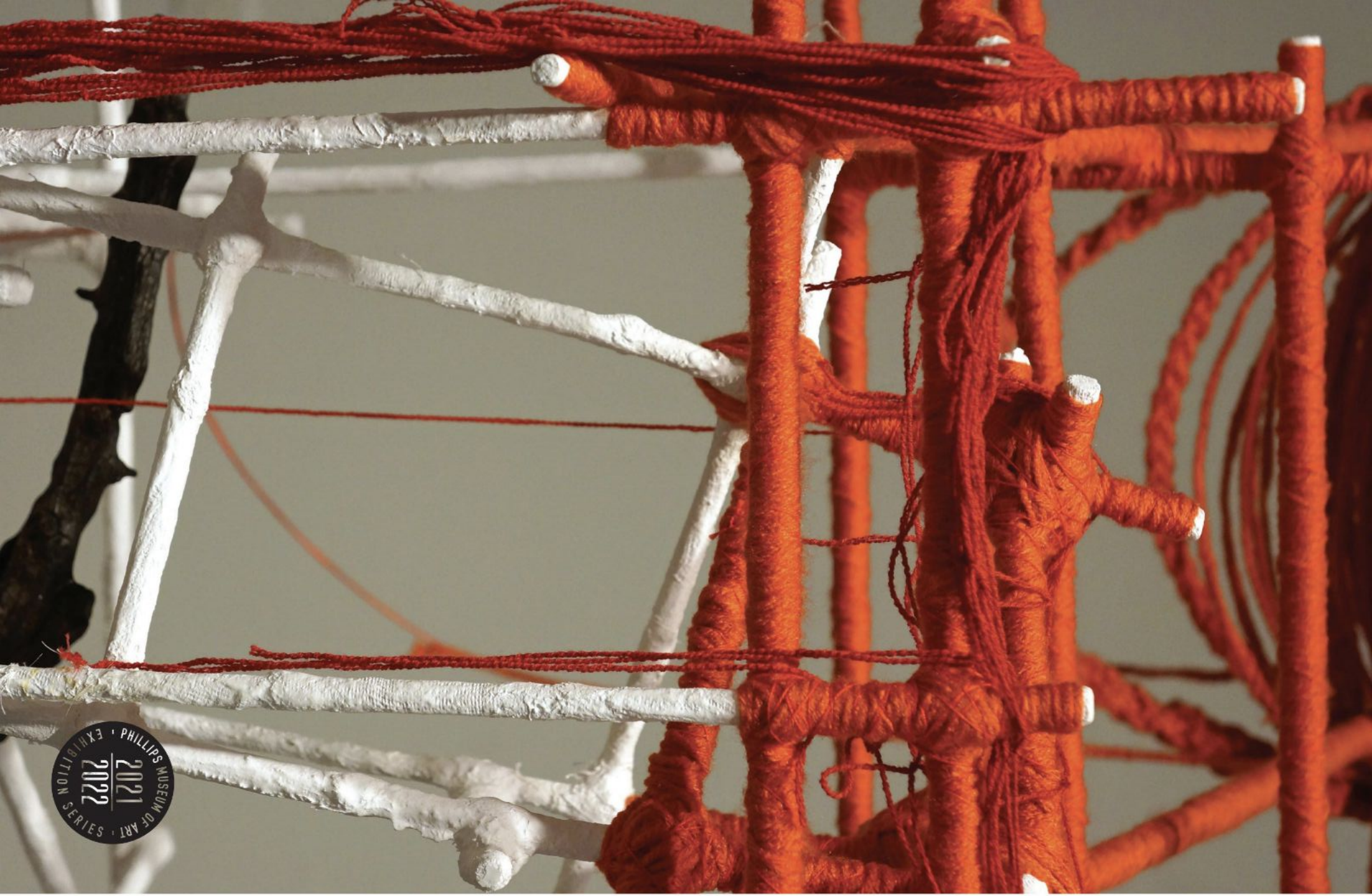


SANDRA EULA LEE | ***SLOW BURN***

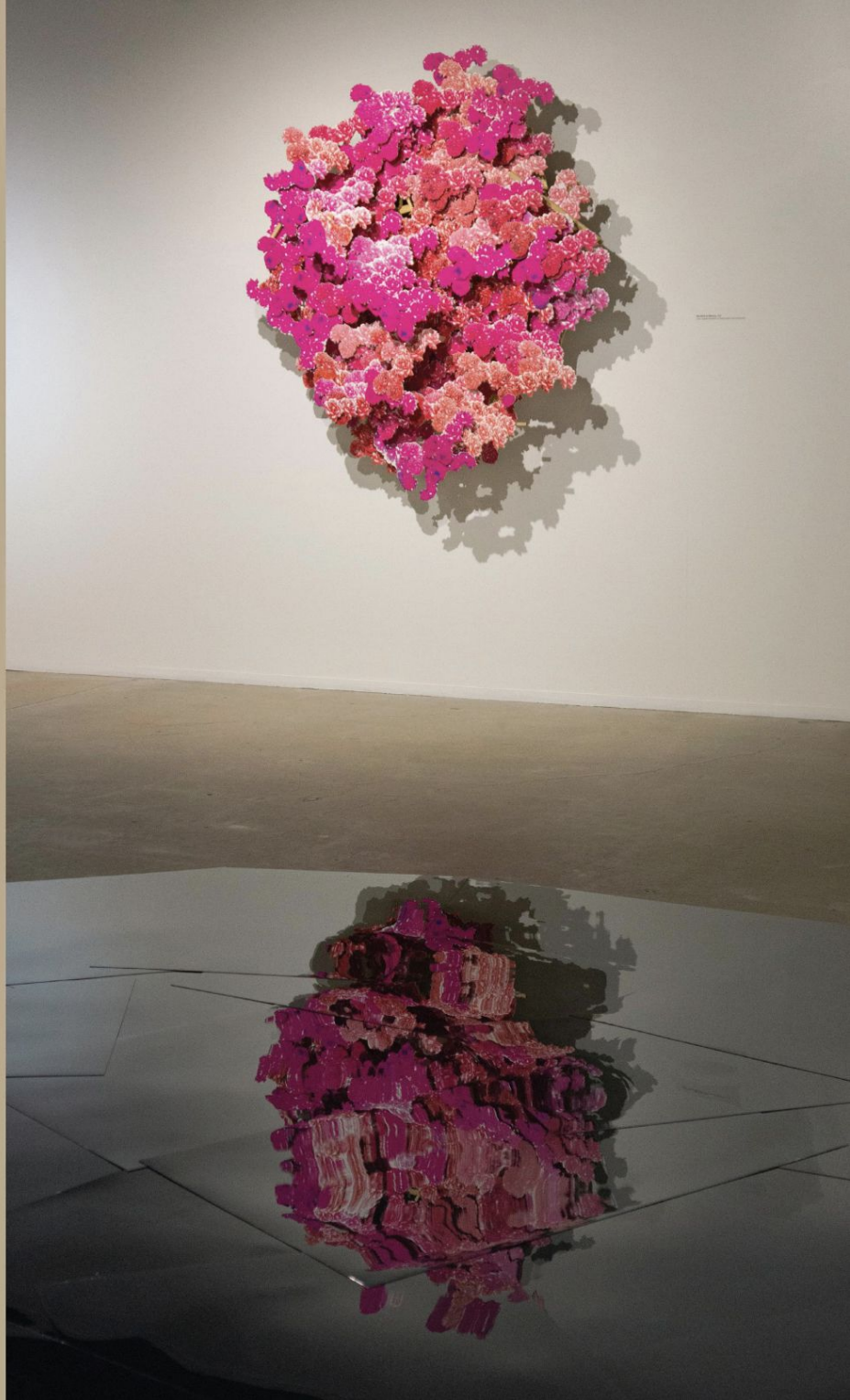
Sandra Eula Lee: Slow Burn
February 1–April 28, 2022

Phillips Museum of Art
Rothman Gallery

F&M PHILLIPS MUSEUM OF ART

(cover photo)
Sandra Eula Lee, *The Walking Mountain (Ferment/Foment)*, 2020. Woven yarn, bamboo stakes, gypsum plaster, sealed containers of fermenting peppers and garlic, red chili pepper powder, charred wood branch, rolling pallet, house paint, and glass, 52 x 30 x 3 in. © Sandra Eula Lee

(right)
Sandra Eula Lee, *The Work of Memory*, 2007. Color copies mounted on foam board and wood structure, 84 x 75 x 15 in. © Sandra Eula Lee

