

Lee Bul

Interlude: Perdu

November 7, 2019—January 18, 2020

536 West 22nd Street, New York

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New York, October 9, 2019—Lehmann Maupin is pleased to announce *Interlude: Perdu*, a solo presentation of new works by South Korean artist Lee Bul. This exhibition will feature recent mixed media paintings from the artist's *Perdu* series that blend biomorphic and cybertronic forms, vividly yet delicately rendered in acrylic paint and mother of pearl. Among the most radical and internationally regarded figures in contemporary Korean art, this is Lee Bul's first U.S. exhibition since two of her sculptures were featured in the 58th Venice Biennale. This marked Lee Bul's second presentation in the Biennale; the artist was invited to return after representing her country in South Korea's pavilion and receiving an honorable mention in 1999. There will be an opening reception for the artist on November 7, at 536 West 22nd Street, from 6 to 8pm.

Lee Bul was born in the 1960s in South Korea under the country's military dictatorship. She thus came of age during a period of incredible social and economic upheaval marked by the transition to a democratic state. This political shift experienced over her lifetime has informed much of her work and has been expressed in various ongoing themes over the course of her career. Beginning her practice in the 1980s with performances and sculpture, Lee Bul has continued to push the boundaries of representation with her architectural and technologically wondrous installations and mixed-media paintings that expose the human desire to transcend mere evolutionary progress. Drawing inspiration from numerous literary, cinematic, and architectural sources, Lee Bul's work is a constantly expanding inquiry into the human condition and the failure of utopian dreams.

In her most recent *Perdu* works, Lee Bul explores the binary between the artificial and the organic, both conceptually and materially. Composed of organic and inorganic material such as mother of pearl, velvet, and acrylic paint, the artist's otherworldly visions of fragmented bodies are seemingly caught on the move, at various distances and in differing detail. For Lee Bul, these works are connected to earlier pieces that explored corporeal and linguistic themes, such as those in her *Cyborg* (1997-2011) and *Anagram* (1999-2006) series. The unfinished state of the forms in the *Perdu* works and overall theme of a physical and metaphorical yearning for completeness is rooted in these past iterations where anagrams, like cyborgs, are formed from reconfigurable parts.

The term *perdu* translates from French as "lost," notably used in *Proust's À la Recherche du Temps Perdu (In Search of Lost Time)*, 1913–1927. In the English language *perdu* can mean hidden or obscure, and is also a military term for soldiers assigned to a highly dangerous mission. Recently, Lee Bul has turned to militarization as a theme perpetually linked to the human condition, one that is almost tangential to utopia. This was best expressed in her monumental *Aubade V* (2019) sculpture included in the 51st Venice Biennale exhibition *May You Live In Interesting Times*. Constructed from repurposed steel from buildings located in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, the tower-like form flashed Morse Code and the International Code of Signals, both systems that communicate important messages of safety or distress.

In Interlude: Perdu, the forms depicted similarly display seemingly contradictory messages. In Lee Bul's *Perdu* works, her anthropomorphic forms are presented as beautiful, disturbing creatures that might have something to tell us about humanity's shortcomings. This message doubly cautions against blindly investing in any technotopian fantasy that promises perfection through bioengineering's transcendence of the human condition not collectively, as utopia was envisioned, but individually and unequally—the conditions of dystopia. In this exhibition, Lee Bul offers viewers the opportunity to contemplate the current state of the world through a vision of the future that offers both hope and fear. She invites us to consider the human impulse to promote visionary and idealistic notions as an attempt to fulfill the elusive promise of a truly egalitarian and harmonious existence.

About the Artist

Lee Bul (b. 1964, Yeongju; lives and works in Seoul) received a BFA in sculpture from Hongik University, Seoul, in 1987. Solo exhibitions of her work have been organized at the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA (2019); Hayward Gallery, London (2018); Martin Gropius-BauArt, Berlin (2018); Art Sonje Center, Seoul (2016 and 2012); Vancouver Art Gallery (2015); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2014); Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (2013); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012); Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris (2007); The Power Plant, Toronto (2002); New Museum, New York (2002); and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1997). Her work has been included in important group exhibitions and biennials such as *May You Live In Interesting Times*, 58th Venice

Biennale (2019); *Score_ Music for Everyone*, Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, Korea (2017); *X: Korean Art in the Nineties*, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2016); *The future is already here – it's just not very evenly distributed*, 20th Biennale of Sydney (2016); *Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2015); *Burning Down the House*, 10th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, Korea (2014); *Prospect 1: A Biennial for New Orleans*, New Orleans, LA (2008); *Not Only Possible, But Also Necessary: Optimism in the Age of Global War*, 10th International Istanbul Biennial (2007); and *dAPER Tutto*, 48th Venice Biennale (1999). Her work is in numerous international public and private collections, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; M+, Hong Kong; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate Modern, London; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.

In 2019, Lee Bul received the Ho-Am Prize for The Arts, which is awarded to people of Korean heritage who have contributed to the enrichment of culture and arts for humankind. In 2014, she received the Noon Award at the 10th Gwangju Biennale, given to an established artist who has produced the most experimental work that embodies the theme of the biennale. In 1999, Lee Bul was awarded an honorable mention at the 48th Venice Biennale for her contribution to both the Korean Pavilion and the international exhibition curated by Harald Szeemann.

About Lehmann Maupin

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996. The gallery represents a diverse range of contemporary artists and estates from around the world. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies. This mission has resulted in historic first exhibitions in New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul. For more information on the gallery and its artists, visit www.lehmannmaupin.com

Current & Upcoming Exhibitions

Alex Prager, *Play the Wind*, September 5–October 26, 536 West 22nd Street, NEW YORK

Kader Attia, *Mirrors of Emotion*, September 10–October 26, 501 West 24th Street, NEW YORK

Jennifer Steinkamp, *Still-Life*, September 19–October 30, 2019, HONG KONG

Liza Lou, *The River and the Raft*, September 26–November 9, 2019, SEOUL

Hernan Bas, *TIME LIFE*, November 7, 2019–January 4, 2020 536 West 22nd Street, NEW YORK

Helen Pashgian, November 14–December 22, 2109, HONG KONG, and November 14, 2019–February 1, 2020, SEOUL

For more information about Lee Bul or other Lehmann Maupin artists, please contact Kathryn McKinney at +1 212 255 2923 or kathryn@lehmannmaupin.com.

IMAGE: *Perdu XXV*, 2019, mother of pearl, acrylic paint on lacquered wooden base panel, steel frame triptych, 64.29 x 131.22 x 2.6 inches (framed) 163.3 x 333.3 x 6.6 cm. Courtesy Studio Lee Bul and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul.