

SEULGI LEE

SPAN

25 JUNE – 7 SEPTEMBER 2025



Left: *U* : 김칫국부터 마신다 *Drink the Kimchi Soup = To Hope for Something to Be Given* (2024). Korean silk, collaboration with Nubi quilter in Tongyeong, 195 x 155 x 1 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul. Right: *W / Sa la kwa shunga lachju itzie ske, Young girl with neat hair*. Courtesy of the artist and galerie Jousse Entreprise, Paris (2017). (Seulgi Lee © ADAGP Paris, 2025)

Ikon presents *SPAN* (25 June – 7 September 2025), the first UK solo exhibition by artist Seulgi Lee.

Born in Seoul, South Korea and living in Paris, France since 1992, Seulgi Lee's work is shaped by the use of colour, gesture, simple yet elegant forms and performance. Intrigued by the relationships between language systems, form and function in traditional crafts, she has developed a unique artistic practice in which she combines conceptual approaches with artisanal methods. For her exhibition at Ikon Gallery, Lee explores a historical measurement – the span of the human hand – through artworks from ongoing projects alongside new pieces commissioned by Ikon.

Developed from research with the School of Jewellery at Birmingham City University, *SIX PENCE* (2025) harks back to the Victorian trade of mother-of-pearl buttons. Sometimes crafted from oyster and mollusc shells from Asia, these fasteners were akin to an everyday form of jewellery,

accessible to all purses. Embedded in a wall of the gallery, the intimate work highlights the subtle artistry and lustre of such buttons, conjuring for Lee the illusion of “stars walking on clothes”.

Made in collaboration with artisans in Tongyeong, a city on the Southern coast of South Korea, *Blanket Project U* (2014–ongoing) uses *Nubi* – a densely padded quilt sewn line by line – as a medium for recalling vernacular proverbs. Colourful, geometrical compositions and the direction of the weave reflect the meaning and actions of the idioms. Hung on the wall or displayed horizontally on plinths – just as original *Nubi* were laid down on beds – the selection includes two new commissions depicting British sayings: *U : A Piece of Cake = Easy to Get Rid Of* and *U : 감쪽같다 Like a Kaki = As If By Magic* (both 2025).

W (2017–2018) is an ensemble of palm-leaf baskets woven by female weavers in the village of Santa María Ixcatlán, Mexico. Positioned on thin, metal armatures, their anthropomorphic forms reflect the landscape of the northern region of Oaxaca and stories told to Lee by the weavers. Works at Ikon include *W / Sala si tundu tsude chitjiū ju wa, The madman has a broken blue (green) nose* (2017), in which an empty-bottomed basket embodies the fragmented body part protruding from a torso-shaped trunk, and *W / Sa la kwa shunga lachju itzie ske, Young girl with neat hair* (2017), where two side forms evoke tightly woven buns. Once a city of more than 10,000 inhabitants, the village’s native language, Ixcatec, is currently practised by four elders; a dying tradition whose disappearance Lee seeks to counter through these works.

SPAN (2025) distills the technique of Korean *dancheong* mural painting into a line-based composition painted by Suyeon Kim, expert practitioner of intangible heritage in Seoul, and artisans trained in this ancient art. The bright colours of *SLOW WATER* (2022) draw further inspiration from the vivid palette of *dancheong* with an elevated platform of intricately interwoven wooden slats built in the style of Korean *Munsal* (traditional lattice door or window). The floating installation deftly combines the typology of the modernist grid with a riot of colours that shift with the movement of viewers.

Heard throughout the gallery is *NANANI GONG-AL* (2021), a collaboration with Ga-gok folk singer Minhee Park combining two traditional women’s songs: the *Gong-Al* song from Incheon, Korea and the Akita Ondo song from Akita Prefecture, Japan. The *Gong-Al* song, which describes the forms and colours of the female sex (*Gong-Al* or ‘egg ball’ in old Korean slang) after sexual intercourse, was often sung by women and men while they made ropes before going to work at sea. Played at intervals, the lively lyrics emphasise the transformation of oral lore when passed between generations.

Alongside her solo exhibition, Seulgi Lee also participates as a resident artist in Ikon’s other summer exhibition, *Thread the Loom*. Working live in the gallery on an AVL Studio Dobby loom, Lee will engage in cross-cultural conversations about textile art with West Midlands artists. Both Ikon exhibitions offer visitors an opportunity to engage with diverse contemporary art practices while celebrating traditional textile skills and crafts.

With this new exhibition at Ikon, ongoing and new projects, I’m focusing on figuring out a methodology for measuring between things, ways of working with them, histories and collective

stories. To shift the point of view from me to you, from you to them, while extending our thumb and baby finger. A SPAN.’ Seulgi Lee

This exhibition is made possible by lead supporter Bagri Foundation, with additional support from Ikon lead benefactor ai. gallery; the Korea Artist Prize Promotion Fund, from SBS Foundation and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; and Trampoline, Association in support of the French art scene, Paris.

