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Mira M. Yang, *Ensemble*, installation view, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2026. Photo: Cedric Mussano

The solo exhibition *Ensemble* dissembles the controlled, crafted identities of the artist and the institution through mimicry of the master and the master copy. As such, artist Mira M.Yang presents a reconstruction of disclosure and disguise that begins and ends with multiple propositions. Is translation, as a gesture, fundamentally a masked matter of progression, of evolution? The exhibition, the first of two chapters curated by Kathrin Bentele, initially unfolds in a small medieval town in Switzerland that quickly and literally situates itself within an uncanny valley. Everything is static but dynamic, depending on the moment.

Questions of automation and authenticity persist as performance and production become categorically intertwined. Walls and corridors are constructed throughout the ground floor mimicking the institutional perimeters, while windowlike holes and intentionally incomplete fabrication become intrinsic to the aesthetic. Elements of sound and installation, sculpture and found objects, video, research, and the rhetoric of performance are embedded in each object's looping dramaturgy. Narrative and language become inescapable, too, as objects lose any stable relationship to time, place, and purpose.

Pragmatically speaking, the exhibition occupies three levels of Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, a former cardboard packing factory built in the late 1890s. It is located in Western Switzerland, not far from the watchmaking factories of the Jura and along the linguistic and cultural border between the French and German-speaking sides of the country. Fribourg is colloquially known as the home of iconic Swiss kinetic artist Jean Tinguely, and, more crucially, is also home to the *Musée suisse de la marionnette* (Swiss Marionette Museum). From that collection, several loans are on view in *Ensemble*. M.Yang researched the museum's archive, finding pan-Asian puppets that inevitably evoked colonialist rhetoric surrounding practices of collecting and preserving. Several figures, or fragments of figures, are without recorded provenance and bear the designation "Object with Unidentified Identity." Others were evidently cherished or valuable; some dated to the thirteenth century, others noted as ancient, and several comparatively recent. As exhibited found objects, they are prominently embedded within the built walls and corridors of *Ensemble*, as well as preciously encased with their gaze upward in low, solemn vitrines. They are an integral part of the exhibition as traces of long lost nostalgia or exoticism, recalling the souvenir for the child and/or the spoils of travel for the father.

Elsewhere in the exhibition are the sculpture *Ensemble* works, all from 2026: multiple sound pieces M.Yang created using various vintage instruments connected to stepper motors and running cables, with computational code controlling the instruments to play themselves on an endless loop. *Ensemble (Poids, Temps, Espace, Flux)* is a drum set fitted with apparently autonomous drumsticks that move in alternation to perform a steady beat. *Ensemble (Visages)* hides in plain sight, framed inside a wall and amid the larger free-standing sculptures, but emits a loud and startling chime when the Mudang bangul brass bells shimmy and fills the room. The reconfigured organ, *Ensemble (Bras, Poignets, Épaules, Mains)*, holds center stage and consists of reed and lead pipes, bamboo flutes, and the unseen wind chest and bellows. Like the other sculptures throughout the exhibition, it is mysteriously connected to the wall through a running black cable that powers the whole performance.



Mira M. Yang, *Ensemble (Poids, Temps, Espace, Flux)* (2026), installation view, *Ensemble,* Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2026. Photo: Cedric Mussano

The running ground cables for the *Ensemble* works are inevitably reminiscent of the imagined strings of the marionettes, controlled by the unseen marionettist. The sculpture's ongoing performances, mysteriously at first glance and mechanically at second, haunt the institution, as do the histories of the still, unplayed, and categorized doll parts. The instruments and the puppets have a patina to them of bygone leisure and utility that beckons the question of the awaiting, devotional object for its newfound master. But the conversation between these two kinds of resuscitated and re-animated playthings speaks louder, as the elusive artist evokes an enigmatic presence, someone like Victor Frankenstein—literature's meticulous Swiss scientist who would tamper with nature to create a monster through emerging technologies and ambiguous electrical currents.

