

Franz Kaka

LOTUS LAURIE KANG
MESODERM

Lotus Laurie Kang

Mesoderm

May 27 - June 24, 2023

Before you is a presentation of works from Lotus Laurie Kang's series *Mesoderm*. Being audience to Kang's practice means a certain familiarity with the artist's skillful creation of exhibitions that contain both artwork and the environment for that work's presentation. I think first of the series of curving, spinal structures made of flex tracks and steel wall studs, collectively titled *Membranes*, ongoing since 2017. The forms act both as sculpture themselves, as well as architectural apparatus to present other works. Another work-as-apparatus that viewers may think of is *Molt*, wrought through Kang's cohesive material repertoire. *Molt* consists of unfixed photographic paper and light-sensitive film skins where the gallery or studio itself is turned into what the artist calls a tanning machine. This body of work is often suspended from ceilings, dividing spaces and filtering light from windows, with recent iterations at Horizon Art Foundation in 2022 and the just-opened Atrium Project for MCA Chicago.

Here, we have a contrasting opportunity to view a reduced and focused presentation of Kang's works. The exhibition consists of several two-dimensional wall works, drawn from a singular series, *Mesoderm*. Taking a rear view of Kang's practice reveals her continual return to the subject of the body's permeability, with the titling of her work often narrowing into fine and specific points of reference. In this case "mesoderm" links Kang's works and the method of rendering drawing and collage to the metaphor of gestation. The mesoderm is the middle germ layer in early embryonic cell development in most animals. Held between the ecto- and endoderm, the middling mesoderm is a group of cells that contain blueprints for the future organism, much like a seed. The mesoderm, Kang notes, eventually becomes fascia, the thin casing of connective tissue that envelops and holds each organ, bone, blood vessel, muscle, and nerve fiber in its place. Fascia is like an interior layer of skin, a bag inside our bodies, providing internal structure. In Chinese medicine, which Kang has begun close study of in recent years, fascia is considered an organ unto itself.

Mesoderm are collages made with various silicones and rubbers, photograms, spherical magnets and found or cast aluminum objects. They are rendered in the artist's recognizable colour palette – marrow and flesh, rust, blush, and bruise (with the introduction of a few shots of lemon). There are also drawings made with photo paper, darkroom chemicals, grease pencils and oil pastels. In thinking of literal and metaphorical acts of tracing and imprinting, lines and lineage, Kang traces onto acetate before tanning onto the sheets of photo paper.

The works contain imagery that is largely abstracted beyond recognition. In keeping with Kang's investment in lineage and recurrence, naming said source material is important regardless of its identifiable legibility: historical photographs of women carrying baskets and vessels, containers in marketplaces, anatomical diagrams of organs, the limbic system in the brain, nerves, as well as some personal photographs. In

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pursuit of an archive of lineage and influence that continually regurgitates rather than digests, Kang constantly adds to this pool of source imagery, most recently through research into the plants and wildlife endemic to the Koreas.

The mesoderm is by definition in development. It is preliminary and full of potential. Once it transfigures into fascia, it becomes the internal structure that holds our bodies to an order. I would suggest that Kang's works are mesodermic in the sense that they contain the structures and information for other works within them. In this current iteration of *Mesoderm*, one could then read the works as preparatory sketches produced during the development of a major project commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, *In Cascades*, that opens concurrently. But I imagine that describing the works in this way would assign too much linearity to Kang's committed cyclical way of working. Another way then to view *Mesoderm* in relation to Kang's larger practice and the simultaneous production and exhibition *In Cascades* might be through a theory of continual movement and circuitry found in her study of acupuncture. Acupuncture communicates the central nervous system, made up of the brain and spinal cord, and the peripheral nervous system, the rest of the body, via nerves. Viewing Kang's work reveals both a honed and cohesive aesthetic and material language and a way of working in seriality where circulation and renewal eclipses fixity and completeness.

Lotus Laurie Kang is based in Toronto, CA. Recent exhibitions include: *Molt (New York-Lethbridge-Los Angeles-Toronto-Chicago-)*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago (2023); *Mother Always Has a Mother*, Mercer Union SPACE, Toronto (2023); *Memory Work*, Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson (2023); *Triennial: Soft Water Hard Stone*, New Museum, New York (2021); *Total Disbelief*, SculptureCenter, New York (2019), *If I Have A Body*, Remai Modern, Saskatoon (2019); *Beolle*, Oakville Galleries, Oakville (2019) and *Formula 1: A Loud, Low Hum*, Cue Art Foundation, New York (2019). In 2022 Kang was the inaugural resident of Horizon Art Foundation, Los Angeles and has been in residence at Triangle Arts Association, New York.