

Press Release

Lee Bul. The Anatomy of Every Setting Sun

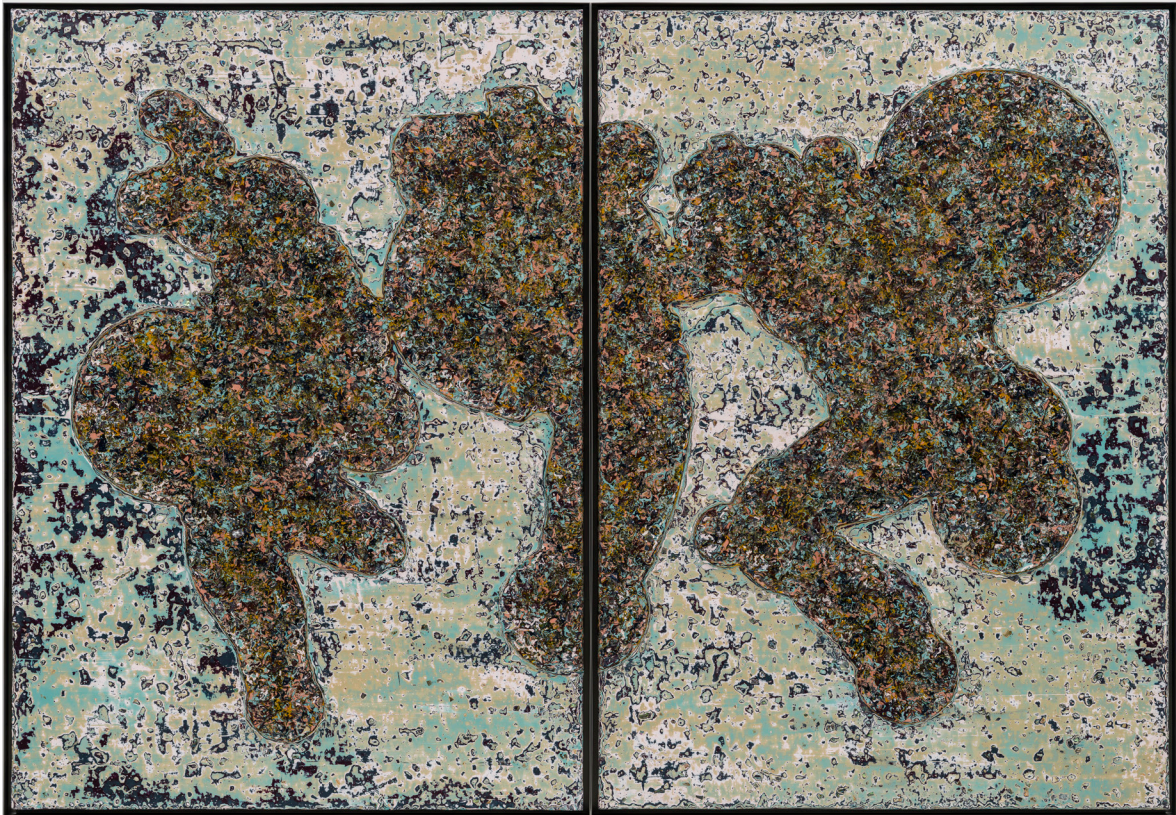
10 September – 24 October 2026

Hauser & Wirth New York, 22nd Street



New York... This September, Hauser & Wirth New York will present the gallery's first exhibition with Lee Bul, one of the most influential artists of her generation and a singular voice in contemporary art's ongoing reckoning with the promises and failures of modernity. Bringing together major new sculptures with recent bodies of work, 'The Anatomy of Every Setting Sun,' organized by guest curator Dr. Jiyeon Lee, extends Lee's decades-long examination of humanity's drive to transcend nature through technology and systems of control. The works on view reveal the tensions between utopian aspiration and inevitable collapse, exposing the entangled relationships between technology, history and nature.

This presentation comes at a pivotal moment for the artist, ahead of the opening of 'Lee Bul: From 1998 to Now,' her major traveling survey exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, on 13 November.



At the center of ‘The Anatomy of Every Setting Sun,’ and levitating in the ground floor space of Hauser & Wirth’s West Chelsea building, is ‘Willing To Be Vulnerable—Metalized Balloon’ (2015–2016/2020), a massive zeppelin-like sculpture fabricated from lightweight materials such as PET film. Part of a series first conceived in 2016; this commanding work transforms one of modernity’s defining symbols of progress into an unsettling meditation on fragility and impermanence. Hovering between monument and ruin, the sculpture evokes both the optimism long associated with technological innovation and the precarities beneath humanity’s pursuit of mastery over the natural world.

The exhibition also debuts new paintings from Lee’s ongoing ‘Untitled (Willing To Be Vulnerable—Velvet)’ series, each of which takes months—and often years—to complete. Lee begins with photographs of her own sculptures and installations, then layers them with source imagery, fragments of material from her studio, and intricately cut pieces of mother-of-pearl. Applied to rich silk velvet grounds, these elements coalesce into phantasmagorical landscapes populated by crystalline architectures that seem to belong to imagined future worlds. Combining elements shaped by biological processes—silk, velvet and mother-of-pearl—with man-made materials such as acrylic and PVC, these works blur the boundaries between the organic and the synthetic, the bodily and the technological. They oscillate between growth and decay, completion and fragmentation, suggesting that even humanity’s most ambitious visions of the future remain unfinished.

