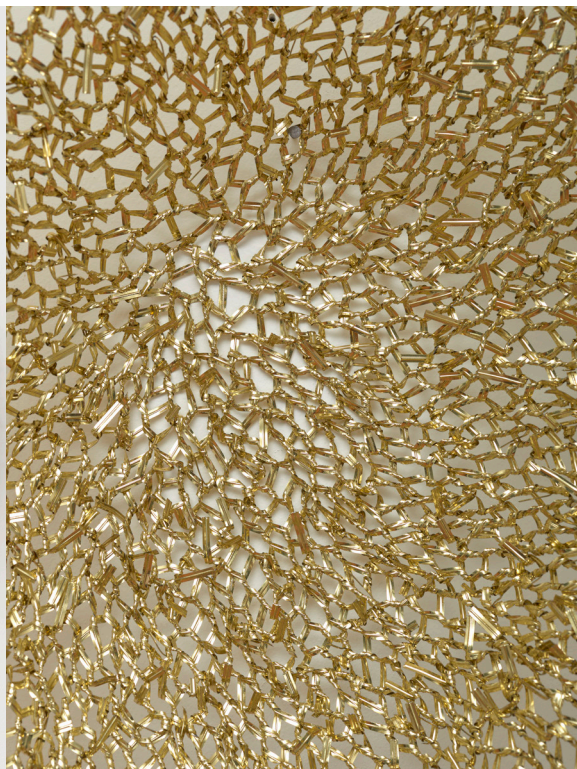


**ART @ BAINBRIDGE**

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM

Threading Memories / MiKyoung Lee

October 21, 2023–January 7, 2024



# Threading Memories / MiKyoung Lee

October 21, 2023–January 7, 2024

The foundation of MiKyoung Lee’s art was shaped by an early fascination with textiles used in her childhood homes in Korea—domestic fabrics made with long-standing techniques. *Threading Memories / MiKyoung Lee* explores memories from the artist’s childhood and from later chapters of her life that she visually expresses through her textile art practice. By twisting and knotting, a method akin to weaving, Lee uses common, mass-produced products such as pipe cleaners, zip ties, and twist ties to create dynamic, lush, and organic large-scale sculptures as well as intimate two-dimensional, wall-mounted works. The meditative nature of these techniques allows the artist to reflect on and catalogue her memories as she creates; open cavities in many of her works provide metaphorical spaces in which viewers can place their own memories for private contemplation and reflection. Through the material she uses, Lee grounds her work in the present as it speaks to the tension inherent between the natural world and synthetic, human-made materials and substances.

Lee was born in Geoje City, South Korea, on an island at the southernmost tip of the Korean peninsula. She trained in fiber arts, printing, drawing, and fashion in Korea before immigrating to the United States in 1993. She is now the director of the School of Art, Design and Art History at James Madison University, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, as well as a practicing artist.

Zoe S. Kwok

Nancy and Peter Lee Associate Curator of Asian Art

---

## ARTIST STATEMENT

This exhibition reflects the past fifteen years of my art practice, with works more intimate and delicate in scale, methodology, and imagery than my past installation-based exhibitions. In this body of work, nature becomes the essential motivation to construct drawings and sculptures.

My work represents and manifests abstract natural and organic imagery through forms and processes. From stitching to unraveling sewing threads to knotting, my approach involves traditional textile methods that reflect my interest in domesticity and family ties. Teaching textile art for over twenty years, I have been incredibly inspired and influenced by textiles' repetitive, delicate, and honest technology.

Mundane objects and capitalism in contemporary culture have influenced my work. I see many of my materials, especially twist ties, as symbols of consumerism in our lives. I am interested in portraying complex contemporary human psychology relating to materialism, superficiality, and the physical through mixed-media sculptures.

I respect and appreciate the beauty of labor in art making. Repetition allows me to experience progress and brings focus and harmony to my psyche. There is an exceptional satisfaction in touching materials with my hands while developing my projects—the simplicity of binding, netting, knitting, sewing, and stitching. These are the metaphors of our lives, how we live, and how we connect.

The connectivity in my process allows me to understand and teach how humans live and interact, how we work to create a better life and future, and how we view our complex society.

— MiKyoung Lee

---

## GALLERY 1: DREAMS

*Bubble* is an installation of three hanging sculptures. Lee created its amorphous forms in response to her interest in the workings of our minds during the relaxed, but sometimes fraught, state of sleep. The undulating forms are her reflection on the importance of dreams to the review and revision of memories, anxieties, and hopes. Lee comments that dreams have an inherent “floating” quality—they hover at the edges of our real lives and disappear when we wake, as though both the dreams and the desires they represent drift away.