But any Industrial Revolution Goth narrative that may imply a creation and destruction subtext is overridden by the exhibition's conceptual underpinning of Choi Seung-hee (1911-1969). The first Korean choreographer of the colonial era to perform in Paris, Seung-hee is a recurring muse of M.Yang's by way of French filmmaker Chris Marker's mediation. After she achieved international fame in the 1930s, Marker visited communist North Korea in 1956 and documented both Seung-hee and her daughter Ahn Seung-hee, performing. Stills from the trip are held in Marker's archive at the Cinémathèque Française, where M.Yang used a loupe and a cell phone camera to make a bootleg copy of photographs that could not be publicly



Corps de Marionnette à gaine chinoise. La tête a été retrouvée (ancient, on loan from the *Musée suisse de la marionnette,* Fribourg), installation view, Mira M. Yang, *Ensemble,* Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2026. Photo: Cedric Mussano



Théâtre de marionettes à tiges chinoises (ancient, on loan from the *Musée suisse de la marionnette*, Fribourg), installation view, Mira M. Yang, *Ensemble*, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2026. Photo: Cedric Mussano

reproduced. The result is *Cinematheque Moranbong* (2025), a work of eighty slides, played through a slide projector, paced as steadily as an *Ensemble* beat. They are photographs of photographs from a contact sheet, seemingly presented in sequence, certainly in the style of Marker, and reminiscent of an animation. Thus, M.Yang's film slides of Marker's photographs of Seung-hee's movement become a cyclical rendition of the gaze through time, hierarchy, and preservation. All the while, Choi Seung-hee or her likeness gazes in return.

Though Choi Seung-hee's choreography is known to have fused traditional Asian dance with European modernist movement, next to no known documentation exists of her performances alongside her voice or the musical accompaniment. In *Transmissions* (2026), the final work on the first floor, M.Yang worked with the choreographer Paula Pau in another form of translation-speculation. A small camera adhered to Pau's arm filmed the abstracted, fluid movement of her hands and dizzying perspective, as well as several establishing shots of Pau wearing a *papier-mâché* canine mask that covers her face and undoubtedly narrows her sight.

Blended movements in public sites, from the Théâtre National de Chaillot, surrounded by the Asian art collection at The Guimet Museum, to a karaoke bar in the *Quartier Asiatique* of the thirteenth arrondissement, offer a glimpse of the city that has changed so much yet has evolved very little. The city of Paris, as a backdrop and extended research subject, becomes a contemporary protagonist in M.Yang's visual autofiction of Seung-hee. The nameplate of *Le Monde* and its headlines are pasted across Pau's mask, masking itself as a smokescreen, a dog whistle, or both. Either way, it serves as a signifier for the performer and the audience, as both contend with the collapse of time in past and present forms of colonialism that surround us. As Pau's limbs seem to elegantly elongate or draw her inwards, the gestures—as in the *Ensemble* sculptures—always point toward the desire for physical autonomy and control.

A Labanotation score of known choreography by Choi Seung-hee, created for the exhibition as a small folded takeaway, is the last remnant of *Ensemble*. Developed by dancer Rudolf von Laban in 1928, Labanotation is known as a comprehensive system for notating



Mira M. Yang, *Cinematheque Moranbong* (2025), installation view, *Ensemble,* Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2026. Photo: Cedric Mussano

human movements—similar to musical notation and compositional scoring. The abstract symbols represent direction, duration, and dynamic qualities of movement, for instance, along with other precise indications of body levels and emotional emphasis. Given the long history of musical notation and sheet music, it is actually remarkable that choreographic scoring is not yet a century old or as widely understood. But then again, interpreting gestures, like interpreting language, is itself an ever-evolving process that risks cultural misunderstanding. As an object for an audience to keep, the score—abstract yet precise in form—becomes a further category of destabilized but articulated translation to end on.

