

# AHL Foundation

## Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA)

### Interview

- Interviewee: Mimi Jung
- Interviewer: Sarah Han, Director at Harper's Gallery
- July 8, 2024
- Interview organized by Hyunsoo Kim (AKAA Research Fellow 2023-2024)
- Open for research use

#### Use of Interview Transcript of Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA)

The Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA) provides our interview transcripts for non-commercial purposes. The following interviews were conducted by various curators, artists, and scholars and were recorded and transcribed by AHL Foundation's Research Fellow. We ask readers to know that the written record is a transcription of the spoken word, which has been edited for continuity and clarity and reviewed by the interviewee and the interviewer.

**Quotes must be cited as follows:** Interview with \_\_\_\_\_, date of interview. Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA), AHL Foundation.

For commercial or reproduction use, including reproduction, quotation, publication, and broadcast in any medium, distribution, derivative works, public performance, and public display, prior written permission must be obtained from AHL Foundation.

Permission will comply with any agreements between the interviewee and the interviewer and may be withheld in the AHL Foundation's sole determination. Please direct any questions or inquiries for the AKAA to [archive@ahlfoundation.org](mailto:archive@ahlfoundation.org).

© 2024 AHL Foundation, Inc.



**Sarah Han (SH): How did you find yourself working in textile, and specifically with weaving as your medium?**

Mimi Jung (MJ): I studied fine art, and my student work was a mix of media, focusing mostly on installations and sculptures towards the end. I utilized whatever format best communicated the idea, never tied to one medium. I'm self-taught in weaving; I did take a four-session introductory class on weaving on a floor loom, primarily to gain access to tools and facilities, as leaving art school often leaves you without resources. The entire endeavor of using a floor loom was not a fit, especially the way the composition would roll away, leaving only a section visible at a time.

After that, regretful for spending what little budget I had set aside on a mismatched medium, I came across a tapestry loom during a late-night Google search. The concept was similar to a floor loom, but this time the entire composition was visible, much like an easel and a canvas. This felt more intuitive to me, as each thread represents a line. I took the basic weaving principles and began experimenting on my own. I initially thought I would create a singular work and then move on to another medium, but more than a decade later, my fixation with weaving has not stopped.

**SH: You mention wanting to transcend “conventional confines of the loom”—can you talk more about this in a formal sense of your art practice?**

MJ: Formally, traditional weaving inherently aligns with a straight-line structure where the weft intersects the warp at a 90-degree angle. Typically, to create rounded edges in weaving, one employs a bitmap technique: the finer the threads or larger the canvas in relation to the thread, the less pronounced the bitmap effect. Erin Riley's work is a great example of this approach, as she beautifully creates woven compositions that embrace the 90-degree parameters while achieving painterly gestures. In Riley's work, the compact intersection of weft and warp generates a cohesive composition.

In contrast, my work delves into the space between these intersections. The warp and weft in my work are rarely compact; instead, the surrounding spaces between these horizontal and vertical lines become the focal points. I seldom adhere to the 90-degree parameter, with the vertical lines (the warp) serving as the only fixed structure to establish the "canvas." The weft in my recent works deviates significantly from the conventional 90-degree angle.

**SH: ...and also in a social context?**

MJ: The notion of barriers, walls, netting, and veils—whatever you may call my woven facades—suggests a lack of permanence, prompting viewers to pause and reflect.

This question prompted me to think about my time in NYC where construction is a constant presence. During my years at Cooper Union, the foundation building was perpetually surrounded by scaffolding, obscuring its entirety from view. This scaffolding is often accompanied by barriers or netting, intended not only to catch debris but also to demarcate boundaries for workers. While netting may not prevent serious accidents, it serves as a suggestion of a boundary—a delineation. The memory of this netting, often in green, black, and neon colors, has also influenced the palette of my sculptures over the years.

An impenetrable stone or metal wall is undeniable. However, a wall woven from vulnerable materials that allows one to peer through it transcends the physical barrier and invites participation. It requires introspection and consideration, creating a dialogue between the viewer and the artwork. This interplay of suggestion through transparency challenges the viewer to engage with the work on a deeper level, reflecting on the ephemeral nature of barriers.

**SH: I know you work on several series at once, but I'm most familiar with the "Shield" series and the "Fallen fence" series. Both series make a lot of sense coming from the same artist, but relate to space in such different ways.**

MJ: The various series I continuously develop do indeed inform each other. I used to describe the "Shield," "Live Edge," and the more framed works as sketches for the sculptural pieces like the "Fallen Fence" series. However, as I transition between these different series, the distinctions become increasingly blurred, with each new discovery influencing subsequent creations. For example, when I was working on my outdoor concrete sculpture, the "Shield" pieces that followed took on a more bulbous form. The focal point of my work consistently revolves around the cord and its suspension, influencing the perception of space around it.