### ***Bubble*, 2016**

Set of three sculptures  
Twist ties and pipe cleaners

---

## GALLERY 2: NATURE

When I was little and growing up in South Korea, I would visit my grandmother during every summer and winter break. She lived in a village on Geoje Island. The village was tiny and rural; it had maybe twenty-six or twenty-seven households. There were no stores, no cars; it was very, very simple. With the water, the mountains, and the fields, my connection to nature there, which felt constant, was so strong. I felt so free there. Everyone was busy working on the farms, so all the village kids and us would be together on the beach and in the fields and mountains. From sunrise to sunset, I was with those kids in nature. Even when we were indoors, nature was visible through the bamboo-screen windows and doors. What I felt, what I touched, and what I smelled in nature affected me as much as what I saw. Those particular memories and experiences, and that place, feel as though they wrap around me; they form my foundation; they comfort and nurture me.

— MiKyoung Lee



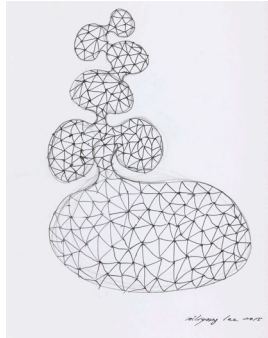
***Dream 12*** (detail), 2023  
Set of five sculptures  
Twist ties and pipe cleaners



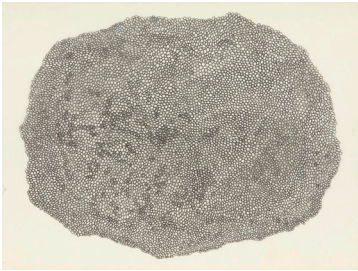
***Blossom 8***, 2023  
Twist ties



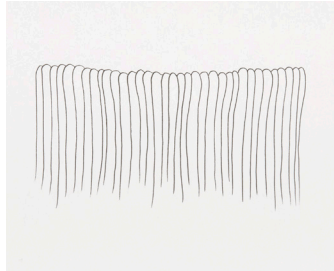
**Rhapsody (detail), 2023**  
Twist ties



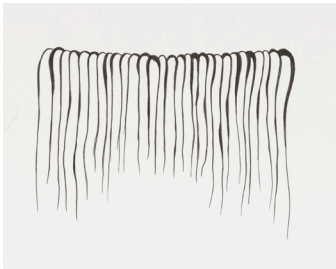
**Drawing Bubble 22, 2015**  
Graphite and ink on paper



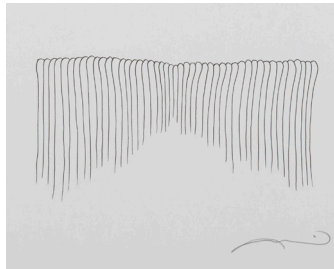
**Drawing Circles, 2006**  
Ink on paper



**Drawing Line 3, 2012**  
Ink on paper



**Drawing Line 4, 2012**  
Ink on paper



**Drawing Line 7, 2012**  
Ink on paper

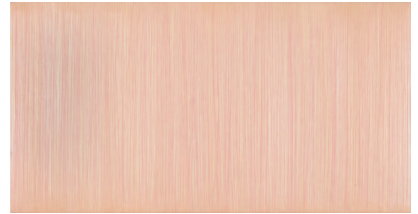
---

### **GALLERY 3: TRADITION AND LABOR**

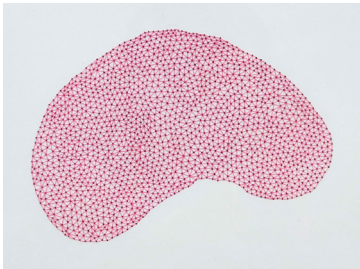
Lee grew up surrounded by women who wove blankets and stitched clothes, using fiber arts techniques with a long history in Korea to create objects for use in everyday life. The works of art in this room are threaded and stitched “drawings,” illustrated odes to textile work and to the women who perform it. To create *Untitled* (2011), the largest piece in the gallery, Lee worked countless single strands of thread over several weeks; the density of the pattern suggests the time-intensive process. Lee comments that her choice to use factory-made thread in the creation of such objects is her attempt to refute a throw-away culture that deprioritizes the handmade.



