

Kiwha Lee : Reverse Universe (Press Release)

MONTI8 is excited to announce the exhibition 'Reverse Universe', the first European solo show of Korean-American artist **Kiwha Lee** (b. Seoul, Korea; lives and works in New York).

The exhibition presents a body of new works, twelve paintings to be hung in both venues of the gallery: the space in Latina—which will present eight small and larger works, and the new project space in Rome—opening its inaugural show featuring a smaller selection of paintings specifically created for the space.

Lee reimagines and reinvents various ancient Asian printmaking processes from craft or “material culture” traditions rooted in objects and architecture but with oil paint on canvas. She credits her distinct voice and vision to her lifelong transcultural upbringing and study across four continents—Australia, America, Europe, Asia. She writes, “Painting is a construct borne of cultural imagination” and its main role in society over the past millennia has been to illuminate and “expand perception”. She offers a new alternative framework through which to see painting—a departure from easel painting’s “painting as window” and casts rather decoratively-mediated light from the outside/backside of the painting into the space of the viewer. Her paintings resemble *jaali*—the ornamental, latticed architectural stone screen that functioned as a window for centuries in the non-West, thereby making pattern a powerful narrative tool not only in the creation of deep space (as pattern was historically associated with flatness and decoration) but also a subversive agent in either camouflaging or drawing attention to “characters”. Lee seeks to establish a new approach to abstraction—not relying on conventions like linear perspective or modelling but rather reshaping and expanding Western pictorial hierarchy with the exclusive use of pattern, color and shape alone.

Kiwha Lee engages in deep art historical dialogue and challenges the hegemony of male, European modernists such as Henri Matisse who drew from the visual vocabulary of the “imaginary Orient”. In her work “*Silk Road*”, she imagines herself retracing the expansive journey of the Silk Road but encounters object fragments that are “free, weightless and breathing”. Combined with references such as Ancient Roman architecture, Venetian glass tiles (*tesserae*), mosaic arrangements all inspired by Italy but as well, Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, painting for Lee is a back-lit, “reverse window” that tells a story of original encounters between the broader East and the West’s cradle of civilization, our present moment and its relationship with the past, the scale-shifting cosmos’s whole to its microscopic part. Time operates in both directions for Lee and continues beyond the frame or surface of her canvases, repeating and layering—exemplified by her technique of meditatively adding and subtracting paint—inspired by the ancient art of textile resists and architectural tiling. Kiwha Lee’s practice inspires reflection about painting’s relationship today with the larger physical world and is a shimmering glimmer of where painting may head tomorrow.

Lee first studied at the University of New South Wales College of Fine Arts then the University of Technology Sydney in Australia (B. Design in Visual Communication (Hons) and obtained an MFA in Painting at Hunter College in 2022. Her work is collected by the Morgan Stanley Art Collection and in private collections globally. Artsy reviewed her first New York solo show earlier this year as one of **5 Standout Shows to See at Small Galleries This February** worldwide and received a mention by **Artforum** as a “**Must-See**”. In 2024, she is included in **Artcube Discoveries Top 100 Early-Career Artists**.

INFO:

KIWAH LEE - REVERSE UNIVERSE

Opening:

18th October - Rome (via dei Reti 1a)

19th October - Latina (via Monti 8)

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