***Brit Barton** is an artist and writer. She is the editor of Art & Order Journal.*

ARTFORUM

MIRA M. YANG'S HALLUCINATORY ARCHIVE

In dual shows at Kunsthalle Fribourg and Fondation Pernod Ricard, the artist traces how cultural identities change through the ages

By Thomas Patier, Mira M. Yang

October 9, 2026 1:42 pm

Paris-based artist Mira M. Yang considers what is transformed, and lost, when a cultural artifact crosses national or temporal boundaries. M. Yang's video Karaoke Falsetto*, 2026, recently on view at Manifesta 16 in Essen, Germany, features two singers—whose vocal techniques draw from classical opera, Korean* pansori*, and experimental performance—interpreting birdsong (culled from a recording of a nightingale), music by German No Wave legend Klaus Nomi, and more. The two performed live at Essen's decommissioned Saint Marien church in a striking cross-cultural homage to the communities who once made use of these religious spaces.*

For "Ensemble," M. Yang's current exhibition at Kunsthalle Friart in Fribourg, Switzerland (which will travel to Paris's Fondation Pernod Ricard in November), the artist delved into the life and work of Korean dancer Choi Seung-hee (1911–1969), whose renditions of pan-Asian classical dances, performed worldwide, became a global sensation during the late 1930s (she once shared a New York stage with Martha Graham). While many of these dances were approximations of sorts—often adapted to Westerners' exoticized ideas of East Asia—Choi's works were also a clear precursor of today's globalized cultural field. By using information and clues gleaned from dance programs and rare performance images left behind by Choi and her collaborators in Paris, M. Yang created multiple bodies of work that freely reinterpret elements from Choi's long-forgotten choreographies.

— Thomas Patier



View of "Mira M. Yang: Ensemble," 2026, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg. All photos: Cedric Mussano.

THIS SHOW UNFOLDS in two chapters, the first being in Fribourg and the second in Paris. Having several chapters suits the material and exhibition quite well, as it is very much about the process of circulation and transmission of cultural performances, about histories and images in transit. I initiated this research when I came to Paris for a residency two years ago. I brought along a copy of *Coréennes* (Korean Women), a 1959 book by Chris Marker, which I had found in the library of the Museum of East Asian Art Cologne. It features photographs he took in '56 as part of a trip around North Korea organized by the Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party, or PCF). I went to the Cinémathèque Française, where his estate is held, and looked through all the pictures from this journey. I'm



View of "Mira M. Yang: Ensemble," 2026, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg. All photos: Cedric Mussano.

fascinated by Marker's way of sampling memory, place, time, myth, and the everyday into a highly sensitizing and poetic cinematic language. At the same time, *Coréennes* is a precious document of everyday life in North Korea in the '50s, of international socialist cultural programs, and of the beauty of North Korean women as seen through the camera of a Frenchman, which also makes this book a document of the Western male gaze at the time.

A few of Marker's portraits from *Coréennes* feature Choi Seung-hee, a North Korean dancer, and Ahn Seung-hee, her daughter, both of whom he photographed during a performance at Moranbong Theater in Pyongyang. I was intrigued by these images because I've been looking into cultural portrayals of Asian femininity, including in art collections, and how these are staged in, or co-opted by, other cultural settings. I'm interested in how those portrayals have historically informed global cultural narratives and exchanges that, in turn, have affected—and continue to affect—the way we see one another today.



View of "Mira M. Yang: Ensemble," 2026, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg. All photos: Cedric Mussano.

I made a series around these images, including a quasi-stop-motion animation of Marker's photographs titled *Cinematheque Moranbong* (2025)—referring to the two places where these images were taken, first by Marker, then by me. At the Cinémathèque, I rephotographed Marker's originals through an archival magnifying lens, which distorted the images. Because rolls of film contain matter from the very place they were taken, and because moving through these materials (from someone else's specific angle and perspective) is quite a physical experience, I paced through details in each print at a certain rhythm: I reanimated the archival photographs into a sort of dance. The resulting work comprises two Kodak slide projectors. Each one projects an image onto the same surface, one on top of the other, in a progression of slow dissolves. *Cinematheque Moranbong* functions like a magic lantern, an early form of cinematic equipment.