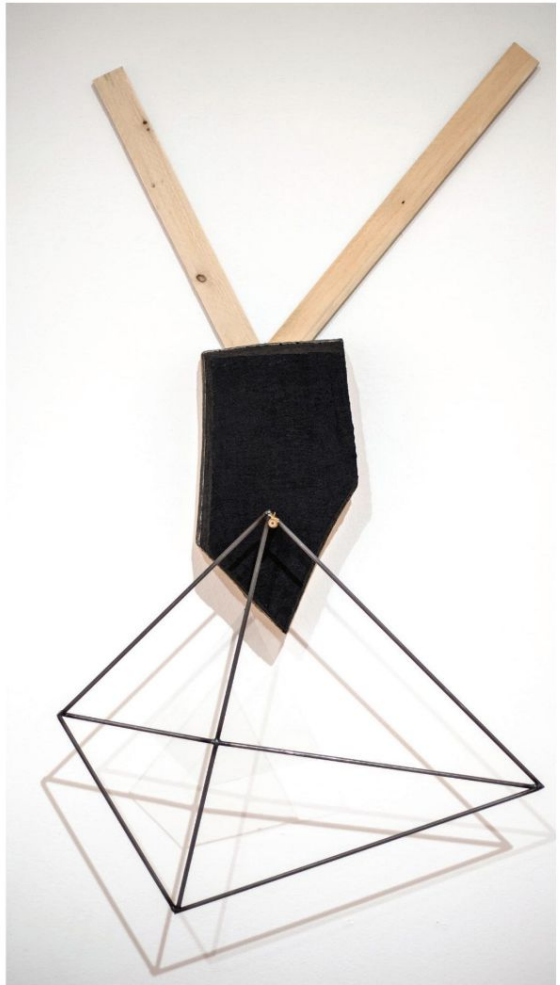


Sandra Eula Lee's Impromptu Gardens & Ponds

Christopher Bennett

> *"Events in this sense are only one mode of the contingent whose integration (perceived as necessary) into a structure gives rise to the aesthetic emotion."*[1]
>
> Claude Lévi-Strauss

In Sandra Eula Lee's work, there is a space that lies between the 'making do' that is so evident in her artistic procedures and what could be called the 'make of' the actual object or arrangement. On the side of 'making do,' like the 'bricoleur' or agent of 'bricolage' analyzed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his book titled *La Pensée Sauvage* (The Savage Mind), first published in 1962, Lee uses her own hands to make impromptu constructions adjusted to the spaces they occupy.[2] Like a 'bricoleur' (or a person who engages in the fabrication of something from a diverse range of available things[3]), Lee largely makes do with materials she finds in her daily environment—deploying the odds and ends left behind by construction and industry in the cities she has resided in and visited over the last ten to fifteen years in South Korea, China, and the United States. Lee has fitted together the unusable remnants of electrical cord or excess bricks left behind at demolition and building sites, for example, alongside other materials typically used in construction such as glass, insulation, and asphalt, to configure her own sets of aesthetic events.



In each of her works, chance and contingency—the precise color of a portion of leftover electric wire as it was found at a particular site, for instance—play a significant role. Her arrangements, at times, suggest a ceaseless becoming or endless putting together of things within the constraints of the culture such works emerge from and occupy, as if the object the spectator encounters in the gallery or museum, while being of some generic type ('pond,' 'garden,' or 'mountain,' for example), could always be configured otherwise.

While on the 'bricolage' side no single material or element Lee employs has only one definite use, regarding the 'make of' (as in the make of something—procedures of making, compositional choices, and the pursuit of an overall formation), she cleanly and elegantly subordinates her raw materials to the purposes of her larger project. Her structures are adeptly rendered; each is a smattering of materials or larger shape with dignity in its own right. *Jimenqiao Village* [Fig. 15], for example, exhibits both deliberation and gracefulness: two slats of wood moored to the wall at different angles appear above a wedge of insulation dipped in asphalt, a pyramidal shape welded out of steel by the artist (this shape, which Lee considers a primordial symbol of a 'place' or 'dwelling' [Fig. 16], appears as early as 2014 in her artist's book *The Walking Mountain*), and a single shard of clear, reflective glass poised at about standard eye level. In addition to reading as a bit casual and off the cuff, Lee sets forward an object of knowledge, a mechanism for reflecting upon the world. She reorganizes the remainders of earlier events carried out by others, such as a construction team's putting up of a building. Yet on the side of the 'make of,' or art as a methodical, research-based undertaking, she manipulates her materials to assemble a structure that, however minutely, actively brings about a change in the world as it was before she got started. Therefore, although Lee brings the stuff of bricolage and 'making do' to bear on the aesthetic plane or that of thoughtful looking, this does not rule out systematicity, a sense of necessity, or the deployment of expertise—aesthetic, experiential, technical—in the same work of art.

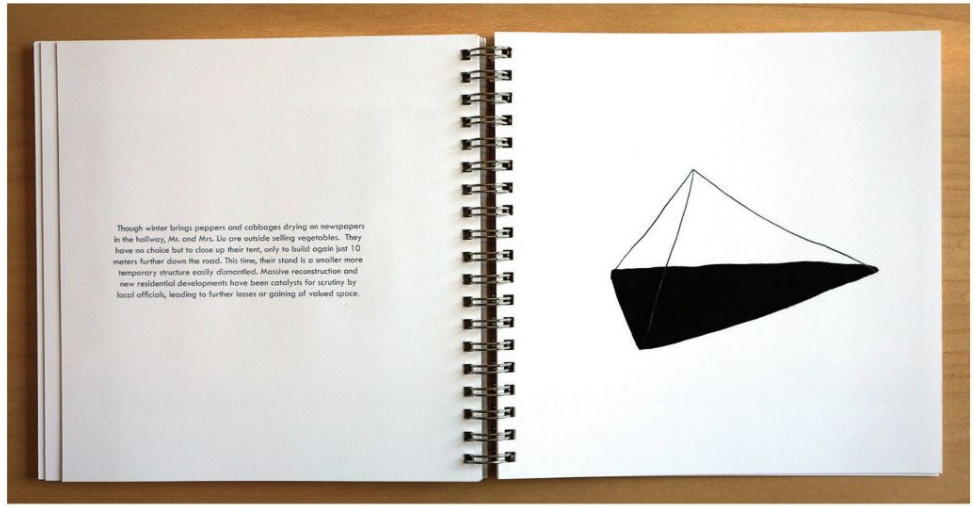


Fig. 15 Sandra Eula Lee, *Jimenqiao Village*, 2016. Glass, steel, wood, insulation foam, asphalt, and bamboo, 41 x 24 x 6 in. © Sandra Eula Lee

Fig. 16 Sandra Eula Lee, *The Walking Mountain*, 2014. Artist's book, 7 x 7 in., 52 pages, edition of 3. © Sandra Eula Lee

The viewing of Lee's production partly unfolds around this distinction between becoming attuned to the artist's manifold ways of 'making do,' on one hand, and soberly deciphering the structure of the work as an outward presence, on the other. Without positing that the artist advances a reconciliation of these two dimensions, the 'making do' and the 'make of,' what would it be like if these orders were somehow set peculiar equilibrium with one another? With first-generation Korean-American parents and a larger family still in Korea forced, like so many around the time of the Korean War (1950–53), to flee the North for the South, Lee has consistently described her once-removed native land, Korea, and its typography as a 'wounded landscape' (suggesting some irreducible breaking open and apart or distress). Might, then, Lee's striving to accomplish a dynamic balance between 'making do' and the 'make of,' along with other opposing ideas and/or forces, point to the possibility of healing, without claiming that she sets forward such healing point blank, particularly as something accomplished once and for all?

One of the artists associated with Italian Arte Povera, a group Lee has studied and expressed an affinity with, Alighiero Boetti once said something of general import to Lee's approach. In 1982, the Italian art critic Bruno Corà asked Boetti, "What's the ultimate rule that basically and invariably governs your work?"[5] To this, Boetti (or as he officially renamed himself around 1971, splitting his name in two parts, *"Alighiero e Boetti,"* or "Alighiero and Boetti") answered,

> *It's managing to balance things.… I see balance as forever taking a weight from one plate to another, in a quest for equilibrium; if there's more weight on the left, then you dash to the right and put something there, and a little bit more, and so on and so forth.*[6]

Corà queries, "There's always a difference?" Boetti replies, at once playfully and acutely, "Right, so there's no straight line that's the balancing factor. Continual motion exists, which is the 'ping-pong' and the 'vice versa'."[7]

