

metroactive ARTS



Nash Baker

HAND MADE “Installation is always active,” says artist Soo Sunny Park, ahead of her new exhibit at ICA.

BRIGHT SIDE

In her first California show, artist Soo Sunny Park explores our relationship with light **BY ELLIOTT SKY CASE**

MULTIMEDIA ARTIST Soo Sunny Park found inspiration while reflecting on light during a series of nighttime drives.

Park, whose installation exhibit *Viewing Filter (Veil of Vision)* opens Friday at ICA San Jose, began incorporating retroreflective materials into her work while living in New England, completing a residency at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine and beginning her position at Dartmouth College, where she remains a professor of Studio Art.

Having grown up in Georgia and Florida after moving from South Korea as a child, Park was struck by

the shift in daylight—the short hours of Northeastern winter made the sunlight that much more valuable, and people shaped their days around it more. The change in environment, coupled with the liminal setting of an artificially-lit highway, revealed a new understanding of how she could work with light.

“Sometimes we think we see light, but for the most part it’s an unnoticed aspect of our lives, even though everything we see, we see because of light,” Park says. “So I thought it would be interesting to think about using light itself as a material in sculpture. I didn’t want to focus on light by making things seem ethereal. I wanted light to be more like the sheetrock or fencing I used to build my pieces.”

Park developed *Viewing Filter*, her first show in California, specifically for the exhibition. The installation is darker than her previous works: fifteen layers of netting create and shadow three-dimensional shapes throughout the gallery, which viewers can explore with their phone flashlights and cameras.

The interactive aspect is part of what drove Park to installation as a medium.

“I think installation art is always active,” she says. “It transforms a space and so it makes certain kinds of movements and actions possible while making others difficult. It affects what we see, but also how we can see, partly by affecting how we can move.”

The concepts of “veils” and “filters” come into play here, she explains, as they serve both to aid and obscure one’s view. As a museum-goer moves through the space, the positioning of their body around and between layers of the “veil” shapes and changes the light bouncing off hundreds of retro-reflective glass beads.

Park builds a relationship to light for herself and her viewers that stands in stark contrast with much of the public art the City of Innovation

has hosted over recent years. Big, colorful LED pieces now ubiquitous throughout San Jose—like the *Sonic Runway* near City Hall and *Sensing You* beneath the 87 underpass on Santa Clara Street—often involve a degree of viewer or environmental “interaction” passing through them, but the technology-centered photo-ops offer a flat, easily-packaged futurism.

Uncritically tech-forward art conceals, via coding, the human labor put into the final product: viewers can watch colors change as they walk, drive, or dial a phone number (in the case of *Show Your Stripes* on E San Fernando Street), but the chain of events by which this happens is hidden. Park’s concern with the physical, tangible parts of her work is to put the process on display, the labor of craft evident across its many surfaces.

The practice of visible, ongoing work and movement is reflected in Park’s career arc as well. Starting with a background in painting, the artist journeyed into sculpture and hybrid media after noticing her intrigue toward certain textures and details of her studio, down to the drops and rings left by half-finished mugs of coffee. She describes one of art’s purposes as de-familiarizing what we take for granted, her work aiming to “occupy spaces between what we’re already familiar with.”

Park mentions experiences of separation and alienation from her youth as an immigrant to the US—spending time apart from parents, facing a language barrier—as influential events for her focus on liminality.

“I think I have always been thinking about spaces between spaces. Between me and you, inside and outside, in the mind, in the world, and so on.”

These concepts inform the subject and material of her art, traversing boundaries of two- and three-dimensional mediums and creating a body of work that is always in movement, reflecting and refracting the surrounding world. **M**

MAR 25 12pm	VIEWING FILTER (VEIL OF VISION)
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