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Lucy Kim: Mutant Optics July 20 – February 2, 2025



Lucy Kim: Mutant Optics [Installation view, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, 2024]. Photo: Jueqian Fang.

Seattle, WA [May 16, 2024]—The Henry is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by visionary artist Lucy Kim (b. 1978, Seoul, South Korea; based in Cambridge, MA). Working across painting, sculpture, and biological media, Kim creates hybrid works that embrace distortion as a tool to deconstruct how we see what we see.

Over the last several years, Kim has worked in collaboration with scientists at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard and the National Autonomous University of Mexico to develop a new, experimental printing process using genetically modified bacteria cells that produce melanin directly on paper. With this work, Kim is exploring materially and conceptually what happens when images become visible through the same black and brown pigment that plays a key role in human coloration and appearance.

For her exhibition at the Henry, Kim is creating an installation of new melanin works made from images of vanilla plants, extending her broader investigations into the entangled relationship between bioengineering, visual appearance, and the social and cultural construction of race and perception. Vanilla is of particular interest to Kim for the role it plays in racial histories and global

economies, past and present. Vanilla is the second most expensive spice in the world and cultivation is in primarily former colonized nations. Kim photographs her images on research farms in Florida, where scientists are breeding new varieties of the vanilla plant to offer alternate sources for domestic production. Her images of vanilla include beans, flowers, and a lab-grown albino plant, a specimen whose modified pigment helps scientists more immediately see the success of their experiments on other genes.

Kim's prints will have a sculptural presence in the gallery, including one composition of over sixty overlapping and layered prints spanning the nearly full twenty-foot-high gallery walls. Using scale and repetition, Kim creates glitches in perception that scramble processes of legibility and recognition. Multiple prints of the same image vary in saturation and show the capricious outcome of a process using live cells, underscoring sight as an evolving process rather than a finite one. Kim's work draws a through line from histories of botanical printmaking and related processes of classification to present day scientific invention, questioning the neutrality of these systems of visual cultural and knowledge production that mold the way we see others and ourselves.



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ARTIST BIO

Lucy Kim is based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She received the 2022 Creative Capital Award for her project printing images with bacteria that has been genetically modified to produce melanin. Kim is also a recipient of the 2023 Brother Thomas Fellowship, 2019 Mass Cultural Council Grant, 2017 ICA Boston James and Audrey Foster Prize, 2014 Artadia Award, MacDowell Fellowship, Hermitage Fellowship, and Ellen Battell Stoeckel Fellowship. From

2018 to 2021, she was an artist-in-residence at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. Kim has exhibited her work at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; the Broad Institute, Cambridge, MA; Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, New York, NY; de Cordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA; Tufts University Art Gallery, Medford, MA; Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore, Saratoga Springs, NY; Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY; among others. She teaches at Boston University, where she works with her scientist colleagues to further develop her experimental technique printing with melanin.

Lucy Kim: Mutant Optics is organized by Nina Bozicnik, Senior Curator, with Em Chan, Curatorial Assistant. Generous support is provided by the Imaginative Project Award. New work by Kim is funded with support from Creative Capital.

ABOUT THE HENRY

The Henry advances contemporary art and ideas. The museum is internationally recognized for groundbreaking exhibitions, for being on the cutting edge of contemporary art and culture, and for championing artists at every level of creation. Containing more than 28,000 works of art, the Henry's permanent collection is a significant cultural resource available to scholars, researchers, and the general public. The Henry is located on the University of Washington campus in Seattle, Washington. Visit henryart.org to learn more.