In relation to such larger issues, this essay sets out to retrace the development of Lee's interest in the 'garden' and 'pond' between 2009 and 2012. It then provides an extended analysis of a particularly evocative work titled *Portable Pond* (2010). In such arrangements, Lee, in classic 'bricoleur' fashion, starts from a sign or image—to wit, a 'garden' or 'pond'—that already exists in reality and brings with it an array of cultural associations. In addition to examining *Portable Pond* in relation to two roughly similar works envisioned by Boetti and another protagonist of Arte Povera, Pino Pascali, in 1967–68, this portion of my essay considers Lee's evocation, across her various works, of some foundational disruption that has taken place. After a brief exploration of the matters of place and scale in Lee's project, the artist's most recent undertakings of 2012–17 take center stage, in which her earlier research into the 'garden' undergoes projection onto the vertical plane of the wall. As Kenneth I. Helphand notes in a book Lee sees as an important resource for her practice titled *Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime* (2006), the 'garden' is, by definition, in some ways a space apart; it is also highly malleable.[8] Yet, while it may provide a space of calm and reflection, the 'garden' for Lee is not simply a place to forget about the world or put serious concerns aside but a site at which to respond to and, at times, oppose patterns within contemporary life.[9] Simultaneously, for Lee making a 'garden,' although retaining a fundamental ambiguity, is at bottom an assertive act. To embrace the thematic zone of the 'garden,' for her, is to assume its "promise," as Helphand says, of "beauty where there is none, hope over despair, optimism over pessimism, and … life in the face of death."[10]

Between 2009 and 2012 Lee began making the works for which she is now best known, namely her three- and two- dimensional arrangements that explore the theme of the 'garden,' principally as an East Asian formation, and the 'ponds' often located within them. Lee's interest in the garden first emerged in 2009 when she was participating in the International Studio Artist's Program (IASK) in Goyang, Korea, just north of Seoul, run by Korea's National Museum of Contemporary Art. As she confided to Anna Carnick in 2011 in an interview published in *Artslope* magazine,

> *What began [in Goyang in 2009] as a search into Korea's wartime history evolved into a wider interest in the landscape and how it has been reconstructed over time. Driving to see the country's landscape, the mountains, and surrounding waters outside the city left a great impression … as did the constant sight of construction.*[11]

After Goyang, Lee completed two more residencies in 2010: one at the nearby Nanji Art Studio in Seoul run by the Seoul Museum of Art and then another in Xiamen, China at the Chinese-European Art Center (CEAC). Over the course of both residencies, Lee's concern with the 'garden'

Fig. 17 Sandra Eula Lee, *Two Waters*, 2010, with *MountainMountain* in foreground, 2010. Construction rocks, glass pane, spray paint, and cut and painted acrylic, dimensions variable. Exhibition view, Chinese-European Art Center (CEAC), Xiamen, China. © Sandra Eula Lee

increasingly came into focus. She explained her travels and thought process around that time to Carnick as follows:

> *During my time in China [in 2010] I was greatly affected by the gardens in the water towns of Suzhou, and later by the mountains and surrounding waters of Xiamen that related to the landscape I experienced [earlier] in Korea. Over time I began to consider the garden's relationship with the landscape—how the garden is essentially an expression of people's philosophy or attitude with their surroundings. Both gardens and landscapes are constructions, and both are ephemeral, or cyclical, in nature. This thread shaped the travel and work I did his past year [2010–11] in Korea and China, considering a variety of garden structures and altered landscapes.*[12]

During her time at CEAC in Xiamen in 2010 Lee exhibited a large, floor-bound arrangement titled *Two Waters* [Fig. 17] consisting of two 'ponds' comprised of dull teal sheets of cut acrylic spread across the gallery floor by hand and topped with discreet sculptures. One of these last sculptures titled *MountainMountain* [Fig. 17, foreground], consists of stones collected from the Xiamen seashore stacked to form a triangle on both sides of a triangular sheet of glass with a burst of spray-painted lemon yellow at the top center suggesting a sun. The arrangement of rocks in *MountainMountain* connects with a centuries-old gardening tradition in Korea in which rock-arrangement is considered an essential element.

On the next 'pond' or plane of water further back, Lee has included a 'decorative pavilion' on top of the acrylic sheets like those dotting the beautiful gardens of *Soswaewon* in Korea or the famed West Lake in Hangzhou, China. This second discreet sculpture, *Floating Pavilion* [Fig. 18], is comprised of a painted wood base topped with two abutting chairs, a clear glass pane about the same size as the pieces of dull teal acrylic on the floor, and rocks salvaged from construction sites piled up, again, on both sides of the central glass pane to form a single, bifurcated mound. The back sides of the chairs have been painted with black and yellow bands—yellow, black, and yellow at the left and, reversing that order, black, yellow, black at the right—forming a pattern highly reminiscent of the striated hazard or caution tape often used at construction sites. Looking at either of the two extended 'ponds,' the viewer can easily imagine the artist's act of manually distributing the acrylic sheets across the floor. As Lee noted about this work looking back in 2016, "In … *Two Waters*, I centered my installation on a pond I constructed out of industrial materials … I carefully placed on the floor to create a larger reflective surface." Each of the 'ponds' is also clearly made from bits and pieces, or broken up internally, and thus possesses a slightly unsettled status. Lee drew attention to this in 2016: after pointing out how "Traditional Korean and Chinese garden design [typically] includes a central reflective pond that provides an area that mirrors back the surrounding elements of the garden landscape," she added, "[my] pond, however, was both portable and fragmented, breaking up the reflections it provided."[14]

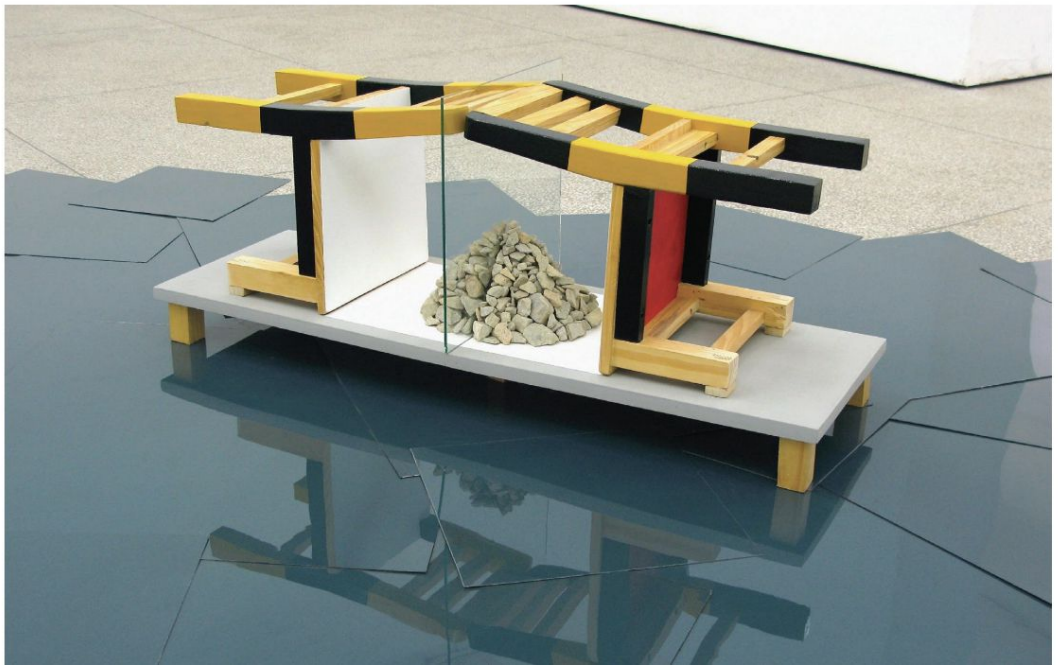


Fig. 18 Sandra Eula Lee, *Two Waters*, 2010, with *Floating Pavilion*, 2010. Construction rocks, two wood chairs, glass pane, painted wood panel, and cut and painted acrylic, dimensions variable. Exhibition view, Chinese-European Art Center (CEAC), Xiamen, China. © Sandra Eula Lee

Next, in 2011, Lee returned to the U.S. for a residency and solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden (BBG) in New York. That year, running from March 27 to June 5, she remounted *Two Waters* at the BBG galleries. Then, just a few weeks later, she traveled back to Korea where she displayed *Two Waters* again at Seoul's *Art Space Pool* from June 24 to July 24.

