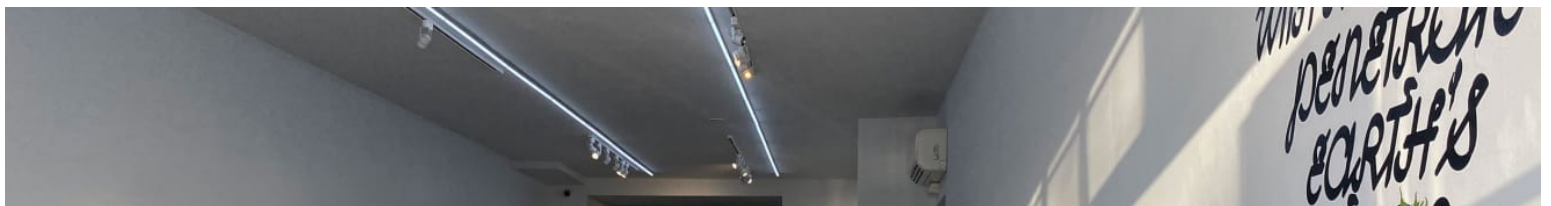


Arts

The art gallery where Christina Yuna Lee once worked honors her life and legacy

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Credit Courtesy Phil Cal/Eli Klein Gallery

Written by
Harmeet Kaur, CNN

Two months since Christina Yuna Lee was brutally killed in her New York Chinatown apartment, family and friends are finding new ways to pay tribute to her life.

The latest comes in the form of an exhibition at Manhattan's Eli Klein Gallery -- where Lee once worked a decade ago -- opening in her honor. It features the work of

"Art was a big part of her life, and I wanted to memorialize her legacy as much as possible," said the contemporary art gallery's founder, Eli Klein, who worked with Lee from 2010 to

(AAPI) artists, and includes an original piece by Lee herself. A portion of the proceeds will go to the Christina Yuna Lee Memorial Fund, which supports causes important to her.

"She's someone that deserves to be remembered in a larger context than this single tragedy."



Working with the Eli Klein Gallery, Christina Yuna Lee handles a sculpture by Chinese artist Li Hongbo in 2013. She worked as an associate director at the gallery. Credit: Courtesy Phil Cai/Eli Klein Gallery

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Late one night in February, Lee had taken a car back to her apartment, where a man forced himself inside and fatally stabbed her dozens of times. While police have yet to determine if the murder was racially motivated, the death nonetheless shocked the AAPI community -- which had already been reeling from the spate of violent crimes committed against Asian women.

For the show's curator stephanie mei huang, who lives less than a mile from where the 35-year-old was killed, it was important to create a dedicated space to process those feelings. Seeing Lee's memorial vandalized just a few days after her death left huang, who uses they and them pronouns, without a safe space to grieve.

"I really felt like I couldn't move on with my life unless I did something about her death," they said.

Some of the exhibition's powerful works grapple with themes of tragedy and violence.

Haena Yoo's series "I've gone to look for America," for example, features origami guns fashioned out of soy sauce-stained newspaper clippings

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detailing violence against Asian Americans. Featuring headlines such as "8 Dead in Atlanta Spa Shooting With Fears of Anti-Asian Bias" and "The Cost of Being an 'Interchangeable Asian,'" the works are a commentary on gun violence in the US that also commemorate the Atlanta spa shooting victims.



"I've gone to look for America (Pistol 1)" (2021) by Haena Yoo. Credit: Courtesy David Lah/Phil Cai/Eli Klein Gallery

Six prints from Hồng-
Ân Trương,
meanwhile, speak to

the hypersexualization of Asian women during US military operations in Asia. Sifting through archival footage filmed by US and Australian soldiers in Vietnam during the late 1960s and early '70s, Trương finds the moments in which the soldiers' gaze fixates on Vietnamese women and creates stills of them. The work is personal -- her mother would have been in her late teens and early 20s at the time. But by divorcing the images from the context in which they were filmed, Trương attempts to give the nameless women a chance at autonomy and newfound possibility.