Choi Seung-hee was quite famous in her day. She trained as a modern dancer in Japan and toured around the United States and Europe. Her solo

stage program was made from a highly imaginative, eclectic selection of traditional pan-Asian references, poses, and gestures. There is a program booklet in the archives of the Centre National de la Danse, which documents the dances she performed at Salle Pleyel and Théâtre Chaillot in Paris. This program was the starting point from which I, in collaboration with Paula Pau, a contemporary dancer and choreographer, began reimagining Choi's choreographies. We were especially interested in how Choi deployed gender and self-exoticization in her work. In one number, she appears as her own drunken father, dancing in a very folk way, mixing modernist, German Expressionist choreographic elements with *talchum*, a Korean traditional mask dance. In another, she embodies a very erotic and ambiguous bodhisattva figure, echoing its Buddhist depictions and the audience's expectations.

The resulting film, *Transmissions*, is partially a response to my encounter with Marker's images. Here, we used a small body camera that we attached to Paula's arm while she interpreted choreographies at sites around Paris that are linked to Choi's visit to the city. We went, for example, to the Théâtre Chaillot and the Musée Guimet, where a lot of Asian art objects are kept (Choi's work was often inspired by such collected objects and artworks). In the film, you see the world and various sceneries being moved by the dance. Sometimes Paula chooses to turn the camera on herself, but the film is mostly composed of distorted moving images of contemporary Paris which, in many aspects, still looks like the version of Paris that Choi saw.

Something from Choi's performances that has largely gone missing is the sound and musical accompaniment. She must have traveled with a group of musicians, but for the most part we don't know who they were or what they sounded like. There is one recording of her singing "A Garden in Italy," a song she translated and performed in Korean. We included it in the film. But beyond that, the sound in *Transmissions* is subtle: mostly breathing and the sounds of Paris through which Paula moves.

In order to bring back sound, I decided to translate our choreographies into a score by using Kinetography Laban notation, which is a type of movement notation. It views the body and its movements as a machine that can be captured through a language composed of symbols and patterns. I





Mira M. Yang, *Transmissions*, 2026, video, color, sound, 16 minutes. Installation view, Kunsthalle Friart

collaborated with two notators: One has a background in Korean dance and is a contemporary dancer herself, while the other is very experienced in dance notation. The Laban notations formed the basis of a symbol-score that is interpreted in the exhibition by a deconstructed pipe organ. This sonic machine—a pneumatic system operated by wind and air—is partially concealed inside walls. It produces very low hums and rattlings rather than harmonious melodies.

The organ's elements are mirrored like a body, representing its different parts. This was important for me because it's like physically operating parts of a body through breath, spread across the space, turning the archive back into something corporeal. The pipe organ is also a very architectural instrument. This system is conceived to interact with the space and reacts to movement within it.

"Ensemble," the title of both this installation and the exhibition, refers to a group of musicians making music together, addressing the broader question of how we can live together in society. It is not about producing a cohesive documentation of Choi's work and legacy, but a hallucinatory, momentary, fragmented experience. I wanted to look at bodies and archives that have historically been exoticized and objectified in order to translate them through my own perspective and moment in time. Reanimating or restaging this material through performance is a way of countering totalizing pictures of Choi, her legacy, and imperialist ideology.

–As told to Thomas Patier

"Mira M. Yang: Ensemble," curated by Kathrin Bentele, is currently on view (through November 13, 2026) at Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, Switzerland; travels to Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris, November 24, 2026–February 6, 2027.



View of "Mira M. Yang: Ensemble," 2026, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg. All photos: Cedric Mussano.

