

VACANCY

PRESS TEXT

SUN WOO
SHELTER

NOVEMBER 14–DECEMBER 27, 2025

Gallery Vacancy is pleased to announce *Shelter*, the first solo exhibition in the gallery by Korean Canadian artist Sun Woo, on view from November 14 to December 27, 2025.

In this presentation, Sun Woo constructs an immersive environment that weaves together domestic labor and the aesthetics of technology. Combining natural materials with household artifacts from different eras, she transforms familiar objects and mechanical remnants into a contemplative space of perception and reflection, where the body moves through an interwoven state of shelter and constraint.

Her expansive mural-like painting *Landscape with Washerwomen* (2025) portrays an ordinary moment: vast white bed sheets suspended from a clothesline, juxtaposed with her strands of long black hair being vigorously scrubbed and compressed by vintage laundering devices. The work revisits the art historical motif of laundry: a symbol long associated with feminine diligence and domestic virtue, and transforms it into a scene of endurance and strain. Rather than depicting a tranquil household routine, Sun Woo integrates traces of her own body into the mechanisms of labor, where the body itself becomes a site of exhaustion, immersion, and compression. The composition, infused with quiet tension and vulnerability, confronts the male painters' romanticized visions of domestic bliss by reframing the feminine body within a landscape of estrangement and metamorphosis. By foregrounding the bodily cost of care and repetition, Sun Woo questions the notion of technological progress as emancipation, a promise that continues to remain unfulfilled.

In *Suspended Lullaby* (2025), Sun Woo constructs an ambivalent tableau within a greenhouse: swaddled forms and an empty cradle hang from the rafters, surrounded by vegetation that extends both inside and beyond its glass enclosure. Below, nurturing tools and a child's toy horse lie scattered, creating a tension between nurture and neglect. The swaddles conceal their contents, leaving uncertain whether they hold infants, objects, or something more unsettling. Similarly, in *Milk and Mortar* (2025), a braid of dark hair emerges from a cradle, encircled by milking devices and young sprouting trees. The term "mortar", traditionally referencing a tool used to grind ingredients, here alludes to the crumbled residue on the ground, signifying both nourishment and erosion.

Through these images, Sun Woo reveals a latent violence beneath surfaces of tenderness. The greenhouse, with its controlled ecology, and the mechanical devices, extensions of maternal labor, coexist as symbols of care and critique. By juxtaposing nature with artificial construction, she reflects on the ambiguous promise of technology in reshaping domestic labor and reimagining intimacy. Oscillating between vitality and fragility, the works trace the emotional spectrum of the maternal body—love, fatigue, devotion, and transformation—dimensions often absent from the idealized imagery of motherhood. The floral-patterned swaddle and the braided hair recur throughout Sun Woo's practice, grounding the work in her personal lexicon of memory and identity. At the same time, the cocoon-like forms suggest the possibility of renewal and self-reclamation within a cycle of protection and constraint.

In *Table of Joy* (2025), the greenhouse reappears as an allegorical space of control and containment. A seemingly serene table setting—neatly arranged forks and plates—is violently interrupted by oversized herb choppers slicing through braids of hair. The greenhouse, an artificial construct designed to regulate heat, light, and humidity, mirrors contemporary systems of caregiving increasingly mediated by technology. Through this juxtaposition of tenderness and precision, Sun Woo reflects on how automation and optimization reshape our notions of intimacy and care, revealing the contradictions within the promise of technological liberation.

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The exhibition culminates in a transformed environment: parts of the gallery resemble a burned attic, where charred wooden planks veil the walls, disrupting the whiteness of the cube. The space evokes the remnants of domestic collapse—a home reduced to trace and memory. These scorched surfaces stand as witnesses to combustion both literal and symbolic, pointing to the fragility of structures once meant to protect. The distinction between interior and exterior, safety and exposure, dissolves into an atmosphere of uneasy habitation. Shelter, once a site of protection, becomes a fragile threshold where preservation turns toward renewal.

Shelter extends Sun Woo's ongoing meditation on the domestic as a space of both refuge and estrangement. Her hybrid forms blur the boundaries between body and architecture, positioning the home as an extension of corporeal experience—vulnerable, fragmented, and perpetually in flux. Moving between intimacy and alienation, her works question the sense of comfort promised by technology and the fragile faith in automation as care. Within these oscillations, *Shelter* emerges as a living state of becoming, a contemporary allegory of refuge, perception, and renewal.

Sun Woo, born in 1994 in Seoul, South Korea, now lives and works in Seoul. She received her Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts from Columbia University in 2017. As an immigrant to Canada and a digital native, the artist interweaves migrating experiences across geographical and cultural boundaries to explore the concept of belonging within the real and virtual space, addressing the collective memory of folklore and mythology. Moving beyond realistic inference, Sun Woo fabricates extreme perils and animated mechanical objects in her paintings and sculptures, wittily wielding together themes of dream, pain, and symbiosis while investigating the gradually disintegrating physical body in the age of hyperconnectivity. Through smell, temperature, and humidity provoked by her photorealist approach, these sensory perceptions activate a shared familiarity and intimacy, both at present and from afar, within the disassociated bodily contexts. Sun Woo's works relentlessly insert heightened perceptual nuances to propose a possibility which summons and amalgamates the dislocated senses across time and within the corporeality created by the artist, evoking visceral feelings that turn the suffering of one's immurement to the spectacle of disembodiment subjectivities. Recent solo exhibitions include: Shelter, Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai, 2025; Portals, Gallery Vacancy at Frieze London, 2024; Swamps and Ashes, Make Room, Los Angeles, 2023. Select group exhibitions at: Songeun Art and Cultural Foundation, Seoul, 2025; Sehwa Museum of Art, Seoul, 2025; Seoul Museum of Art, 2023; Ulsan Art Museum, 2023; Art Sonje Center, Seoul, 2023; and Thaddaeus Ropac, Seoul, 2023. Sun Woo is the recipient of Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture in 2023 and Art Change Up from the Arts Council Korea and Ministry of Culture in 2021. Her works are in the collections of Beth Rudin DeWoody, New York; The Perimeter, London; and Museu Inimá da Paula, Belo Horizonte.