For their discussion of 2011 published in *Artslope*, Lee and Carnick explored the BBG project and installation. In addition to *Two Waters*, her exhibition there included earlier works, such as *Seeds in a Wild Garden* [Fig. 19], first produced in Goyang in 2009, alongside some brand new offerings. To make *Seeds in a Wild Garden*, Lee configured leftover bricks, wood, plastic parts, tubing, nails, and even a rubber glove salvaged from construction sites in Goyang to form a single, slightly irregularly shaped tuft on the floor. Before laying them out, Lee painted all of these components in the color palette of the neighborhood gardens—bright and dark green, red, and candy-like orange, yellow, and pink—she discovered in between Goyang's many construction zones and apartment blocks. Indeed, with its vibrant colors, *Seeds in a Wild Garden* may come closest within Lee's body of work to suggesting something typically seen in a garden, namely, plant life and flowers (yet there is ambiguity here; in addition to flowers, the yellow and orange could also refer to caution tape or construction cones). Lee found herself especially struck in Goyang and, later, other locations too, by the ad hoc or 'impromptu' gardens mounted and tended by anonymous civilians in the interstices of the city. Such "improbable gardens," as Helphand calls them, found in unexpected places, can

sometimes be formal and traditional sort: at stake here, as Helphand puts it, is the difference between seeing "a garden in your backyard versus an identical garden on a highway meridian,"[15] and *Seeds in a Wild Garden* seems to derive a good deal of its inspiration from gardens of the latter variety. Precisely because it is out of place, before such an "improbable garden" the onlooker experiences a shock of suddenly recognizing the form and elements of a garden—and, with this, a renewal of the power of a garden to convey beauty, comfort, meaning, and human resourcefulness and ingenuity in the first place.[16]

Lee also deepened her research by studying Japanese gardens and spending time at the BBG's majestic *Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden*. As she told Carnick,

> *At the BBG I started with Japanese garden traditions, spending time in the Garden and meeting with curators…. With the librarian's help, I'm mining the archives and reading books that approach the garden as a container for ideas and identity. This is my interest in bringing my artwork to the BBG audience, to highlight alternate forms of garden making and question some of the cultural assumptions that are attached.*[17]

It was during her Brooklyn residency that Lee first happened upon Helphand's book, *Defiant Gardens* as well, which extensively explores, as she just put it, "alternate forms of garden making."[18] His concept of a "defiant garden," in particular, that stands "not in harmony with but in opposition to its location, asserting its presence and almost demanding a response from its … visitors,"[19] added momentum to her preexisting interest in the garden as an atypical place allowing for contemplation

Fig. 19 Sandra Eula Lee, *Seeds in a Wild Garden*, 2009. Rubble collected from construction sites in Korea, house paints in colors from local gardens, dimensions variable. © Sandra Eula Lee

and self-sustainability, but also as a site of possible resistance and pronounced artifice ('artificial'—in a positive sense—in that it is clearly tailored to meet specifically human needs). As Lee explains,

> *Helphand proposes that the power of a garden can be strongest when it exists in inhospitable conditions…. Focusing mostly on gardens made during wartime, Helphand's book really resonated with me … creating further connections with the work I started [earlier] in Korea. Images … in the [BBG] exhibition include documentation of various gardens created amongst the construction sites and historical landscape [I witnessed] in Korea and China.*[20]

Next, *Two Waters* traveled to Seoul's *Art Space Pool,* completing a round trip of sorts (having started percolating in Korea and then made its way from Xiamen, to New York, and back to Korea). In the catalog commemorating the exhibition, Lee embraced Helphand's terminology, calling her own works 'defiant gardens'. As she explained,

> *Helphand discusses [in Lee's estimation] how the power of a garden can be even greater when created in inhospitable environments. Making a garden can help a person feel more at home, even in changing conditions. Helphand focuses on gardens made by humans during times of war, as well spontaneous growth that can transform the face of a stricken landscape.*[21]

Speaking about her own work through Helphand—what a garden can do "even in changing conditions," and particularly within circumstances defined by continual construction and accelerated modernization like those she witnessed in Seoul, Xiamen, or a place like Beijing, remains one of Lee's primary artistic interests.

Thus, to retrace Lee's steps, her involvement with 'gardens' and 'ponds' began during the time she spent in Korea in 2009, a country which she has succinctly described as "a peninsula surrounded by mountains and by water." Historically, Korea's terrain has also been strongly marked by war, such as the month-long battle at Heartbreak Ridge near Chorwan in September 13–October 15, 1951. Additionally, for 2,000 years, Korea has been a country filled with gardens (typically Korean gardens are of a more asymmetrical and rugged sort than their Japanese or Chinese counterparts). Recently, such gardening practices, particularly in areas like Seoul, have been increasingly set against circumstances of rapid change and urban development. As Lee Young-Wook states in an essay about Lee's work, "It cannot be exaggerated that the land of Korea was covered by gardens in the not so distant past. Nowadays this landscape has been torn up, overdeveloped and overspread with apartment buildings."[23]

When Lee left Korea for Xiamen and broader travels in China in 2010, she found herself again in areas undergoing massive redevelopment. In 1980 the Chinese government had designated Xiamen,

for instance, as a Special Economic Zone—one of the select areas of the country opened to the global economy and foreign companies in the years following Deng Xiaoping's market reforms of 1978, which gradually integrated Communist China's economy with international markets. Thus, in Xiamen and greater China, as Sigurdur Gudmundsson has noted, Lee hit upon "commonalities with her experiences in South Korea [earlier] where new construction was consistently underway and neighborhoods and communities are also fast changing."[24] Before returning to the U.S. for her time at the BBG in 2011 and the subsequent show in Seoul, it was evident to Lee that her own work with the 'garden'—in addition to providing respite from such phenomena and a space for reflection—would somehow have to grapple with and address such larger realities unfolding around it.

In 2010, the year Lee spent in Seoul and Xiamen, she also envisaged *Portable Pond* [Fig. 20]. Here again, in this floor-bound arrangement, the artist begins from a sign or image—to wit, a reflective 'pond' like that typically encountered in an East Asian garden—already out in the world and which, as Lévi-Strauss puts it, "to some extent has been transmitted in advance."[25]

Once again, it is not difficult to imagine Lee's scattering these roughly fifty sheets of painted, cut acrylic across the floor. The main 'pond' is also paired with two wooden poles or markers painted with alternating bands of yellow and black. The planes of acrylic vary in size: the smallest sheets appear in the half nearest the poles while the largest populate the opposite side.

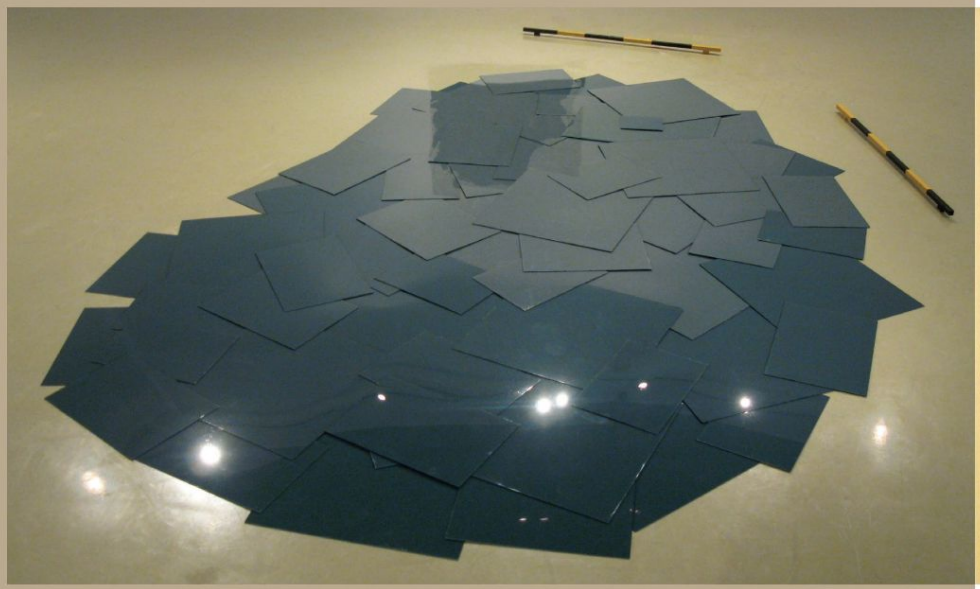


Fig. 20 Sandra Eula Lee, *Portable Pond*, 2010. Cut and painted acrylic, wood, dimensions variable. © Sandra Eula Lee

Part of the evocativeness of *Portable Pond* resides in the tension created between the factual, literal qualities of the materials employed, which have their own assertive properties and read as self-consciously constructed, and the imagery (in this case a 'pond' within a garden) they evoke. Positioned before the work, there can be an unsteady oscillation between these two levels of response. Arguably, Lee posits a space or gap between awareness of the concrete materials deployed and that which they mimetically depict. Indeed, it is likely such work unfolds in and around this very gap. As Lee puts it, "the meaning of a garden [for me] is the space that lies between the actual materials employed and the image of the landscape that it represents."[26]

In *Portable Pond,* the sheets of dull teal or turquoise acrylic, spread out and overlapping, come together to form a single, oblong shape. In an actual garden, of course, such a 'pond' would reflect the surrounding landscape, such as trees nearby and the sky.

