

EXHIBITION GUIDE

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SEULGI LEE SPAN

25 JUNE – 7 SEPTEMBER 2025
SECOND FLOOR GALLERIES

Ikon presents *SPAN*, the first UK solo exhibition by 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. Winner of the 2020 Korea Artist Prize, her work has been presented in international exhibitions including Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012), Gwangju Biennale (2014), Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (2015), Casa da Cerca, Almada (2020), Incheon Art Platform (2021), Kunsthall Aarhus (2022), Lyon Biennale (2024), and Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi (2025). In 2023, Lee undertook a residency at the Villa Kujoyama with the Institut Français in Kyoto, Japan.

For her exhibition at Ikon Gallery, Lee explores the span of the human hand as a way of feeling and thinking about scale and material. Using a form of measurement that predates the metric system, the exhibition introduces visitors to Lee's

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“methodology for measuring between things, ways of working with them, histories and collective stories.” Artworks from ongoing projects and new pieces commissioned by Ikon invite visitors to experience crafted objects and installations from an intimate perspective.

SLOW WATER (2022) [2] comprises an elevated platform of intricately interwoven wooden slats built in the style of Korean *munsal* (traditional lattice door or window). The floating installation references Islamic *mashrabiya*, canals in the South Korean port city of Incheon, and an artificial stream in Poseokjeong pavilion that was used by nobles in the 8th century to float wine glasses during drinking games when they would devise poetry. Colours painted on sides of the wooden slats evoke the vivid palette of *dancheong*, a Korean form of decorative painting that traditionally adorns wooden palaces and temples. As viewers move, the combination of colours change, turning the seemingly rigid, modernist grid into a fluid, interactive structure. Also built using *munsal*, the curved form of ***MOON DOOR north-east (2023) [13]*** reflects the changing shape of the moon during the lunar cycle.

Throughout the galleries are works from ***Blanket Project U (2014–)***. Made in collaboration with artisan Sungyoun Cho in Tongyeong in South Korea, they use *nubi*—a densely padded quilt sewn line by line—as a medium for recalling vernacular proverbs. Bold, contrasting colours and the direction of the weave in ***U: Drink the kimchi soup = To hope for something to be given (2024) [4]*** and ***U: My three-foot nose = I’m too ground down to help anyone else (2018) [5]*** capture the meaning and actions of Korean idioms. Two new works depict British sayings ***U: A piece of cake = Easy (2025) [10]*** and ***U: Like a piece of kaki = As if by magic (2025) [11]***, the latter playfully embodied in a visual abstraction of its Korean equivalent. The circular composition of ***U: Read Sky Cheonsang Yeolcha Bunyajido west-north (2023) [3]*** represents a constellation from a 14th century astrological map. Placed beneath *SLOW WATER*, its

horizontal display whimsically inverts the position of the sky, while reflecting the original use of *nubi* as bed quilts.

Alongside *Blanket Project U* is **W (2017)**, an ensemble of palm-leaf baskets woven by female weavers from the Xula cooperative in the village of Santa María Ixcatlán, Mexico. 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. Positioned on thin, metal armatures, the forms of the baskets reflect the landscape of the northern region of Oaxaca and stories told to Lee by the weavers [7, 8, 16, 22].

Relationships between vernacular language and craft are further explored in **BAGATELLE (2022) [6]**. A French form of pinball popular in the 17th century, the word *bagatelle* means 'trivial'. Its term in slang, '*trou madame*', doubles as an innuendo for the female sex—a reference that Lee playfully responds to through nail designs that recall female body parts. **NANANI (2021) [21]** a collaboration with Ga-gok folk singer Minhee Park (Haepaary), combines two traditional women's songs: the *Gong-AI* song from Incheon, Korea and the Akita Ondo song from Akita Prefecture, Japan. The *Gong-AI* song, which describes the forms and colours of the female sex (*Gong-AI* 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. Marine folklore also infuses **L'ÎLE AUX FEMMES (WOMEN'S ISLAND) (2019) [18]**, a recording of songs inspired by Breton oral culture. Improvised wordplay highlights women's historic presence on the island, known for seaweed farming. The lively lyrics of these sound works highlight the transformation of oral lore when passed between generations.

