

Lee Bul

10 September – 9 November 2014

Ikon presents the first UK solo show of works by Korean artist Lee Bul. The judicious survey of early drawings, studies, sculptural pieces and ambitious installations – including a new commission made for Ikon – showcases the visually compelling and intellectually sharp works which have established Lee as one of the most important artists of her generation.

Born in 1964, under the military dictatorship of South Korea, Lee Bul graduated in sculpture from Hongik University during the late 1980s. Her works became preoccupied with politics in the broadest sense, delving into many variants of the all-too-human, and thus fallible, forms of idealism that permeate culture and civilization. From the beginning, she took an iconoclastic path, creating works that crossed genres and disciplines in provocative ways. Early street performance-based works saw Lee wearing full-body soft sculptures which were simultaneously alluring and grotesque. Her later female *Cyborg* sculptures of the 1990s drew upon elements from art history, critical theory, science fiction, and the popular imagination to explore anxieties of dysfunctional technological advances, whilst simultaneously harking back to icons of classical sculpture.

Lee's more recent works have similarly dual concerns; at once forward-looking yet retrospective, seductive but suggestive of ruin. Sculptures suspended like chandeliers, elaborate assemblages that glimmer with crystal beads and chains and mirrors, poignantly evoke castles in the air. The sculptures reflect utopian architectural schemes of the early 20th century as well as architectural images of totalitarianism from Lee's experiences of military Korea.

Perhaps the most explicit of these works is *Mon grand récit: Weep into stones...* (2005), with its mountainous topography reminiscent of skyscrapers described by Hugh Ferriss in his book *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929). A nearby transmission tower broadcasts a flashing LED message from Thomas Browne's *Hydriotaphia* (1658): "weep into stones / fables like snow / our few evil days." Scaffolding supports several scale model structures: a looping highway made of bent plywood, a tiny Tatlin's Monument, a modernist staircase that features in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, and an upturned cross-section of the Hagia Sofia.



Ikon Gallery

1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS

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Alongside these seminal works a new commission, made possible through the Art Fund International scheme in collaboration with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and New Art Gallery Walsall, will be unveiled at Ikon. *After Bruno Taut (Devotion to Drift)* will make explicit reference to the architect Bruno Taut (1880 – 1938), a great influence on Lee Bul's works. The suspended sculpture, dripping with an excess of crystalline shapes and glass beads, will reference the exponential growth and unsustainability of the modern world. Contrary to Taut's early 20th century optimism, Lee conjures up beautiful dreams that she knows won't come true, exploring what she sees as the failings of utopian optimism.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a major publication, produced in collaboration with Artsonje Center, Seoul; MUDAM – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; EACC, Castellon; and Korean Cultural Centre UK.

Note to Editors:

1. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 6pm. Admission is free.
2. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
3. For more information, high-res images or to request an interview please contact Sophie Campos or Emma Gilhooly at Pelham Communications on 020 8969 3959 or email sophie@pelhamcommunications.com or emma@pelhamcommunications.com.
4. Exhibition opening: Wednesday 10 September, 6 - 8pm.

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