

## Press Release

### Mire Lee

#### *Faces*

September 10–October 25, 2025

Public Reception: September 9, 6–8pm

Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles

**Sprüth Magers**

The work of Mire Lee fuses volatile substances with traditional sculptural materials and industrial remnants to produce haunting objects and installations. Equally beautiful and grotesque, her sinuous compositions twist into positions that evoke bodies, entrails and skeletal forms and touch upon notions of psychological tension and trauma. Following Lee's Hyundai Commission installation at Tate's Turbine Hall in 2024, Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are pleased to present *Faces*, the artist's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, which brings together new sculptural works that build upon the artist's recent installations, along with two early videos and a new suite of wall-based works.

Entering the gallery, visitors are confronted with a wall of "formwork" – a temporary structure used in construction to support wet concrete as it cures – which the artist has often used to delineate space and introduce echoes of past labor and presence. Opposite this barrier, which visitors must circumnavigate to access the rest of the exhibition, are two new series of concrete works: *Heads* and *Poles*. Lee's sculptures regularly evoke the human body, and *Heads* continues this exploration through the classical motif of the bust. Skull-like in shape, their molded concrete surfaces reminiscent of bone, these forms twist improbably upon each other. The artist's *Poles*, slender cast concrete cylinders compressed between construction fixtures, evoke upright, faceless bodies. In combination, the *Heads* and *Poles* suggest ancient materials and beings, not quite human, but generated from aspects of human industry.

A screen built from a grid of metal sheets (floor pieces and dripping trays from the artist's recent Turbine Hall installation) displays Lee's 2018 video, *Faces*. Composed of brief excerpts from Japanese pornography – an addiction that distressed the artist for periods of her life – the fragments focus only on moments just before violence begins. Isolated by Lee, the close-up shots of women's faces are seemingly innocuous, but the tension and angst held within them suggests something unsettling is about to occur. This feeling is compounded by the metallic screen, whose rust stains in the projector's light could be blood spattering. Like the formwork that first greets gallery visitors, Lee understands these reused surfaces as skins: worn and marked by use and residues, which add new temporal and psychic layers to each installation.

Bearing the same title, and created for this exhibition, *Faces* (2025) is a suite of paintings created by manipulating pigmented methylcellulose, sometimes on its own, other times applying it to delicate swaths of polyester construction mesh and other fabrics. A thickening agent, the methylcellulose contracts as it dries, gripping and pulling at the textile fibers in a way that suggests torn skin and generates many different compositions and surface qualities. Each of the *Faces* has its own aura, and together with the series' title, suggests a nameless crowd – victims, perhaps, of violence and terror. Suffering is implied through the dark red-brown tinting and lacerated membranes, but also beauty, transformation and redemption.

Equally reminiscent of the body, though its interiors rather than its surfaces, is *Untitled (my motorized Ophelia)* (2025), a new kinetic sculpture that follows a series of Lee's iconic motorized works (her first, *Ophelia*, she made in 2018). The work consists of a tentacular form built from myriad tubing and circuitry that rotates amid viscous liquid in a metal trough. Suspended from the ceiling, the form drags and rubs against the tray below, shifting unpredictably with an unsettling vitality. Like a wounded creature, it moves slowly, with appendages coiling and swiping as it turns. A machine at its heart, *Untitled (my motorized Ophelia)* adds a layer of technological breakdown and alienation to the environment Lee has devised.

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In *Sleeping Mom* (2020), by contrast, which is projected behind a second formwork wall, we encounter Lee's mother peacefully sleeping. The image is still, quiet and uneventful. As the video loops, we see echoes of something familiar: the rhythm of nights, of inner restfulness, but also the possibility of awakening. This work was first shown in the artist's solo exhibition *Carriers* (2022), which also included formwork barriers; much as a mother carries her child to term, the formwork births concrete facades that house others, creating a fluctuating dichotomy between container and contained.

In this combination of past and present works and materials, Lee transforms the gallery into a sensorial landscape of tension and fragility, where fluids and trembling structures evoke bodily systems pushed to their limits, caught between construction and disintegration. The result is an atmosphere that is simultaneously estranging and intimate; in its depths we recognize the intensities of the human experience.

Mire Lee (\*1988, Seoul) lives and works in Seoul and Amsterdam. In 2024, she presented a site-specific work at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall as a Hyundai Commission artist, which marked the first major presentation of Lee's work in the UK. Other solo exhibitions include New Museum, New York (2023), Zollamt – MMK, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (2022) and Art Sonje Center, Seoul (2020). Recent group exhibitions include National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art – MMCA, Seoul (2024), Kraftwerk Berlin (2023), Busan Biennale, La Biennale di Venezia and 58th Carnegie International (all 2022) and Schinkel Pavillion, Berlin (2021). This fall, her work appears in the 12th SITE Santa Fe International, curated by Cecilia Alemani; Okayama Art Summit 2025, Okayama, Japan; and the group exhibition *to ignite our skin* at SculptureCenter, New York.

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