In a traditional Korean garden, the landscape would typically include evergreens, pear trees, and bamboo forests. Situated within the highly self-conscious and stripped-down context of the art gallery or museum, however, Lee's 'pond' does not reflect surrounding plant life or the sky, but the gallery or museum space itself and possibly the viewer's image as they peer in from above. In one photograph [Fig. 20], the surface of *Portable Pond* reflects the empty space and electric track-lighting on the ceiling

Fig. 21 Sandra Eula Lee, *Deep Waters (Pacific),* 2011. Torn pieces of Korean newspapers, wood panel, 35 3/4 x 42 1/8 in. © Sandra Eula Lee (left)

Fig. 22 *View of Town and Volcano*, Shrine VII, Çatal Hüyük, ca. 6000 BE. Wall painting. Photo: Common domain. (top)

overhead; near top center, a separate work hanging on a nearby wall, *Deep Waters (Pacific)* [Fig. 21] appears reflected upside down like a wavy, rectangular mirage with enduring presence. *Deep Waters (Pacific),* a collage made from torn pieces of Korean newspapers, as Lee Young-Wook notes, "visualizes the Pacific Ocean … moving, deepening and expanding itself."[27] Thus, in this photograph of *Portable Pond*, one body of water appears reflected in another.

The two painted wood poles, each supported by two small feet, drive home the entire arrangement's self-consciously fabricated character. In addition to warning the spectator, hazard tape-like, not to step any further, they also resemble the levers included in photographic reproductions of works of art from time to time to convey scale. In one such photo of a mural depicting a volcano beside clusters of Neolithic homes located at a shrine in Çatal Hüyük in modern-day Turkey, a striated beam like this [Fig. 22] rests on the floor to communicate the painting's size in relation to the surrounding architecture. Typically, such indicators are placed around the work sometime after its completion by agents other than the artist(s), yet Lee's painted levers are part of the work from the moment of its unveiling. Read from left to right, again enacting a basic pattern of reversal, the one at the left begins with black and, after a few alternations, ends with yellow, while the one at the right begins with yellow and ends with black. If the two poles were simply collapsed inward and put side by side, however, they would be practically identical. That is to say, their positioning suggests a reversal. Lee also leaves an area of empty space in between the two poles.

Art critics have previously compared Lee's three-dimensional works to those of Robert Smithson (Smithson's 'non-sites,' to be sure, come to mind), Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Hammons, Jessica Stockholder, and Paul Thek.[28] *Portable Pond*, in particular, is also strikingly reminiscent of the experiments of the Italian Arte Povera artists, which Lee carefully studied in Italy in 2006 as a visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome.

Lee's spreading sheets of acrylic across the floor to arrive at a small pool positioned in the art gallery or museum, for instance, is not too far afield from Boetti's *Pack*, which he mounted at Milan's Galleria de Nieubourg in March-April 1968 at a solo exhibition titled *Shaman/Showman*.[29] As Boetti told the art critic Mirella Bandini in 1972, explaining this last, comical title a little and his and his Arte Povera peer's procedures around 1966–69, "This is what was going on: the feeling of being a shaman, a bit of a magician, who became a showman, who took everyday objects and put them together in slightly different situations."[30] To make *Pack* at Galleria de Nieubourg, which he conceived as a prototype for a larger work he hoped to mount outdoors on a hill in Ivrea as part of an ultimately unrealized group project he was planning titled *Parco magico* (Magic Park) to include Luciano Fabro, Mario and Marisa Merz, and other Arte Povera figures, Boetti placed a plastic tarp over a slightly elevated, rectangular frame positioned on the floor. Next, he secured the tarp at the edges with rocks fetched from the Po River, filled the resulting depression within with water, and placed fragments of plastic on the water's upper surface to arrive at a tableau of fractured pieces with thin gaps between them. At the time Boetti was fascinated by "pack ice" found at the earth's poles: when temperatures get high enough, sunlight causes the initially unbroken sheets of ice on the surface of the sea to crack, resulting in a field of shattered, distinct sections, yet some idea of the initial, unbroken sheet can still be intuited. In this last way, in Boetti's view, the image of the 'pack,' in his words, furnishes a powerfully condensed image of "the missing unity, which doesn't exist."[31]

The acrylic sheets comprising Lee's *Portable Pond,* instead of being separated by intervals, overlay each other every which way. The outer edge of *Portable Pond* is also jagged and oblong, not set within a rectangular frame. The empty space that is there is mostly around the work, providing a place to stand, perhaps reversing into a 'bank' in the spectator's imagination, and to take things in. Unlike a floor piece by Carl Andre, the viewer cannot walk across *Portable Pond's* upper surface, and, as the poles with their caution pattern perhaps portend, if one were to walk across the acrylic sheets they would likely shift and slide about upon contact. Not being able to walk across the work is fitting for Lee's actual imagery: a 'pond,' after all, is not something typically journeyed across on foot, unless it's ice-skating season (and such things happen rarely in official gardens and certainly in Louisiana, of all places). Rather, Lee's 'pond' is a space apart, a space for reflection, literally and figuratively.

Fig. 23 Pino Pascali,
32 MQ Di Mare Circa (32 Square Meters of Sea, Approximately), 1967. Iron pans, water, and colored aniline dye, 3 3/8 x 43 3/8 x 2 1/2 in., each pan. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome. Photo: Cosmo Leara.

Lee's evocation of a 'pond' in the gallery or museum also calls to mind Pascali's playfully titled *32 MQ Di Mare Circa (32* Square Meters of Sea, Approximately) (1967) [Fig. 23], in which Pascali repurposes prefabricated metal pans, real water, and synthetic blue dye to configure a stretch of vibrant blue ocean, like that found along the Adriatic coast in his native region of Puglia, indoors. Pascali, like Lee, was attentive to negative space, leaving an empty zigzag passageway cutting through the pans at one of the corners. Here an especially adventurous viewer can walk through Pascali's zigzag trench, albeit precariously, as recorded in a photograph taken by Claudio Abate recording Pascali doing just this when the work was first unveiled in Foligno in 1967 (I survived the trek myself in 2005–06 at Rome's Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna more than once when this work was up all year).

Both Lee and Pascali use commonly available materials to configure an image of something typically encountered outdoors within the interior space of the gallery or museum. If Pascali is interested in referencing nature within the gallery but also establishing an unsteady interplay between the natural and the artificial in the work proper (setting real water side by side with patently synthetic, blue dye or rectilinear, industrially fabricated pans, for example)—Lee proceeds from a sign, 'garden' or 'pond,' in which nature and culture are already profoundly enmeshed with one another from the very beginning. Both artists, too, while evoking 'nature,' use markedly synthetic materials to the degree of drawing attention to their own work's plainly fabricated or fictional character—thus recalling Giorgio Vasari's conception of a figure like Michelangelo during the Renaissance not as an 'artist' in today's sense, but as an *'artifice,'* or *'artificer,'* from the Latin *artifex.*[32]

In *Portable Pond* the scattered acrylic sheets come together to form a single 'pool' yet also read as fragments, suggesting some foundational disruption that has taken place. Indeed, much of the sophistication of Lee's works, across the board, derives from how they speak to some irreducible disarticulation that has occurred. Or, as Lee has stated, drawing attention to this facet of her output, "echoes of division" and "the spaces between run through [the work] both conceptually and formally."[33]

Vis-à-vis some definitive splitting apart or separation that has taken place, Lee's artistic gestures embody an attempt at a reparative gesture—one that aims to suture the rifts it posits without imposing any such healing on the viewer tout court or even necessarily achieving it in the object per se. As Lee Young-Wook clarifies, moreover, the 'garden' itself in Korea and East Asia has been associated for centuries with the impetus to reclaim mental balance within challenging and even destabilizing circumstances. This, too, comes to Lee ready-made in the very notion of the 'garden' or 'pond.' As Lee Young-Wook states, gardens and gardening have been pursued in Korea for centuries as "a practical way of finding peace, balance and stability for the human mind."[34] Through her use of unorthodox materials and larger social preoccupations, however, Lee partly subverts such long-standing gardening practices, particularly those of a strictly conventional or highly escapist bent.

The evocation of some foundational disarticulation in *Portable Pond* relates, too, to pivotal dichotomies, such as the polarization between 'making do' and the 'make of,' concrete materiality and mimetic evocation, internality and externality, and other contrasting ideas and/or forces as well, that await being actively taken up by the spectator. Generally, Lee's works pursue and encourage a state of mind that brings such contradictory forces into a kind of dynamic balance or equilibrium. Yet within the works themselves an underlying disjunction awaits, and Lee traffics, above all, in spaces and gaps 'in between.' Her art does not advance or impose equilibrium on the viewer point blank; instead, her arrangements create a more open situation. As Lee Young-Wook writes, grappling with this problem and ending with a reference to a state of mind that might "fill all the rifts,"

> *Stability of mind can only be achieved through a very complex mental process including commitment, self-awareness, self-reflection and enjoyment. But Lee's gardening does not force either commitment or enjoyment. It rather requires self-awareness and self-reflection. Her garden is open. The landscape [she produces including the] … ponds … is transitory yet detached. Her gardening seems to invite a tranquil passion to emerge from our minds and fill all the rifts.*[35]

Works of art like *Portable Pond* let the gaps remain, however, so that they may be actively taken up each time the work is viewed. And in this way, Lee sets forward a structure that is perpetually unfinished in that it perennially awaits a spectator who might take it up once again, throwing into question the notion of there ever being any absolutely completed artistic object or experience.