New works from Lee’s ongoing ‘Perdu’ series further explore the porous threshold between painting and sculpture through an exacting process in which mother-of-pearl is embedded within layers of acrylic paint that are repeatedly applied and sanded to reveal shifting, radiant surfaces. These materially rich works extend the artist’s longstanding interest in the interplay between the organic and the synthetic. While earlier ‘Perdu’ works drew on the hybrid visual language of Lee’s biomorphic sculptures, these latest examples shift toward increasingly abstract architectural landscapes, extending her examination of utopian modernity.



The exhibition culminates in a group of new large-scale sculptures that further develop ideas first explored in Lee's acclaimed 2024 commission 'Long Tail Halo' for the Fifth Avenue façade of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Fusing bodily, mechanical and architectural forms, these hybrid structures continue her longstanding interrogation of the monuments through which societies project power. At once futuristic and fragmentary, they exist between organism and architecture, exposing the instability beneath modernity's grand narratives while imagining new forms. Together with 'Willing To Be Vulnerable—Metalized Balloon,' these works bring Lee's sustained examination of modernity, technology and the body into sharp new focus.

About the artist

Lee Bul (b. 1964, Yeongju) lives and works in Seoul, South Korea. Having graduated from Seoul's Hongik University with a BFA in sculpture, she made early breakthroughs to create multi-faceted, provocative works that crossed genres and disciplines exploring themes of beauty, corruption, and decay. Some of Lee's now-iconic works from this period were considered integral in the emergence of a global contemporary art of the 1990s, as advocated by supporters of her work, influential curators including Harald Szeemann, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Okwui Enwezor. Lee's 'Majestic Splendor' (1997), an installation featuring decomposing fish adorned with sequins that was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was selected by Szeemann for his Venice Art Biennale exhibition in 1999, 'dAPERTutto.' The same year, her karaoke installation 'Gravity Greater Than Velocity I, II' (1999) and 'Amateurs' (1999), featured in the Korean national pavilion and she received honorable mentions for both projects.

Since then, Lee's work has increasingly explored the enduring themes of utopian modernity and the rise and fall of progressivist projects, influenced by her own experience as the daughter of political dissidents during Korea's turbulent social and political transformation. Following an artistic residency in New Zealand in 2005, Lee embarked on a series of sculptures and related works on paper and canvas furthering her artistic inquiry on the ruins of historical projects to build a better civilization. Lee's current practice continues to delve into this expansive topic, reflecting on the 'melancholic traces' of these failed progressivist ideals.

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In 2024, Lee was commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, to create sculptures for the niches of its landmark Fifth Avenue facade. 'The Genesis Facade Commission: Lee Bul, Long Tail Halo' on view from 12 September 2024 to 10 June 2025. A major touring survey co-curated by Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul, and M+, Hong Kong, opens in Belgium at the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp on 13 November, before touring to other international venues.

Lee's work is held in prominent public collections throughout the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Tate Modern, London; British Museum, London; Musée d'Art Moderne Grand Duc Jean, Luxembourg; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; M+, Hong Kong; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul; Amorepacific Museum of Art, Seoul; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea. She is the recipient of the 9th Ruth Baumgarte Art Award (2023); Honorary Doctorate from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2022); Ho-Am Prize in the Arts (2019); Insignia of Officier, Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2016), presented by the Ministry of Culture, France; and the Noon Award (2014), presented by the Gwangju Biennale Foundation. She was awarded a Menzione d'Onore (1999) for her contribution to the 48th Venice Biennale.

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Caption and courtesy information

Lee Bul
Willing To Be Vulnerable—Metalized Balloon
2015-2016/2020
Fabric, PET film, air blower, electrical wiring
Installation view of the 20th Biennale of Sydney,
Sydney, Australia, 2016.
© Lee Bul
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Algirdas Bakas

Lee Bul
Untitled
2026
Mother-of-pearl, acrylic paint, collage on canvas
80 x 60 x 3.5 cm / 31 1/2 x 23 5/8 x 1 3/8 in
© Lee Bul
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Jeon Byung-cheol

Lee Bul
Perdu (diptych) TBC title
2026
Mother-of-pearl, acrylic paint on jute canvas,
aluminum base panel, stainless-steel
163.3 x 226.6 x 4 cm / 64 1/4 x 89 1/4 x 1 5/8 in
© Lee Bul
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Jeon Byung-cheol

Lee Bul
Untitled (Willing To Be Vulnerable—Velvet #29)
2026
Mother-of-pearl, acrylic paint, collage on silk velvet
180 x 130 x 2 cm / 70 7/8 x 51 1/8 x 3/4 inches
© Lee Bul
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Jeon Byung-cheol