For more information, press appointments, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small by email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Social Media: @ikongallery #IkonGallery @bagrifoundation @_ai_gallery @ace_national @aceagrams @ace_midlands @galeriejousseentreprise @galleryhyundai

Notes to Editors:

1. **Seulgi Lee** was born in Seoul in 1972, and has been living in Paris since 1992. After graduating from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts de Paris, she founded PARIS PROJECT ROOM to promote collaboration among artists (2001). Her work has been featured in numerous exhibitions: *La Triennale – Intense Proximité*, curated by Okwui Enwezor, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012); 10th Gwangju Biennale, curated by Jessica Morgan (2014), *N a pris les dés*, curated by Arlène Berceliot Courtin, Air de Paris; *Korea Now!*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (2015), *Zigzag Incisions*, curated by Elfi Turpin, CRAC Alsace, France; *The Other Face of the Moon*, curated by Sungwon Kim, Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju (2017); Busan Biennale, curated by Jacob Fabricius (2020); *Stories of Abstraction: Greenberg’s Nightmare*, curated by Marjolaine Lévy, Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris; *Refugia*, curated by Jiyeon Yang, Alternative Space Loop, Seoul (2021); *Frequencies of Tradition*, Kadist, San Francisco (2022); 17th Lyon Biennale, curated by Alexia Fabre (2024); and *We are in Open Circuits*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi (2025). Solo exhibitions include *SOONER’S TWO DAYS BETTER*, curated by Sophie Kaplan, La Criée, Rennes, France (2019); *MACHRUK*, curated by Claire Staebler, L’Appartement 22, Rabat, Morocco (2019); *WE ARE NOT SYMMETRICAL*, curated by Filipa Oliveira, La Casa da Cerca, Almada, Portugal (2020); *SLOW WATER*, curated by Hyunjin Kim, Incheon Art Platform, Korea (2021); Mendes Wood DM, Brussels (2022); Galerie Jousse Entreprise, Paris (2022); and *SAMSAM*, Gallery Hyundai, Seoul (2024). She has made limited editions for Hermès (2017) and Ikea (2019), and her work is part of public collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Kadist; Fonds Régional d’Art Contemporain; Centre National des Arts Plastiques; Mobilier National; Paris; Seoul Museum of Art; Suwon Museum of Art; and Space K, South Korea. Winner of the 2020 Korea Artist Prize, for which she presented a major exhibition at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2020), Lee was also awarded a residency at the Villa Kujoyama with the Institut Français in Kyoto (2023). Her work is represented by Galerie Jousse Entreprise, Paris and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul.
2. **Ikon** is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art gallery, situated in Birmingham’s city centre. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2024. It is an educational charity with free entry for all, and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features international and local artists working in a variety of media, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon’s off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon’s activities, stimulating public interest in and

- understanding of contemporary visual art. Ikon aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. ikon-gallery.org
3. **Ikon** is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm. Free entry, donations welcome. Ikon is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.
 4. The **Bagri Foundation**, established in 1990, is a family foundation driven by curiosity. With a vision to cultivate a meaningful space for Asian culture to thrive, its programme seeks to shift perspectives and deepen connections. Through grants and strategic partnerships, the Foundation gives artists and experts from across Asia, or those inspired by the continent, wider visibility on the global stage. Recent and upcoming projects include *Artes Mundi 11*, the UK's largest art award; *CinemAsia Film Festival*, one of Europe's leading Asian film festivals, and *Thikra: Night of Remembering* by Akram Khan Company (touring 2024-25). bagrifoundation.org
 5. Based in London, **ai.** is a gallery platform which is committed to encouraging dialogue and challenging the notions of the East and West. It has a permanent space at 1a Tenter Ground, London, E1 7NH. a-i-gallery.com
 6. The **Korea Artist Prize Promotion Fund** is an art award jointly organised by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) and the SBS Foundation since 2012. Its mission is to support, foster and promote artists who present new possibilities, visions and alternatives for contemporary Korean art. To further encourage the international activities of artists who have participated in the Korea Artist Prize, the SBS Foundation operates the Korea Artist Prize Promotion Fund. This fund provides financial support for distinguished overseas projects by previous supported artists, enabling them to expand their artistic practice and international presence. Through this initiative, the SBS Foundation and MMCA aim to ensure that the Korea Artist Prize serves as a dynamic platform for contemporary Korean art to engage with a global field.
 7. **Trampoline, Association in support of the French art scene, Paris.** Trampoline is a non-profit association of private cultural organisations working together to promote the French art scene internationally. Trampoline instigates and supports international exhibition projects and the wider dissemination of artists from the French art scene, and invites directors and curators of international institutions to France to encourage the development of projects abroad. trampoline-association.fr/en
 8. **Arts Council England** is the national development agency for creativity and culture. ACE have set out their strategic vision in *Let's Create* that by 2030 they want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 ACE will invest over £467 million of public money from Government and an estimated £250 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. artscouncil.org.uk