Rather than being set down permanently, *Portable Pond*, as its title implies, is also transportable—bound to be dismantled and remounted in another location. The notion of 'portability,' including the cycle of mounting, dismantling, and likely reconfiguring the work elsewhere later on connects also with the atmosphere of ceaseless construction Lee encountered in her travels of 2009-11, such as the continual tearing open of the land and covering it back over, and demolition, erection, and remodeling. Indeed, her setting down acrylic tiles in *Portable Pond* to create a thin, makeshift skin at one level resembles a temporary covering placed over a cut into the earth or depression at a construction site. 'Portability,' too, connects metaphorically with other contemporary realities such as the rise of itinerant lifestyles and transnational migration, travel, and exchange. Through 'portability,' Lee, self-reflexively, incorporates change into her works: they are not static, but ongoing, bound to be taken down and moved. Such remountings introduce minute differences into her artistic structures each time, including the object's dialogue with the precise parameters, literal and symbolic, surrounding it.

Lee's practice draws upon different sources of inspiration. In the history of twentieth-century art, some of the first instances of 'bricolage' being transposed onto the aesthetic plane occurred in the 1910s when Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso were immersed in the first flush of Cubism. After

Cubism's opening 'analytic' phase, in the summer of 1912 Braque, while vacationing in Provence, wandered into a hardware store where he purchased a roll of mass-produced oilcloth printed with faux wood grain. At the time he was working on a Cubist drawing and was about to render the body of a guitar in pencil. Armed with his recent purchase, however, he soon cut out a portion of the wood grain oilcloth and pasted it directly into his drawing to render the guitar's surface.[36] Picasso quickly followed suit with *Still Life With Chair Caning* (1912), in which, beneath a still-life including a knife, wedge of fruit, wine glass, pipe, and newspaper, he affixed a portion of oilcloth simulating wicker directly to the canvas (thus mimicking, according to Edward Fry, in anti-illusionistic manner, the common use of this kind of oilcloth as an actual tablecloth).[37] Taking further recourse to everyday materials, Picasso then placed a portion of real rope around the outer edge of the oval-shaped canvas. Regarding art since 1945, Lee's overall aesthetic, such as her use of prefabricated elements and adoption of repetition as a compositional strategy, builds upon the legacy of American Minimalism as well, such as Dan Flavin's installations deploying fluorescent tubes or Andre's hand-distributed magnesium or aluminum tiles. There are also echoes of Arte Povera's tactics between 1966 and 1969 when its different protagonists displayed a penchant for redeploying materials acquired at hardware shops, construction supply depots, and outdoor flea markets.

Lee's bricolage-like procedures have found the bulk of their stimulus, however, in the rather different context of the early twenty-first century, and in cities like Seoul, Xiamen, and Beijing situated within today's globalized economy. Lee's activities have emanated, especially, from the question of what it means to configure a sense of 'place' within such locales defined by rapid change, including intensive migration and displacement. As Lee Young-Wook writes, "The materials [Lee] adopts … are fragments left over from our everyday lives…. [Her] performative practice … [includes] piling them up towards creating a place."[38] Lee aims to configure a space of reflection within day-to-day life and to negotiate matters of cultural identity, while also conveying a sense of the making and re-making of place as an ongoing process. As she stated in 2016, looking back on her earlier travels,

> *Living and working in Beijing neighborhoods, I've experienced urgent issues related to gaining and loss of space. Neighborhoods change frequently with constant demolition and pouring of black asphalt and concrete. People are relocated and homes destroyed. Through this process I've been inspired by the will to create place among changing environments. I've observed many impromptu gardens [by anonymous makers and caretakers] created from personal objects, found materials, and careful placement and intention…. It is human sentiment that will always be found, despite development, demolition and change in the environment.*[39]

Describing them as 'impromptu,' Lee was particularly struck by the small gardens she discovered in the interstices and peripheries of the city. In addition to more formal gardens, such as *Soswaewon* in South Korea or *Master of Nets* in Suzhou, these 'ad hoc' plots, with their air of resourcefulness and bits of unrehearsed compositional magic or positioning, ended up profoundly affecting her practice.

Whether one of Lee's works, like *Portable Pond*, is roughly the same size as the thing it depicts out in the world or, as seen in *Sidewalk Soswaewon* (2010/16), at a markedly more diminished scale, there is, from the beginning, a kind of aesthetic pleasure in seeing something one already knows from the world at large translated into a slightly different set of materials, and in a gallery or museum even the smallest details can become a site of intensive attention and focus. Whether smaller, about the same size, or larger than the 'real thing,' each of Lee's works functions as a model of sorts in which she and, by extension, her audience attempt to comprehend larger realities within contemporary society, and in *Sidewalk Soswaewon*, which depicts a rectangular pond at center surrounded by a fence, there is pleasure, too, in grappling with such far-reaching issues within what is essentially the format of the miniature.

Works like *Portable Pond* or *Sidewalk Soswaewon* have a way of transforming the spectator into an active participant without their even realizing it. Part of this occurs through a process already mentioned—Lee's translation of things already known into different, often vivid materials; this very act of transposition serves to engage the viewer, placing them in a gap between the thing depicted and the concrete materials or object. What is more, the viewer, situated before one of Lee's works, can easily imagine several other ways, albeit minutely, in which the arrangement before them could have been arranged. Each work tells them a bit about the type of general permutations Lee favors as an artist but also sets forward an irreducibly unique rendition of such general patternings. Lévi-Strauss, too, argues that such things convert the viewer into a participant in the artistic process or event. In *The Savage Mind*, identifying the artist as a figure existing halfway between the 'bricoleur' and a systematic scientist, he notes how the viewer, stationed before a definitive arrangement, yet one that also suggests a multiplicity of other configurations yet to be actualized, is

> *put in possession of other possible forms of the same work; and in a confused way … feels [them] self to be their creator with more right than the creator [or artist proper] … because the latter abandoned them in excluding them from his [or her] creation. And these forms are so many further perspectives opening out on to the work which has been realized.*[41]

The tension between the generic imagery or themes Lee explores and the irreducible specificity of each iteration works to her advantage, combined with an astute and, at times, humorous and playful poetic sensibility. Such procedures pass on to their viewers, mostly on the side of 'making do,' a sense of a potentially extended creative process, and this very evocation of many possible, yet-to-be-realized outcomes paradoxically heightens awareness of the distinctness of each rendition.

Between 2012 and 2016, Lee's practice has undergone an expansion and opening out. The most recent works exhibit a new lightness and intimacy. *Jimenqiao Village* [Fig. 15], for instance, prompts a slightly different, close attention to the artist's decision-making process and her manipulation of just a few, stripped down elements to arrive at a finely tuned arrangement. Moreover, rather than radically departing from the previous 'gardens' and 'ponds,' the recent works, much more, involve a projection of the earlier 'garden' concerns and sensibility onto the wall and onto new landscapes (mountains are frequently referenced, for instance), attesting to how, as Helphand has noted, "garden values" may be "attached to [practically] any landscape."[42]

The works of 2015–16 perhaps include a few more economical prompts within the object itself that refer back to the artist's process and lived experience of fabricating the work. For example, in *Make of/Make Do*, Lee turns to processes of weaving with reed typically associated with craft or modes of production often thought to be 'prior to' fine or advanced art. Long slats of bamboo run across and behind the main circular unit, like large knitting needles, metaphorically pointing back to the artist's act of weaving this last entity by hand. Segments of plastic bags and colored fabric have also been incorporated into the warp and weft. Electric lights woven into the outer rim light up the work and surrounding space with a whitish, yellow-orange light (thanks to an orange extension cord running out from the work, which casts a shadow and cuts up the space around the wall as it makes its way to an electrical outlet). Weaving, of course, is a process characterized by a high degree of regularity, yet Lee makes a point of exposing the glitches and large rift left of center opening onto the wall behind. Also, at the top left [Fig. 24], Lee has appended a pair of white gardening or work gloves with red trim to the edge of the main unit, referring, again, to the artist's hand and perhaps an attachment, albeit cautiously, to her artistic project and all that it makes possible.