ISSN 2055-2565
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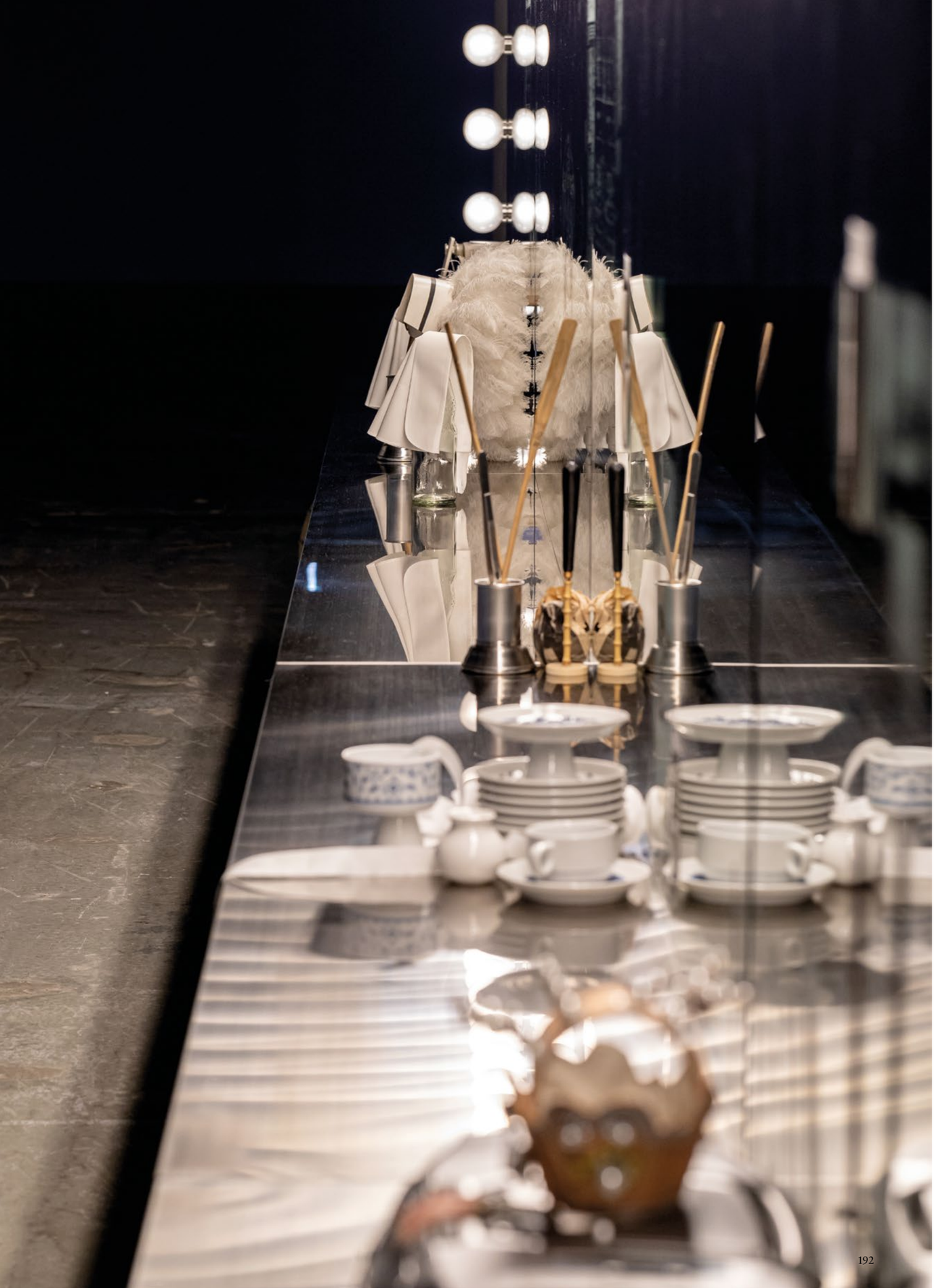


Issue 91
Spring 2025

MOUSSE

mouth of a volcano. Yes, mouth; and lava tongue."
AN SONTAG quoted by DANI BLANGA GUBBAY from
s on Spitting, p.157

BINTA DIAW
ISIN HENDRIK FOLKERTS
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SHANZHAI LYRIC
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Mira Mann: Besides *Coréennes*
by Nicholas Tammens

In one of Mira Mann's most recent works, *Cinematheque Moranbong* (2025), we see two slide projectors superimposing images taken by the artist at the estate of filmmaker Chris Marker. These slides reframe photographs taken by Marker when he was invited as a part of a delegation of French journalists and intellectuals to visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in May 1958—only four years after the end of the Korean War and the rigid partition of the peninsula. Among the photos that would become Marker's 1959 book *Coréennes*,[1] Mann focuses on shots showing the popular North Korean dancer and actress Choi Seung Hee and her daughter Ahn Seung Hee performing modernized pan-Asian interpretations of traditional dance forms such as *geommu* (knife dance). Within the idealistic atmosphere of the new Communist republic, Choi brought many dance traditions such as those associated with the oppressed class of *gisaeng* entertainers from the harsh distillation process of Japanese colonization into the ambitions of a modern socialist era.[2] In 2025, Mann's appropriation of Marker's images—still strikingly beautiful—suggests something additional, where Choi comes before Marker.

