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Sunah Choi
Kólla

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An object: its traces, silhouette, the shadow it throws.
Form follows function; culture extracts from nature. Ornamentation, decoration, accumulation, then—
radical abstraction.

Sunah Choi's latest body of work is characterized by a push-and-pull between addition and subtraction. Deceptively Minimalistic, the works on view merge material austerity with the codified richness of a thickly woven allegorical tapestry. The exhibition's titular *Kólla*, Greek for glue, is the etymological root for the term collage—a creative device that Choi understands to go beyond the mere act of pasting images together to point to new meanings. Instead, she asserts that collaging—of natural forms, cultural markers, man-made designs—exists in a constant loop of patterns, repeated, emulated, and reproduced, enveloping us in our everyday urban surroundings. The installation *Loop I – IV*, positioned at the entrance to the gallery, could be approached as a visual pun, an exercise in distilling a flow of reproductions into a sculptural piece.

Inside the gallery, the works on view build on the processes that have long informed Choi's practice, both contextually—capturing physical manifestations of cultural phenomena—as well as formally: The artist often expands on analog techniques of drawing with light and photographing without a camera.

Here, Choi uses the century-old technique of the photogram for a series of wall-mounted works on Baryta paper. The black-and-white photograms appear to be populated by abstract patterns. Yet the negative images they depict are the result of a meticulous process in which the artist retraces, with ink on transparency, shapes she either finds in nature (leaves, wood bark, the cracks between a mound of foliage) or derives from patterns that have been inspired by nature, like camouflage or arabesques. Some formations, on the other hand, are left entirely to chance, created by dripping ink on transparency, and then blowing air on it. Layering several transparencies in a single photogram, Choi creates a palimpsest of visual references and then exposes the paper to light, thus “gluing” them together into a “collage.”

But there's also an ideological collage at work. It is embodied by Choi's fusion of influences ranging from Oceanic cutout patterns, traditional Korean *Munjado*—decorative pictographs that illustrate the eight virtues of Confucius—to the fathers of the *Neues Sehen* movement, and Surrealism. A rhomboid sculpture hangs from the ceiling, dividing the gallery space like a fence. Titled *Diamond (After Magritte)*, it is a blown-up steel version of a detail in Magritte's 1926 painting *Les épaves de l'ombre*, in which the painter posits this enigmatic shape at the heart of a mountainous landscape mysteriously populated by cutout wooden ornaments, feathers, and what appears to be the remnants of a green parrot. While in the painting, the rhomboid's grid is broken up by feathers, in her hanging sculpture,

Choi repeats the leaf patterns that are found in her photograms to give shape to the grid's voids.

The steel-and-brick sculpture *provisorisch stabil* (provisionally stable) follows a self-imposed constriction: As she collected and recorded forms found in urban environments, Choi noted their dimensions. Electricity boxes, phone cable boxes, trash cans—these are some of the deconstructed rectangular shapes repeated in this work, all held together in careful balance by another rectangle, a standard building brick.

In *Timeline*, a sculpture hanging in a separate room, climbing rope threads horizontal lines through a steel rectangle in a form reminiscent of a notebook or staves. Another rope creates irregular graph-like peaks and drops within the frame. Were the traces of one's actions, one's movements, or story, to be represented on a timeline, what would that look like?

Hili Perlson