

## Press Release

### ***territory***

Mire Lee, Liu Yujia, Gala Porras-Kim, Tan Jing, Zhang Ruyi

April 27–July 27, 2024

Public Reception: April 26, 6–9pm

Sprüth Magers, Berlin

**Sprüth Magers**

On the occasion of Gallery Weekend Berlin 2024, Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are pleased to present *territory*, a group show of works by Mire Lee, Liu Yujia, Gala Porras-Kim, Tan Jing, and Zhang Ruyi, curated by Shi-ne Oh. It will be Sprüth Magers' first group exhibition focusing exclusively on female Asian artists. The title, *territory*, naturally associated with aggressive political policies and behaviours, questions the vast definitions of borders and boundaries and how they both limit and liberate our transgressive desires on physical as well as psychological terrain.

The five artists will transform all of the gallery's spaces, premiering works that examine the bounds of the body, disgust and morality, and the restraints of language, history and memory. Diverse in media and approach, the artworks on view employ unpredictable materials to engage and challenge viewers' senses.

In the downstairs galleries, a literal division—a concrete wall produced especially for the show—sets the stage for a body of work by Gala Porras-Kim (b. 1984, Bogotá; lives and works in Los Angeles and London). Her research-based practice considers the relationship between cultural artefacts and the institutional conventions around registration, conservation and display. *Untitled (Efflorescence)* (2018/24) is a structure made with concrete supersaturated with salt, which will gradually migrate to the surface, causing its slow deterioration. The work references the use of natural processes of demolition to bypass regulations for the historic preservation of buildings.

Installed close by, *Out of an instance of expiration comes a perennial showing* (2022–ongoing) examines the conditions and limits of conservation methodology: mould spores collected from the British Museum's storage are propagated in the gallery. A living object, the large-scale work continues to change as the microorganisms and fungi grow. By displaying the germinating microbes that have digested microscopic particles of ancient artefacts, the viewer can witness the objects evolving into a new form. It is a return to their pre-institutional natural course of decay, shifting the argument for repatriation from a geographical traversal to an organic one.

Tan Jing (b. 1992, Shenzhen; lives and works in Guangdong) weaves reality, fiction, folklore, and personal memory into narratives, which she combines with surprising materials into multisensorial experiences. A distinct smell leads visitors to Tan Jing's installation, *Floor Tiles and Flowers* (2023), for which she blends various spices native to Thailand into brittle plaster tiles that crumble underfoot. In their different states of fracture, the plaster pieces speak to the fragility of memories and the complexity of diasporic family history. The olfactory experience is completed by scattered fabric flowers that emit the fragrance

of Thai talcum powder and are arranged into floral garlands in *The Souvenir* (2023). Her video installation *Nook of a Hazy Dream* (2023) plays on one manufactured and three handmade glass panels and follows Lap Hung, a fictional character grappling with his sense of identity after remigrating from Thailand to China in 1956, paralleling the life of Tan Jing's late grandfather.

Liu Yujia (b. 1981, Sichuan Province; lives and works in Beijing) presents three recent video works exploring the Chinese frontier region of the Changbai Mountains, a place steeped in complex geopolitical histories and extractive economies. Interested in the impact of territorial borders imposed on nature, she turns her lens onto various social contexts. In *A Darkness Shimmering in the Light* (2023), Liu Yujia weaves eco-fiction with drone footage, 16-mm film, ethnography, and mythology to create a space where the political, personal and spiritual meet.

The black-and-white video *Harvesting* (2023) depicts diligent Korean women—ethnic minority workers—silently picking cultivated wood ear fungi in the Chinese-North Korean border region. *Mushrooms* (2023) features hypnotic close-ups of the boreal forests of Northeast Asia set to an atmospheric underscore and the sound of birds chirping, leaves rustling, and branches snapping. Liu Yujia resists an anthropomorphic perspective as the camera moves close to the ground or captures the papery gills of white mushrooms. Fusing documentary and narrative storytelling, the work offers a captivating view of the interactions between insects, spiders, trees and fungi—a ballet of the undergrowth.

In the upstairs gallery, Mire Lee (b. 1988, Seoul; lives and works between Berlin and Seoul) confronts the boundaries between the abject and the arousing. The visceral works, which draw on scatology, are rooted in the uncomfortable. Composed of a mixture of organic and synthetic materials such as cement, wood, silicone, oil and clay, they centre around the hole as a metaphoric motif.

From the cavernous concrete mixers of the kinetic sculpture *Look, I'm a fountain of filth raving mad with love* (2024) comes a raucous noise as the machines slowly spin their contents. The work's title stems from a poem by Kim Eon Hee, who is known for her brutal images of bodies and eroticism. Elsewhere, Mire Lee indicates the body in absentia: a sculpture's burlap and concrete structure, its bulges, gaping holes, and cracks, suggests—with a blasé morbidity—dried entrails. Addressing fear, violence, trauma and mental breakdown, her noisy and distinct-smelling installation defies taboos and explores art as an intensely physical experience.

In the gallery's Window, Zhang Ruyi (b. 1985, Shanghai; lives and works in Shanghai) examines China's accelerated urbanization in the 1990s, interrogates the contradictions of city life, and reimagines public space. Her sculptures and paintings are based on common construction materials found in large cities, such as cement, tile, plastic film, graph and grid paper, and detritus from building sites. Employing the cactus as a central image, the works explore the tension and coexistence between the organic and the inorganic. Take *Submerged Landscape-1* (2019), an aquarium which contains two identical concrete cacti sculptures, each skewered with two pieces of rebar. Over time, the water in the artificial environment causes erosion and moss growth on the objects' surfaces. In other places, the prickly plants thrive despite the inhospitable conditions: cement cacti grow out of cement PVC pipes in *Modern Fossil (Pipe)-3* (2022–23) and *Perishable Modernity-2* (2023), while *Planter-5* (2018) and *Planter-8* (2022) have the desert flora's spines sprouting on rubble.

For further information and press inquiries, please contact Silvia Baltschun (sb@spruethmagers.com).

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