Elsewhere Lee employs leftover, non-functional sections of electrical wire no longer capable of carrying a current. Since relocating to the area around Kenyon College in Ohio in 2015, where she now directs the expanded sculpture program, such unusable portions of electric wire collected from construction sites in Korea and China earlier have become one of her principal materials. A number of the newer works featuring such wire are titled (like her artist's book of 2014) *The Walking Mountain*. This repeated designation alludes to a sutra by the Japanese Buddhist priest and philosopher Dogen Zenjii in which, as Lee explains, "he writes about … mountains walking;" their walk, the artist continues, "may appear different from a human's but we know they walk because their heads are in the sky and their feet are in the water."

In *Walking Mountain (Day)* of 2016 featuring light blue and white electrical cord, Lee bends and loops this material to spell the word 'day' numerous times. Such a use of wire illustrates how, for Lee, the leftovers of other agents' completed tasks can always be called upon once again to play the part of means: almost anything deemed suitable for her own artistic sequences can come in handy later. She began with a template of the word 'day' based on her handwriting, reasserting the connection to the artist's hand and body. On close inspection, the blue and white electric cord reveal digitally-printed codes such as '450/750V,' or, at the start of the first rendition of 'day' in white at the tip of the 'd,' the word 'BEIJING.' There is also one 'day' rendered in silver metal nearby a nail driven into the wall that holds up the entire (and thus fairly lightweight) structure. Precedents for Lee's use of metal to configure text, in this case 'day,' can be found as early as 2007. In *Former Bosses*, for example, the artist deployed unfolded metal paper clips to enumerate the first names of all of her bosses since high school in a single line of lower-case script; the last boss's name in the sequence ends with a single, partly intact paper clip, pointing back to the process of making and commonplace materials used.

Fig. 24 Sandra Eula Lee, *Make of/Make Do* (detail), 2016. Reed, bamboo, work gloves, electrical cords, plastic bags, construction mesh, and tarp, 73 1/4 x 73 1/4 x 5 in. © Sandra Eula Lee

In two iterations of 'day' executed with white electrical cord Lee has also appended to the final 'y's' a cut portion of a shirt dipped in hot asphalt and allowed to dry. The upper verge of black splatters against the white shirt and the lower, all-black jagged edge set against the empty wall form triangular shapes reminiscent of mountain ridges in the positive and the negative, respectively. As a larger shape, the work seems peninsula-like, like Korea itself perhaps, and, on top of this, surrounded by mountains. The overall alignment and shape, including the bottom edge, suggests a process of construction that is conclusive yet open-ended—perhaps never entirely completed. Another of Lévi-Strauss's insights about the 'bricoleur' seems pertinent here: as he remarks, "The 'bricoleur' may not ever complete her purpose but she always puts something of herself into it."[44]

Repetition of a single textual element, 'mountain,' creates momentum as well in *The Walking Mountain (Paved)*. At the bottom center, multiple layerings of white wire spell this word once. Above, single strands of wire deliver the same designation many times over in smaller script. At times this last tuft of white lettering can slip out of focus and form a hovering mass of shapes resembling mist or cloud formations collected above the more visual rendering of a mountain (a single black triangle coated in asphalt) below.

In another, particularly vivid construction titled *The Walking Mountain*, also produced in Ohio partly using materials collected abroad, bent white electric wire, some of it stamped with designations like 'KUNLUN XIANLAN' or, again, 'BEIJING,' enumerate the word 'mountain' six times. Moving from the top down, the first four iterations read from left to right. Then, across an implied horizon line, 'mountain' appears twice more inverted, as if mirrored in a pond or another body of water. Washes of yellow and reddish-orange spray paint at the center evoke the light of early morning or sunset. What is more, the last, inverted 'mountain' has been dipped in asphalt, giving it a charred, chunky appearance, and, from top to bottom, evoking a spectrum of light from the early day to the black of night. Some bits of white wire still peak through the asphalt, and, in a final flourish, Lee has appended two pieces of string to the sides of this last iteration that drape downward and come together to form a single fine knot, also dipped in asphalt.

Or, in *Home within a Home*, a triangular, mountain-like shape with teal, white, and black sides emerges from a fragment of salvaged concrete. As part of the overall construction, which resembles a kind of miniature impromptu garden mounted directly on the wall, the wooden shelf, specifically, helps establish an unsteady interplay between its own horizontal breadth and strict rectilinearity and the seemingly more precarious, 'dwelling'-like configuration set an angle above.

Repetition of themes, materials, and even titles has been a consistent feature of Lee's project for some time. In *Day Out* [Fig. 25] dating to 2007, for example, at left the artist repeats the unit of a shirt cuff, depicted with single sheets of A4 paper stitched together, to arrive at a column extending from the floor. The cuffs also feature hand-drawn vertical, horizontal, and crisscross patterns, though some are left plain white, along with a real button and a nearby rendition of a buttonhole. Lee has also looped and tied off plastic bags around the center of the tallest column, adding bursts of red, white, blue, black, yellow, and teal. Furthest up, a tied-off red and white bag, for example, overlays a grid of hand-drawn verticals and horizontals. All the cuffs in the main column emerge from a cylindrical, cement base visible at the very bottom. To the right, Lee takes things back to the two main components, a cement base exposed, this time, at the top (reversing the order, at left, before) and a single, unbuttoned cuff below. Facing downward, the open cuff engenders a triangle of negative space flush with the floor.

On the side of 'bricolage' or 'making do,' Lee opens her production to contingency—the chance aspect of what she uncovers in her search for materials, in all their fine-grained specificity, for example. The bricoleur's chance-based, slightly off the cuff procedures bring with them, however, the risk of the work proper developing to the detriment of form. Things as they are simply found is not always enough, hence the artist's alterations and many stages of refinement.

Put programmatically, Lee sets the casual, ephemeral, and highly adaptive procedures of the 'bricoleur' in productive tension with formal necessity—or the sense that, though the work's organization could always be slightly otherwise, it had to be this particular way. In Lee's hands, the 'making do' and the 'make of,' in other words, are preserved as differentiated zones. While she attempts to put these two dimensions in correct proportion to one another and therefore recover a dynamic balance, this does not mean that these paired dimensions are necessarily resolved in the object proper, particularly once and for all. Instead, her work mainly unfolds, again, in the spaces that open up 'in between' such apparently opposing forces and/or concepts.

Though aiming at integration, the artist's works, as external entities, bear marks and echoes of an irreducible disruption or disarticulation that has taken place, which the spectator then takes up each time the work is viewed. Lee's production, while prompting and even encouraging the interweaving of such oppositions within lived experience, allows the relationship between 'making do' and the 'make of,' literal materials and the imagery rendered, subject and object, and internality and externality, to remain problematic and unresolved.

These forces—the 'making do' and the 'make of', and so forth—are coextensive with the everyday world and our existence in it. Both facets, to the extent that a work of art is capable of such things, correspond to the scope of our own day-to-day lives. Overall, Lee's production brings gaps and "spaces between" to the surface that do not go away but rather remain as the basis for all our activity. There is likely another moment too when such oppositions, adeptly set side by side by the artist in the object, are brought together to form an equilibrium or moment of entirety within incarnate, imaginative perception. Yet any such 'balance' or 'unity,' in a far-reaching, worldly sense, is largely something for which we are still waiting.

Sandra Eula Lee, *The Work of Memory* (detail), 2007. Color copies mounted on foam board, wood structure, 84 x 75 x 15 in.

Notes

[1] Excerpt. Source:
https://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php%3Fdate=2007%252F09%252F19.html

[2] Bennett, Jane. Vibrant Matters: A Political Ecology of Things. Duke University Press, 2010. p.6

---

1 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete," in *The Savage Mind* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966): 27.

2 For Lévi-Strauss's entire analysis of the "bricoleur," see Lévi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete," 16-33. Lévi-Strauss's analysis of "bricolage," in hindsight, seems to bear a close and profound relationship with a great deal of international artistic experiment immediately following its publication, particularly three-dimensional art of the mid- to late 1960s including later Minimalism and Land Art, the work of brilliant women artists like Eva Hesse, Yayoi Kusama, and Lee Ufan, and practically all the artists associated with Arte Povera in Italy between 1966 and the early- to mid1970s.

3 See "bricoleur," in Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008: 173).

5 Bruno Corà in conversation with Alighiero Boetti, "A Drawing of Flying Thought," in Lynne Cooke, Mark Godfrey, and Christian Rattemeyer, eds., *Alighiero Boetti – Game Plan* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia, 2011): 207.

6 Corà in conversation with Boetti, "A Drawing of Flying Thought," 207–208.

7 Ibid., 208.14tg6

8 Kenneth I. Helphand, *Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2006): 2.

9 Ibid., 4.

10 Ibid., 7.

11 Anna Carnick, "Sandra Eula Lee's 'Two waters', an Interview," *Artslope*, March 30, 2011, n.p.; available under "press" at sandralee-studio.com; accessed September 5, 2016.