**SH: Immediately they make me think about how you consider negative space, but I think "Shield" series emphasizes the engulfing power of space, while "fallen fence" brings the focus to the corporeal. Can you elaborate on the genesis of the concept and execution of each of these series?**

MJ: Especially in my earlier works from the Fallen Fence series, what is most evident is my attempt to create a rigid woven surface and then sculpt with it to evoke movement. This approach emphasizes the corporeal aspect you noted, focusing on the physical presence and materiality of the woven structures.

My exhibition at the Missoula Art Museum exemplifies the culmination of these studies, particularly with the piece *Resonate With*. In this work, two mound-like shapes woven from rigid materials—one suspended from the ceiling and the other positioned on the

floor—command a sense of weight and solidity. However, the focal point lies in the singular line that connects them. This line creates a visual dialogue, suggesting both descent and ascent, and defines the spatial relationship between the mounds within the installation.

Series like "Live Edge" and "Full Gradient" serve as explorations, though I'm reconsidering labeling them as studies, as each piece inherently influences the next, blurring distinctions. These series slowly allow me to build confidence in controlling each weft. And as I gain more control over the weft, the gradients become more nuanced and the forms more defined. Thus, when the "Shield" series was created, it to me emphasized that same "engulfing power of space."

Ultimately, all these series are interconnected, each new discovery informing the next. They explore different aspects of space, materiality, and structure.

**SH: When I was first getting to know your work (admiring from afar!) I was really intrigued by the large installation pieces you've made—some of which are interactive, in the sense that you can walk into the center of a circular structure, or invited to walk around the work for a 360 view of the piece. This is wild to me, because I know that the works are quite delicate. It feels like playing with fire.**

MJ: It was playing with fire, and at times, it burned, but something fascinating emerged from it. The way people experience art—and life—has shifted dramatically due to social media. It seems less crucial how one behaves in the physical world as long as one's digital representation aligns with desired perceptions.

For instance, when I exhibited pieces like *Black Interior* or *Four Teal Walls* at a fair, the environment was wild—energetic, open to the public, and largely unsupervised. In such settings, the act of taking selfies to document a "cultural outing" becomes part of the public representation. Viewers, in trying to find the most optimal selfie angle, often inadvertently bump into the artwork and position themselves in areas not intended for access to get the perfect shot.

The interaction with these pieces highlights how people navigate and sometimes disregard these boundaries, prioritizing their own experiences, whether it's touching the work or capturing a selfie. While it can be disheartening at times, once I detach myself from the work, I recognize that these dynamics are integral to the dialogue my work creates.

**SH: I know you are planning to delve deeper into the 3D, sculptural works, and I'm curious to know more about how you think about the relationship of the body (yours, and the viewer's) to the work.**



As for the consideration of the body, the free-standing sculptures like *Black Interior* and *Four Teal Walls* stand 6.5 feet tall, towering over an average person. This height is deliberate, influencing the viewer's field of vision. Some areas of the sculptures are woven denser to create opaqueness, while others incorporate more air to achieve transparency. These choices all contribute to exploring the boundaries and participatory aspects inherent in the delineation of space.

**SH: You were born in Korea, lived in New York; Basel, Switzerland; Frankfurt, Germany; and Los Angeles, but now live in rural Montana. How, if at all, has that affected your work? Any changes that have manifested visually, or psychologically in your practice?**

MJ: I hope the answer to this question stays fluid, ever evolving as I find many new places to call home. Even if I settle in a single place, that manifestation changes with age. Leaving Korea at the age of 8, I moved every 2-3 years, never started and finished at the same school until college. This nomadic life made me an acute observer, a skill I overdeveloped as a survival tool. Sometimes I wonder if being more of a participant in my childhood would have significantly altered my work.

The diversity of social norms I've encountered in different places has profoundly influenced my work. These insights are drawn from my personal experiences and are stereotypical—Moving from Germany's direct and structured communication style to Montana's avoidance of confrontation has been eye-opening. In Germany, a simple phrase like "I'll see you soon!" triggers an immediate need for specific plans, reflecting a culture that values clarity and precision in communication. On the other hand, in Montana, people often go to great lengths to avoid direct conflict, opting for indirect methods to resolve differences.

These contrasting social dynamics highlight how fluid identity can be, as individuals adjust their behaviors to fit cultural expectations. For me, navigating these norms has been integral to my art practice, influencing how I interpret themes of identity and social interaction. I aim to capture the complexities of these cultural landscapes—how they shape personal identity and societal norms.