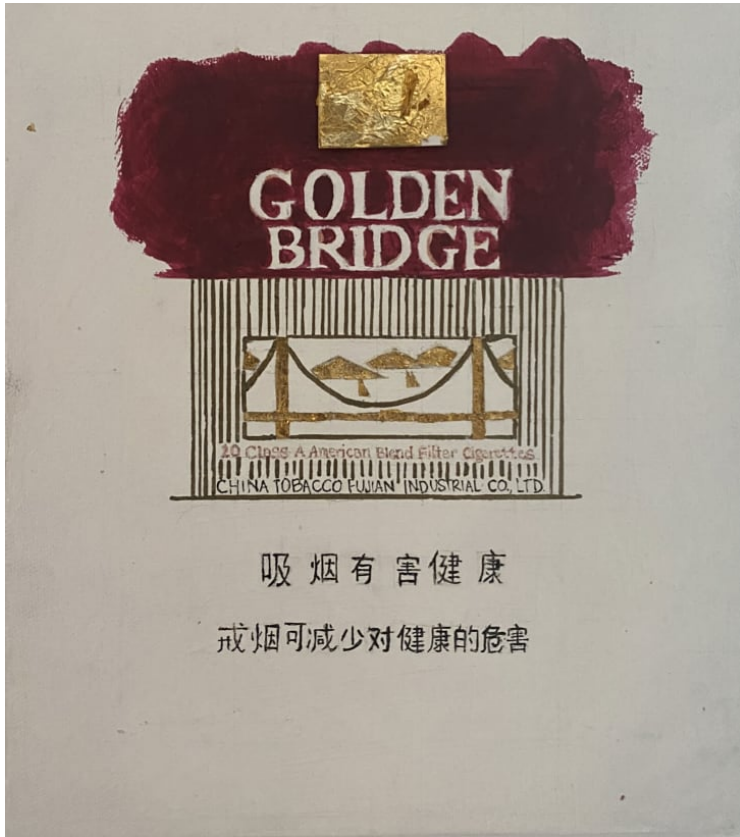




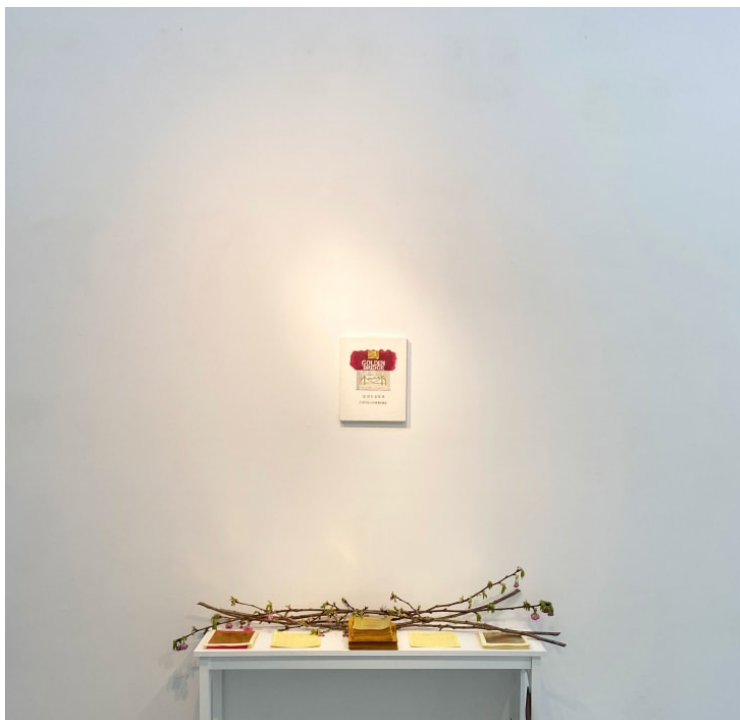
Hồng-An Trương's piece, "00:04:48:08" (2017). Credit: Hong-An Truong/Phil Cai/Eli Klein Gallery

The exhibition's title, "with her voice, penetrate earth's floor," also reflects the deep sense of mourning permeating throughout the space. It comes from "Dictée," the magnum opus of late Korean American artist [Theresa Hak Kyung Cha](#). In November 1982, just two months after her book published, Cha was raped and murdered aged 31.

As visitors move through the exhibition, they eventually come to a painting by Lee, depicting the Chinese cigarette brand Golden Bridge, detailed with gold leaf. She had made the work for Klein around the time she left the gallery, a nod to her boss' former smoking habit and to the Chinese practice of gifting cigarettes as a sign of respect. Below the painting, the show's artists have placed objects in an altar for Lee.



"Golden Bridge for Eli Klein" (2014) by Christina Yuna Lee.
Credit: Christina Yuna Lee/Phil Cai/Eli Klein Gallery





An altar of offerings is placed below Lee's painting. Credit: Courtesy Phil Cai/Eli Klein Gallery

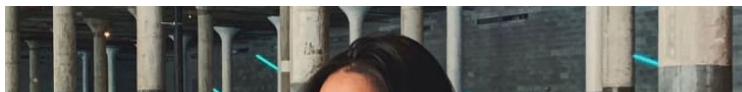
huang, who works as an interdisciplinary artist, created replicas of Chinese Daqianmen cigarettes -- a brand that was also a favorite of their grandfather's - - out of joss paper for the altar. Joss papers, also known as ghost money, are tissue-thin sheets burned as offerings to ancestors in China and other Asian countries.

"Asian people are expected to dull their emotions in this country and be perceived as pleasant," said huang, who opts to lowercase their name to keep the emphasis on the art. "To be pleasant all the time means that you cannot grieve all the time. And I think it's resulted in a lot of unprocessed grieving. Reminding ourselves to return to the grieving processes that our ancestors engaged in feels right at this time."

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Christina Yuna Lee. Credit: Courtesy Phil Cai/Eli Klein Gallery

Despite the sense of loss and tragedy that continues to haunt Asian Americans, the show is also meant to celebrate Lee -- her life and the power she embodies in death. Her voice continues to reverberate in the movement against AAPI hate, and huang said they hope others in the community are able to find strength, too.

"The only people that can really help us are ourselves, and we have to speak up," huang said. "As crippling as these events and crimes have been, I wanted to channel the grief into something that was social rather than isolated."

The exhibition "with her voice, penetrate earth's floor" is on view at Eli Klein Gallery in New York City until June 5.

Top image: An exhibition shot of Eli Klein Gallery's "with earth's floor" exhibition.

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