12 Ibid.

13 Sandra Eula Lee, "Statement of Plans," unpublished artist's text shared with the author, 2016, n.p.

14 Ibid.

15 Helphand, *Defiant Gardens*, 9.

16 Ibid.

17 Carnick, "Sandra Eula Lee's 'Two Waters,' an Interview," n.p.

18 Ibid.

19 Helphand, *Defiant Gardens*, ix. Plural forms changed to singular for clarity.

20 Carnick, "Sandra Eula Lee's 'Two waters,' an Interview," n.p

21 Kim Jinjoo, "Sandra Eula Lee: Two Waters," in Kim Jinjoo and Sandra Eula Lee, eds., *Sandra Eula Lee: Two Waters* (Forum A and Art Space Pool: Seoul, 2011): 8.

23 Lee Young-Wook, "Landscape – Wound – Making a Garden," in Jinjoo and Lee, *Sandra Eula Lee: Two Waters*, 12.

24 Sigurdur Gudmundsson, "Sandra Eula Lee: Two waters," in Jinjoo and Lee, *Sandra Eula Lee: Two Waters*, 16.

25 Lévi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete," 20. Plural changed to singular for regularity.

26 Lee, "Statement of Plans (2016)," n.p.

27 Young-Wook, "Landscape – Wound – Making a Garden," 13.

28 Linda Norden, catalogue essay for the exhibition "Casting Memories" at Art Gate Gallery, New York, 2012; available under "press" at sandralee-studio.com; accessed September 12, 2016.

29 For a reproduction of a rare, archival photograph of this work, now lost, see my essay "'For Lasting Beauty': Alighiero e Boetti and Afghanistan," in *Order and Disorder: Alighiero Boetti by Afghan Women* (Fowler Museum of Art: Los Angeles, 2012): 51.

30 Mirella Bandini, "Alighiero Boetti interviewed by Mirella Bandini in 1972," in Richard Flood and Frances Morris, eds., *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972* (Minneapolis and London: Walker Art Center and Tate Modern, 2001): 190.

31 Achille Bonito Oliva, "Alighiero E Boetti/Achille Bonito Oliva, 1973," in *Alighiero & Boetti: Bringing the World into Art, 1993-1962* (Milan: Electa, 2009): 184. On "pack ice," I am indebted to Annemarie Sauzeau Boetti, who graciously told me about this at the Boetti archive in Rome in 2005-06.

32 Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, "Introduction," in Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): xii.

33 Jinjoo, "Sandra Eula Lee: Two Waters," 8.

34 Young-Wook, "Landscape – Wound – Making a Garden," 14.

35 Ibid., 14.

36 Beth Harris and Steven Zucker, "Picasso, Still Life with Chair Caning," at www.khanacademy.org; accessed September 19, 2016.

37 Edward F. Fry, "Convergence of Traditions: The Cubism of Picasso and Braque," in William Rubin, ed., *Picasso and Braque a Symposium* (New York: Abrams and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1992): 99.

38 Young-Wook, "Landscape – Wound – Making a Garden," 14.

39 Lee, "Statement of Plans," n.p.

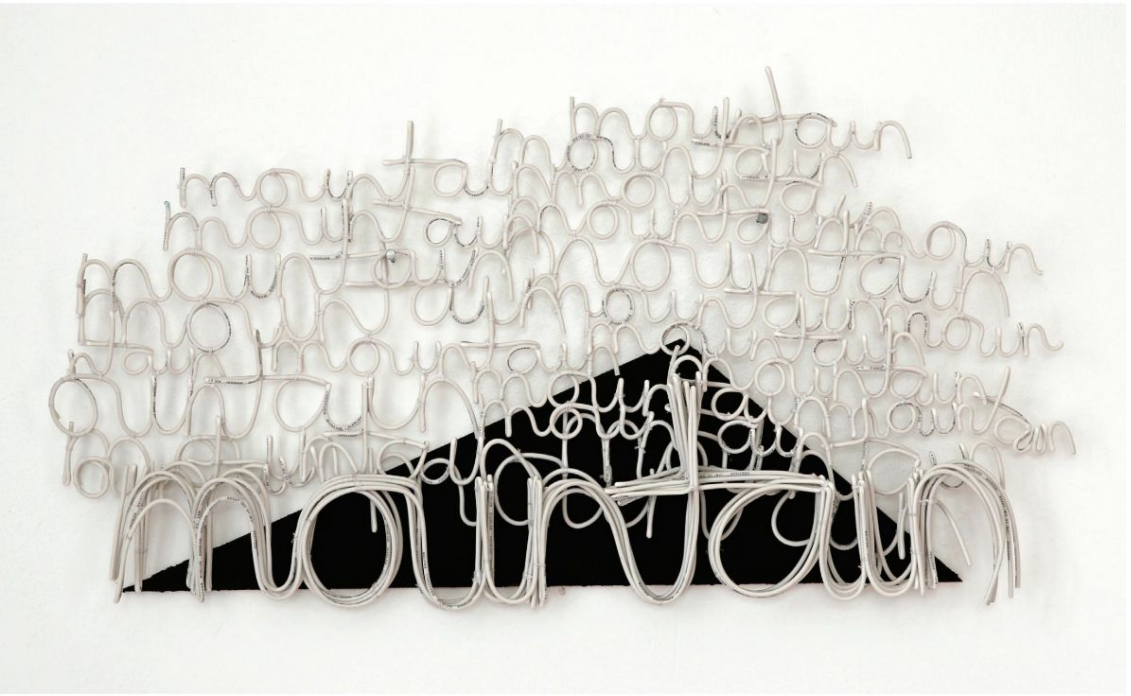
41 Lévi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete," 24.

42 Helphand, *Defiant Gardens*, 2.

44 Lévi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete," 21. Masculine pronoun change to the feminine.

45 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Everywhere and Nowhere," in *Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964): 156.

Christopher Bennett's essay was first included in the catalog for the exhibition "Sandra Eula Lee: Make of/Make Do" at the Hilliard Art Museum at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2017. The essay appeared alongside a second, full-length essay on Yun-Fei Ji titled, "Looking for Lehman Brothers", written in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name.



Christopher Bennett, Assistant Professor of Art History/ Contemporary Art at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, is an art historian who specializes in European, American, and global art since 1945. His current research includes a book project focused on Italy in the 1960s and a number of the artists associated with the Arte Povera group. He has held prestigious research fellowships including a Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome and fellowship at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. In addition to pursuing art historical scholarship he has curated a number of exhibitions including a full-scale show of the work of Alighiero Boetti at the UCLA Fowler Museum in Los Angeles and, at the Hilliard Art Museum at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, tandem exhibitions of the art of Yun-Fei Ji and Sandra Eula Lee.

Sandra Eula Lee, *The Walking Mountain (Paved)*, 2015.
Electrical wire, asphalt, wood, and thread,
18 ½ x 26 x 2 ½ in.

phillips museum of art

Lindsay W. Marino
Director & Collections Manager

Janie M. Kreines
Curator of Academic Affairs & Community Engagement

Chad M. Chaney
Preparator & Exhibition Specialist

Babs A. Smith
Office Coordinator

office of communications

Jason Klinger
Senior Director of Creative & Brand Strategy

Sally Yacovelly
Graphic Designer

Slow Burn has been made possible with support from Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and an Artist Award from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

object lessons

Sandra Eula Lee

Change is constant—everything in the material world is always in flux. Living in different cultures, I've observed how materials and objects cycle through everyday space in different ways and at different speeds. What can they communicate about the conditions we've created? In *Electronic Garden/Slow Burn*, I compressed defunct electronics, wires, and building materials with the geological minerals used to make them, trying to capture different states at once. I want to unhinge and reframe these materials beyond the limits of use value. I point to material histories, uses, and effects on the body, but at the same time, I don't foreground only those aspects; too much emphasis would overshadow the poetics of these combinations and collisions.

The two pieces were made together, but there's a continuum. A lot of my work involves installing it in new formations, and I'm always editing, trying to discover something more elemental. I'm searching for a meeting ground between different realities, sensations, and speeds of change—processing that into form. The binding is the human gesture, a means of reconciling and understanding things we want to see as oppositions. In these hybrids, process reveals more than a fixed, final state. Even though the elements are very specific and I spent a lot of time collecting and choosing them, the wrapping had to be improvisational—it's the poetics of navigating day to day through this slow burn; and it had to be a little more aggressive to smash the parts into a newly embodied whole.

***Electronic Garden/Slow Burn,* 2021.**
Defunct electronic parts, electrical and audio wire, petrified wood, cassiterite, bauxite, chalcopyrite, sphaelerite, and cut log, dimensions variable.

COURTESY THE ARTIST