Small pieces capture the ingenuity of the handmade. **HAN (2024) [19]** miraculously seals water from the Korean river in clear glass. **TRAM SAMSAM (2025) [14]** translates wooden *munsal* into miniature form, while **THING (2022) [20]** presents

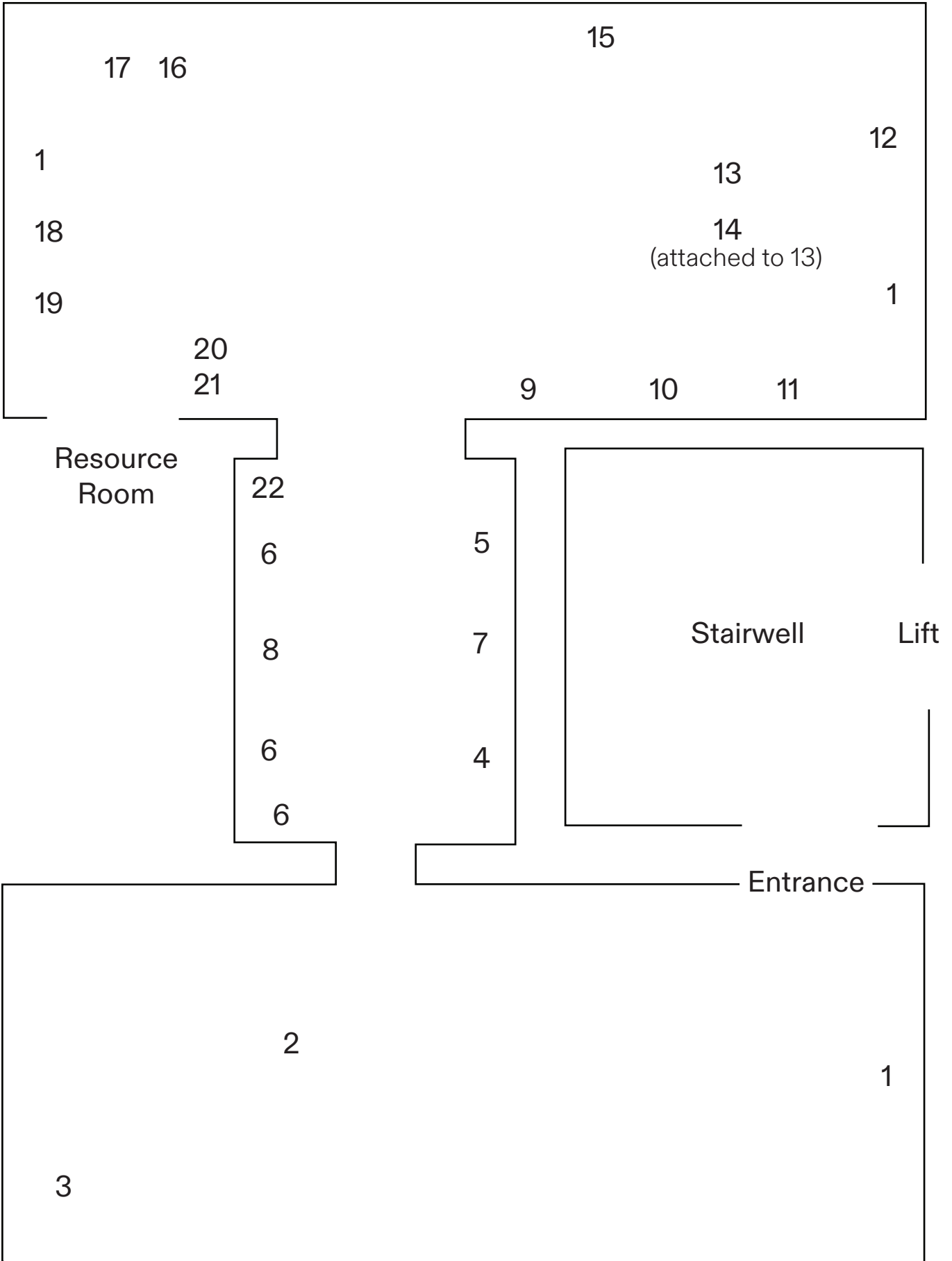
painted metal structures as palm-sized objects. ***William Murdoch's Wooden Horse (2025) [15]*** reveals a tiny colourful impression of a tricycle propelled by hand cranks, invented by mechanical engineer William Murdoch (1754–1839) when he was a boy. Born in Scotland, Murdoch spent most of his life in Birmingham working for the West Midlands engineering firm Boulton & Watt. A similar spirit of youthful play is found in ***ESPAN (2024) [9]***, a silk ball embroidered by Japanese artisans specialised in the folk art of *temari*. Tucked in a niche of the ceiling, its concentric blue rings appear to narrow and expand when viewed from different angles—an illusion caused by its spherical shape.

Developed from research with the School of Jewellery at Birmingham City University, ***SIX PENCE (2025) [12]*** harks back to the Victorian trade of mother-of-pearl buttons. Often crafted from oyster and mollusc shells from Asia and Australia, these fasteners were akin to an everyday form of jewellery, accessible to all purses. Embedded in a wall of the gallery, the installation highlights the artistry and lustre of mother-of-pearl buttons, which for Lee conjure the illusion of “stars walking on clothes.”

