

Franz Kaka

Alice Gong Xiaowen

Heavy Fog

Press Release:

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Franz Kaka is proud to present *Heavy Fog*, a sculptural sound installation by New York-based, Chinese-Canadian artist Alice Gong Xiaowen that transforms the gallery into a resonating instrument. Seven guqin strings stretch across the drywall panels of a monolithic, asymmetrical structure at the centre of the room. Each nylon-wrapped steel string, tuned by hand and anchored by custom harp tuners, is set into motion by solenoid electromagnets, vibrating in slow, sustained resonance—its tone held in suspension by a magnetic field rather than by touch. The resultant tones move through hollow walls and custom wooden panels, turning the architecture itself into an acoustic body that amplifies and shapes the music. Here, sound is sculpted through space.

Gong's practice explores the personal, historical, and poetic conditions of how things come into being. In recent years, she has turned to the idea of material translations of matter and haptic memories to imagine the collapse and reconfiguration of object-hood. The guqin's own transformation mirrors this. Once strung with silk, its material was changed to metal during China's Cultural Revolution, when a Party committee sought to make it louder and more public, aligning it with Maoist ideology and rejecting "the Four Olds"—old ideas, culture, customs, and habits. This shift, both sonic and political, lingers within the exhibition, suggesting a memory of what has been lost and dissimulated.

In the gallery, a dense grey form rises from the floor, emitting faint, continuous tones—a freestanding corner chamber, slightly askew. From within this hidden chamber, low frequencies move through the air as if thickening it. The absence of visible instruments heightens attention to subtle variations in harmony, including presence, repetition, and disappearance. Listening becomes an act of imagination, a guqin suggested but unseen, its sound hovering like mist. Low frequencies drift through the air, enveloping the listener in an atmosphere that is part instrument and part architecture.

Here, heavy fog blooms where corners begin to hum. Sound gathers, drifts, and reforms, sometimes swelling until the room feels full, then receding into near-silence. Overtones rise and fade; harmonics shimmer between perception and dissipation. Through vibration, the air gives shape to change itself, quiet but full, its temporal density shifting as time. What unfolds is not melody, but duration, a slow accumulation and dispersal of sound, a composition in time that hollows and refills the room, again and again.

Sound, though often abstract, creates meaning through the act of listening. Hearing turns vibration into memory, as it is shaped by the mind into thoughts, sensations, and imaginative experiences. These experiences are indexical, meaning they directly point toward something real and material (like how the

sound of thunder points to a storm), without needing to be mediated by visual signs or written language. Through this, sound offers a unique way of accessing and interpreting the world, different from how images or text are encountered, and grounded in attunement rather than representation.

By isolating the resonance of individual frequencies, *Heavy Fog* invites visitors to experience sound before identifying it, to notice how hearing slips into memory. The work lingers in that in-between space where sound becomes recollection, an echo of what is gone and what remains.

Alice Gong Xiaowen (b. in 1994, Beijing; lives and works in New York) received a BFA from School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a MFA in Sculpture from the Yale School of Art. Solo and two-person exhibitions have been held at Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai (2025); lower_cavity, Holyoke (2024); and House of Seiko, San Francisco (2023). Select group exhibitions include Minor Attractions, London (2025); Island Gallery, New York (2025); Bank Gallery, New York (2025); Kiang Malingue, New York (2025); Romance, Pittsburgh (2025); Stilllife, New York (2024); Franz Kaka, Toronto (2024); Silke Lindner, New York (2023); DUPLEX, New York (2022). Xiaowen is the recipient of Susan H. Wedon Award, 2025; Explore and Create Grant from the Canadian Council for the Arts, 2022; the UrbanGlass Winter Scholarship Award, 2019; and the John W. Kurtich Foundation Travel Fellowship, 2015.