**Untitled, 2011**  
Sewing threads



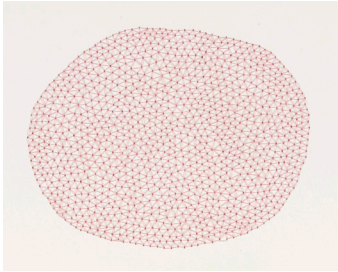
**Below, 2014**  
Thread and beeswax on canvas



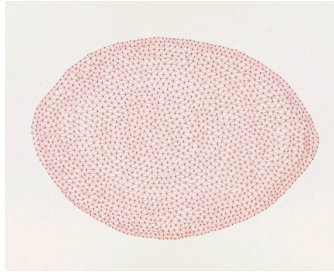
**Thread Drawing, 2017**  
Stitches on paper



**Thread Drawing, 2022**  
Stitches on silk organza



***Thread Drawing, 2021***  
Stitches on paper



***Thread Drawing, 2022***  
Stitches on paper

#### **GALLERY 4: LIFE CYCLES**

*Bubble #3* occupies the center of this room and is the earliest work in the exhibition. Its red color, which it shares with *Reflected Memory 2*, is bold and assertive, marking a significant moment in Lee's life—when she became a mother. This momentous change saw her contemplate the repositioning of her identity while grappling with the physical changes and demands of her new role. Motherhood allowed Lee to reflect on memories of the chapters of her life and those of her female ancestors, as well as on the life cycles articulated in the Buddhist faith of her childhood. The womb-like quality of the large, suspended *Bubble #3*—placed in conversation with *Reflected Memory 2*, which seems to physically evoke the very act of giving birth—eloquently speaks to the seismic changes brought on by childbirth.



---

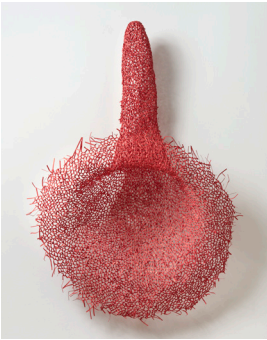
The continuous twisting that defines Lee's mark-making process serves as a tangible expression of the invisible binds that build and create a family and a community. No single thread, pipe cleaner, or twist tie could represent her forms. Rather, countless small pieces must bind and connect to create a whole, just as a family and a community grows stronger by creating ties.



**Bubble #3, 2008**  
Pipe cleaners

---

In Lee's words, "In my practice, I see a metaphor for life. The layers of tangles and twists in my art pieces are a significant part of life. Accumulating tangles is part of life. The threads in these works seem chaotically ordered, but they come together beautifully; they become reordered to create something new, with new textures and contours. I really love these ways of thinking about life."



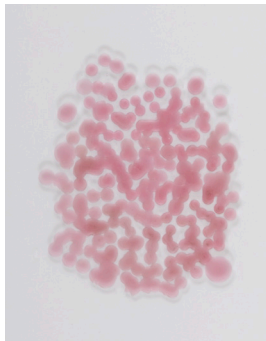
**Reflected Memory 2, 2022**  
Twist ties



**Drawing Bubble 17, 2012**  
Oil pastel



**Material Drawing 7, 2012**  
Candle wax



**Material Drawing 9, 2012**  
Candle wax

All works are by MiKyoung Lee (born 1970, Geoje City, South Korea; active Philadelphia, PA, and Harrisonburg, VA), are from the collection of the artist, and are © MiKyoung Lee.

*Threading Memories / MiKyoung Lee* is curated by Zoe S. Kwok, Nancy and Peter Lee Associate Curator of Asian Art.

Support for *Threading Memories / MiKyoung Lee* is provided by Nancy C. Lee, the P. Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Center for East Asian Art, the Department of East Asian Studies, and the Program in Asian American Studies.

Art@Bainbridge is made possible through the generous support of the Virginia and Bagley Wright, Class of 1946, Program Fund for Modern and Contemporary Art; the Kathleen C. Sherrerd Program Fund for American Art; Joshua R. Slocum, Class of 1998, and Sara Slocum; Rachelle Belfer Malkin, Class of 1986, and Anthony E. Malkin; Barbara and Gerald Essig; Gene Locks, Class of 1959, and Sueyun Locks; and Ivy Beth Lewis.

Art@Bainbridge is a gallery project of the Princeton University Art Museum, located in historic Bainbridge House in downtown Princeton. Please also visit Art on Hulfish, our photo-forward gallery and programs space in Palmer Square, open daily. Our main building is under construction as we build a bold new Museum, anticipated to open in spring 2025. Visit our website for online exhibitions, videos, live programs, and more.

[artmuseum.princeton.edu](http://artmuseum.princeton.edu)



PRINCETON  
UNIVERSITY  
ART MUSEUM  
STORE

56 Nassau Street

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM  
**ART *on* HULFISH**

11 Hulfish Street

**ART @ BAINBRIDGE**  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM

158 Nassau Street