Coloured walls extend the vibrant tones and motifs of Lee's works. Murals painted by Suyeon Kim, expert practitioner of intangible heritage in Seoul, with artisans Jaewoo Park and Jin Mo Kim employ the ancient technique of *dancheong* painting. Titled ***FLYING BUTTONS (2025) [1]***, the line-based compositions trace the path of giant, imaginary buttons rising and moving across the galleries.

Alongside her solo exhibition, Seulgi Lee 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 from **25–27 June** and **1 July**.

GALLERY MAP



LIST OF WORKS

1. *FLYING BUTTONS* (2025)

Dancheong mural, collaboration with Suyeon Kim, Jaewoo Park, Jin Mo Kim, Seoul

2. *SLOW WATER* (2022)

Paint on basswood trellis, collaboration with carpenter Pascal Theodoly. Production support: CNAP Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris

3. *U: Read Sky Cheonsang Yeolcha Bunyajido west-north* (2023)

Korean silk, collaboration with *nubi* quilter Sungyoun Cho, Tongyeong
Courtesy the artist and Space K Seoul Collection

4. *U: Drink the kimchi soup = To hope for something to be given* (2024)

5. *U: My three-foot nose = I'm too ground down to help anyone else* (2018)

Korean silk, collaboration with *nubi* quilter Sungyoun Cho, Tongyeong
Courtesy the artist and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul

6. *BAGATELLE* (2022)

Nails, oak, metal balls, collaboration with cabinetmaker Bernard Mauffret, Paris

7. *W / Sala kwashungu la shhũ itzie ske, alias, Young girl with neat hair* (2017)

8. *W / Sa kuane ratue, alias, To eat the egg* (2017)

Palm heart, brass, collaboration with Xula cooperative in Santa Maria Ixcatlan, Oaxaca, Mexico and François Lunardi, Paris (brass mount)

9. *ESPAN* (2024)

Embroidered silk *temari* ball, collaboration with Takako Koide, Kanazawa

10. *U: A piece of cake = Easy* (2025)

11. *U: Like a piece of kaki = As if by magic* (2025)

Korean silk, collaboration with *nubi* quilter Sungyoun Cho, Tongyeong
Courtesy the artist and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul

12. *SIX PENCE* (2025)

Mother-of-pearl buttons, collaboration with mother-of-pearl artisan George Hook, Birmingham

13. *MOON DOOR north-east*
(2023)

Paint on tilia wood, collaboration
with cabinetmaker Bernard
Mauffret, Paris

Production support: Mondes
Nouveaux and Virginie Yassef

14. *TRAM SAMSAM* (2025)

Paint on wood

15. *William Murdoch's Wooden
Horse* (2025)

Pen on paper

16. *W / Sa la si tundu tzude chitjiu
juwa, alias, The madman has a
broken blue (green) nose* (2017)

Palm heart, brass, collaboration
with Xula cooperative in Santa
Maria Ixcatlan, Oaxaca, Mexico
and François Lunardi, Paris (brass
mount)

17. *U: Laugh out loud while
clapping one's hands* (2023)

Korean silk, collaboration with
nubi quilter Sungyoun Cho,
Tongyeong

18. *L'ÎLE AUX FEMMES
(WOMEN'S ISLAND)* (2019)

Sound, collaboration with Anne
Laure Vincent, Clémence Mimault
and Pierre-Philippe Toufektchan
16 minutes (looped excerpt from
video work)

Commissioned by La Criée—
Rennes, France

19. *HAN* (2024)

Water from Han River, glass,
collaboration with glass test tube
artisan Jongin Kim, Seoul

20. *THING* (2022)

Painted metal

21. *NANANI* (2021)

Sound, collaboration with Korean
Gakok singer Minhee Park
(Haepaary)

2:40 minutes (looped every 15
minutes)

Made with the support of Hyunjin
Kim and Incheon Art Platform

22. *W / Usatcha, alias, Coyote*
(2017)

Palm heart, brass, collaboration
with Xula cooperative in Santa
Maria Ixcatlan, Oaxaca, Mexico
and François Lunardi, Paris (brass
mount)

All works courtesy the artist and
Galerie Jousse Entreprise, Paris,
unless otherwise stated

FREE DIGITAL GUIDE

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EVENTS

Spotlight Tour with Seulgi Lee

Friday 27 June, 3-3.30pm

Free, booking essential

CBSO in the City

Thursday 24 July, 2-3.30pm and 3.45-5pm

Free, no booking required

Gathering Threads, Sounds and Stories: A Celebration

Thursday 4 September, 5-7pm

Booking essential

Book your place on our website ikon-gallery.org.



EXHIBITION SUPPORTERS

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