Adding a second framing to these photographs makes them speak to a documentation of performances: of Choi's dance and of Mann's act of re-photographing. Photographs leave performance behind, becoming a material approximation of what memory might be if it were cropped in by the imposing limits of a frame. Mann's additive—in the spirit of artistic strategies of appropriation—is, firstly, a reformatting of Marker's images showing Choi's performances dissolving into the repetitive trundle of the slide projector, and, secondly, a recontextualization into the storied world of an artist where performance, narrative, and forms of migration all surface as key and recurring themes. Even at surface level, Mann's work suggests that the artist's training in traditional Korean music and performance is never far from their approach to performing as an artist—as *Cinematheque Moranbong* shows in its almost mechanical pirouette of exposures—nor far from how a work is staged or performs itself. In showing us how Mann sees her, Choi is reanimated, even if within the original imposition of Marker's gaze, which famously fancied women and cats.

The theatricality that Mann's work seems so comfortable inhabiting is no less present in the self-conscious viewership of art. While the debates surrounding the autonomy of art, and the so-called theatricality of Western Minimalism that challenged it, may seem worn out in this context, there's still something to be said in terms of how an exhibited object proposes something to a viewer, to aesthetic subjectivity, and to the resulting judgments—in other words, how a work addresses its viewers, imploring them to look outside its boundaries, and perhaps, if we are wishful, break identifications with it and question our own place in judging it. Sometimes all of this can be implied simply with the use of a mirror. As a material, mirrors recur in Mann's work for their physical properties, and also stand in as quotations of socially preexisting forms. The monumental *objects of the wind* (2024) is one example of Mann's sculptures where the form of the dressing-room mirror is appropriated. Yet in this particular work, the mirror we usually find in the private space of the pre-show green room is elongated to imply two painting traditions: the Eastern examples of ancient Chinese panoramic scrolls and Korean Chaekgeori paravents, and the much later nineteenth-century European panoramic landscape.

Viewers of *objects of the wind* are not only confronted with their own image within an exhibition space, but also find themselves reflected in a scene that suggests vestiges

192–195 Mira Mann, *objects of the wind* (detail), 2024, 15th Gwangju Biennale installation view at Exhibition Hall, Gwangju, 2024. Courtesy: the artist and Gwangju Biennale Foundation. Photo: Studio Possiblezone
196 Mira Mann, *objects of the wind II*, 2024, performance with Domi Chansorn, Nam Sook Kim-Bücker, and participants of the Dassiragi Group at Klosterruine, Berlin, 2024. Courtesy: the artist and Klosterruine, Berlin. Photo: Juan Saez
197–199 Mira Mann, *Cinematheque Moranbong* (stills), 2025. Courtesy: the artist and Drei, Cologne

of performance. Traditional Korean instruments lie on the mirror's ledge; photographs of unidentifiable performances are taped to its surface; and references to a German Korean nurses' group appear from the fog where the surface of the mirror has been removed by acid etching.[3] The implied narrative in which we are quite literally reflected seems less married to drawing a line between fact and fiction and more about leaning into the allegorical mode of mythology. Or, as Mann describes, while the work is dedicated to Korean nurses who came to Germany as contract workers and continue today to practice the traditional form of performance called *pungmul*, "the work draws parallels between these women's stories and the transformative journeys of Barigongju or Princess Bari and Shim Cheong from Korean folklore."[4] Similar conflations between narratives of migration and mythology appear across much of Mann's work from recent years, perhaps most personally in the three-episode video *mother may recall another* (2023), in which Mann travels to South Korea with their mother, Hanju Yang, visiting sites from Yang's childhood in Mokpo before she immigrated to Germany in the 1980s.

