

Curatorial Statement

Jiyoon Lee, PhD, on Lee Bul. The Anatomy of Every Setting Sun:

Every setting sun. Not one ending but a series of them, arriving on schedule, each as beautiful as it is final. Lee Bul has spent four decades on futures that were promised and did not arrive, and this exhibition is about what is left once you go on living in their absence.

The futures are other people's. Bruno Taut above all: she has been returning to his Alpine Architektur since 2006, and some of the works are titled simply After Bruno Taut. Taut drew a glass world to be built into the Alps, during the First World War, with no practical function attached to it. There are the monuments the Russian Constructivists designed and never raised. There is Campanella's City of the Sun of 1602, which she took for the title of Civitas Solis II. Most of it was never going to be built, and was not less serious for that.

What she does with them is not lamentation. Anatomy is the study of internal structure, of how the parts of a body are disposed rather than what the body does, and her method is anatomical in that sense. She takes a future that failed, opens it, and sets out how it was held together.

Three scales are at work in the gallery. The airship on the ground floor is seventeen meters of PET film held up by an electric blower that runs for the length of the show; rigid airships were built by four nations and given up by all four. The new sculptures, which follow from Long Tail Halo on the facade of the Metropolitan Museum in 2024, fuse bodily and architectural form into monuments that have not settled on what they commemorate. In the 'Perdu' and 'Velvet' panels the scale is an arm's length, where mother-of-pearl is cut by hand, set into acrylic and sanded back over months, if not years, until the surface catches light.

Nobody performs an anatomy on something they are indifferent to. That attention, given to futures no one now believes in, is what makes the exhibition warmer than its subject. And a sun that sets is not a sun that has gone out. It is the same one, coming up on a horizon somebody else is standing on.

About Jiyoon Lee

Jiyoon Lee, PhD, is a curator, art historian and cultural adviser with more than 25 years of experience developing contemporary art projects in Europe and Korea. She founded SUUM Project in London in 2003 and is the executive director of SUUM X, its contemporary art exhibition platform. From 2014 to 2016, she served as Managing Director of MMCA Seoul.

Her projects include the International Olympic Committee Media Art Collection for the 2012 London Olympics, the Liverpool Biennial, Heatherwick Studio: Building Soulfulness and Jean-Michel Basquiat: Signs: Connecting Past and Future.

Lee holds an MA in Art History from Goldsmiths, University of London; an MA in Museum and Gallery Management from City University London; and a PhD in Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art.