirty-one visiting curators, artists, and peers. The title framing invites an examination of expiry, investigating the drafts, studio detritus, and discarded iterations an artist generates during production. Rather than focusing on ephemera or waste, the assembled works invert this premise, transforming transient studio materials into enduring structures of what is overlooked or left behind.

Tianyi Sun demonstrates this with exceptional clarity. Drawing on her background in film and performance, she reconstructs the hidden architecture of a set that cinematic framing typically excludes. C-stands, the industrial steel tripods used to mount studio lights, are deployed across the gallery without light fixtures, supporting draped translucent screens and anchored by sandbags filled with red beans. Deprived of their primary illumination purpose, the support apparatuses become the central visual subjects. Her ceramic sculptures extend this conceptual logic. On a movie set, a prop antique is fabricated rapidly and economically, intended to persist only for the duration of a scene, but Sun constructs her props to outlast their cinematic utility. *Screening [Kingfisher]* (2026) casts a traditional Chinese circular screen in organic resin and wax, embedding red beans, embroidery thread, and digital prints on synthetic silk directly into the matrix, consolidating disposable prop materials into a permanent object. *Pillow [Senior]* (2026) pushes this transformation further by casting a fragment of a traditional unyielding sleeping pillow: a thin, curved porcelain slab mounted on the wall, its undulating edge

casting a soft shadow while a pale celadon glaze pools over the imprinted surface pattern. Stripping away the pillow's volume to retain only a flattened surface fragment, Sun transforms the object into a visual memory that recalls its past identity.

Shaan Ken Rao, *To Have Been*, 2026, Ink and acrylic on canvas, 36 x 48 inches. Photo courtesy of Eli Klein Gallery.

Clare Hu applies a parallel transformation to domestic artifacts before diverging conceptually. A large circular glass tabletop, modeled after the Lazy Susan central to Chinese family dining, lies horizontally atop an industrial moving blanket, revealing intricate pencil drawings of overshot weaving drafts through the underside of the glass. Preserved beneath glass, it transforms into an archival keepsake. Hu integrates these drafts with family photographs purchased from eBay, documenting a Chinese American family's root-finding journey to China. This arrangement adapts an immigrant domestic tradition of placing family photographs beneath table glass, preserving memories within daily domestic life. Here, the gesture adopts a stranger's discarded album, reintroducing orphaned images into a domestic realm. A second set of Lazy Susans lean against the gallery wall, recalling restaurant fixtures resting between service hours. Hu's textile works clearly depart from Sun's pristine surfaces. Working without a loom, she patches moving blankets and dishwasher insulation into floor tapestries and hanging curtains. Designed to absorb wear, these materials retain every physical trace: paint traces, frayed threads, and handling marks remain visible. Stitched fabrics and printed images trace the path of the Augusta Canal in Georgia, enlarged during the 1870s through the labor of Chinese workers, an overlooked chapter in southern US history. Through this visible patchwork, Hu actively archives physical labor, both personal and historical, allowing that narrative to arrive on a moving blanket, folded into the material of transit.

Shaan Ken Rao captures a far less tangible state, addressing themes of survival, loss, and addiction through the tension between fleeting instability and structured order. In *Landscape 1* (2026), grids drawn with a five-line music staff pen wave freehand across a vast, pale expanse. Floating across this undulating score are geometric motifs: a dark hexagonal form suspended inside a teal square, a yellow grid patch anchored by a blue dotted axis, translucent violet disks, and soft pink ladder-like steps. By leaving select grid cells vacant to act as musical rests, Rao turns absence into a deliberate structural element. In *To Have Been* (2026), a painted sheet of semi-translucent fabric floats at the center of a cool, clinical space overlaid with a muted grid. Held taut at its corners by four outward-pointing red arrows, the fabric's creases form a hazy, unreadable face. The arrows capture a dual movement—pressing forward while receding into space—evoking an anxious back-room atmosphere where memory and identity resist resolution. Rather than building heirlooms, Rao anchors fleeting emotional remnants, grounding the exhibition's conceptual framework in raw emotional reality.

A subtle light-blue palette connects all three artists. Viewed across the gallery space, these tonal variations delineate the exhibition's conceptual spectrum, spanning from objects crafted for preservation to imagery that resists definitive objectification. This dialogue materializes where their works physically intersect: Sun's *Pillow [398w]* rests directly upon Hu's moving blanket, but sits inverted so that its cobalt-glazed pattern faces downward, leaving only the raw, unglazed porcelain back exposed. This gesture conceals the refined finish, returning the cast object to a state of raw material, and underscoring the collaboration across the studio floor. Little of the summer residency's raw detritus remains on view, save for Hu's blankets, which supported the team during discussions and now function as finished installations. By offering a glimpse into an ephemeral two-month phase of unpolished drafts and peer critiques, this residency model re-engages the gallery as a space of active creative production. The date on the wall marks an official expiration, yet every work in the space endures past that threshold.

Clare Hu, *Debris, 2025*, Woven textile, moving blankets, digital images printed on cotton, hand mending, 80 x 120 inches. Photo courtesy of Eli Klein Gallery.

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