The premise of this trip was to produce a work envisioned as a contemporary version of Simcheongga, a Korean story associated with the traditional narrative theater of *pansori* and known for its themes of sacrifice, transmigration of the soul, martyrdom, and loss of vision. In the tale, Simcheong takes care of her blind father; in Mann's videos, the act of seeing is embodied by Yang's vintage home-video camera, which circulates between the artist-protagonist, their mother, and family members. This allegory of vision in *mother may recall another* underscores that an amateur documentarian home-video aesthetic is wedded not necessarily to an objectivity that equates sight with truth, but rather to the almost ungraspable yet precariously framed position of another's subjective experience.

This subjective gap speaks of a kind of estrangement—not something to be thought of negatively, but part of a representational strategy that resists identification between viewer and characters. This aligns with what Bertolt Brecht warned us about in popular forms of bourgeois performance when he proposed the *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement or alienation effect), a strategy meant to disrupt identification and sow critical awareness in the audience. Whether this proved successful is another matter, but what is telling is that Brecht was partially inspired by techniques from Chinese opera. What we do not know is to what level he was led to this due to cultural estrangement. Did Marker feel like a stranger when taking his photographs, or did he just see a woman he desired to capture? All we know is that both of these Europeans went to Asia with their own motivations.

A camera in the hands of the artist's mother is not the same. The actual lived estrangement of being a migrant is something else—the exiled, the hyphenated, the split self. This is not a matter of play, but a spectral, almost constant reminder of otherness. A lot of art fails to express this reality of lived experience. Even if it virtuously claims to represent people, narratives, or identities with sincere accuracy, it falls short in asking how. As if following Brecht's warning against identification, it is in the mire of how form is put to work that Mann's art revels in offering us contradiction over pathos.

1 The feminine form of the noun for "Koreans" in French, usually retained in English translations of Marker's work.

2 *Gisaeng* (기생) refers to a class of courtesan women in Korea who were trained in the arts of singing, dancing, and entertainment, associated with the period of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910). Their primary role was to entertain elite men—especially scholars, aristocrats, and political figures—through performances of music, poetry, and dance. *Pansori* was one of the arts closely connected to the tradition of the *gisaeng*.

3 This refers to the Korean migrant nurses' group Verein Koreanischer Krankenschwestern und -pfleger sowie Krankenpflegehelferinnen und -helfer e.V. Founded in 1972, it is one of the longest-established migrant self-organizations in Berlin. On July 20, 2024, at Klosterruine, Berlin, Mann staged a performance with members of this group, titled *objects of the wind II*.

4 From an email with the artist, January 2025.

MIRA MANN
(b. 1993, Frankfurt) lives and works in Düsseldorf. Their work has been exhibited and staged at DREI, Cologne (2025, 2022); K20, Düsseldorf (2024); the 15th Gwangju Biennale (2024); Shmorévaz, Paris (2024); Klosterruine Berlin (2024); IMAI Foundation, Düsseldorf (2024); KIT, Düsseldorf (2024); Gallery of the Bauhaus University, Weimar (2024); Friart, Fribourg (2024); N/A, Seoul (2024, 2023); Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2023); Frac île-de-France, Paris (2023); Heit, Berlin (2023); Brücke Museum, Berlin (2022); de Appel, Amsterdam (2022); Kunstverein Bielefeld (2022); Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf (2022); Lantz'scher Skulpturenpark, Düsseldorf (2021); PiK Deutz, Cologne (2021); Dortmunder Kunstverein (2021); Simultanhalle, Cologne (2020); and Kunsthalle Osnabrück (2019), among others. They are recipient of the Peter Mertes Stipend 2025.

NICHOLAS TAMMENS
is a writer and curator living in Berlin. He has produced exhibitions with Dora Budor, Patricia L. Boyd, Jef Geys, Amanda van Hesteren, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Fred Lonidier, and others. These took place at 1856, Melbourne; Kunstverein Hamburg; Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; Nottingham Contemporary, England; Yale Union, Portland, Oregon.


1801