

# AHL Foundation

## Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA) Interview

- Interviewee: BANG GEUL HAN
- Interviewer: MONIKA FABIJANSKA
- Date / Location: MAY 13, 2023 / NEW YORK
- Recorded BY MONIKA FABIJANSKA
- This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity BY MONIKA FABIJANSKA AND BANG GEUL HAN
- Open for research use

### Use of Interview Transcript of Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA)

The Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA) provides our interview transcripts for non-commercial purposes. The following interviews were conducted by various curators, artists, and scholars and were recorded and transcribed by AHL Foundation's Research Fellow. We ask readers to know that the written record is a transcription of the spoken word, which has been edited for continuity and clarity and reviewed by the interviewee and the interviewer.

**Quotes must be cited as follows:** Interview with **BANG GEUL HAN BY MONIKA FABIJANSKA, MAY 13, 2023**. Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA), AHL Foundation. The recordings associated with this interview WILL NOT be made available upon request.

For commercial or reproduction use, including reproduction, quotation, publication, and broadcast in any medium, distribution, derivative works, public performance, and public display, prior written permission must be obtained from AHL Foundation.

Permission will comply with any agreements between the interviewee and the interviewer and may be withheld in the AHL Foundation's sole determination. Please direct any questions or inquiries for the AKAA to [archive@ahlfoundation.org](mailto:archive@ahlfoundation.org).

© 2023 AHL Foundation, Inc.

Monika Fabijanska (MF): Bang Geul, I am very grateful that you waited for me yesterday and made seeing your new exhibition at The 8th Floor a more personal experience.

You keep surprising me. You push yourself, and as a result, you push me. As a curator who has been following your work for years, each of your projects forces me to read a lot to understand what you do, and in the process, I acquire valuable knowledge that would be useful for any citizen, any person. And so, I wonder who is your dream audience? When you make art, do you imagine people who will experience your works? Do you want to make them study and grasp all the information coded in your art? Or do you want them to approach it as they wish?

Bang Geul Han (BGH): I think my intention usually is to be somewhat sneaky. My work tends to be quiet. That's strategic, in the sense that nobody is yelling, screaming, but it is more like whispering—I want to create that kind of soft intimacy, as if sharing a secret or something that you may not be supposed to know. Am I confessing? Am I sharing someone else's secret? So, my audience... I always think about my community, including my family—I get very nervous when my family comes to see my show. They are the most difficult and most rewarding audience that I can reach because they know me first as a sibling or an aunt, and so on, but that knowing can be a barrier to understanding the subject matter. When I say “my community,” I don't mean people who understand me. You know, it is the social surroundings where I am situated, but where I am also being repeatedly misunderstood and don't necessarily share all viewpoints.

MF: I am asking because the art market usually presents an artwork isolated from all its context in order to please the buyer who can fill it with any meaning. Many artists fall prey to this demand to detach the work from its actual roots in their personal experience or knowledge. Studying patriarchal art history, we were told that all of it is abstracted, philosophical thought or esthetic form, but it is not true. We are not capable of drawing a line between our personal experience and our reflection on the world. Women artists had their work canceled for being biographical, not serious enough, not sophisticated enough, for focusing on their personal experience, often very intimate. Your practice grows out from such a point and then becomes much broader. Do you reveal a personal connection, make yourself vulnerable so that your work would connect with people, or do you try to conceal yourself within the realm of your works?

BGH: I think some of it is out of my control, in terms of protecting myself, not revealing. As you said, there is no way I can sever my personal experience from my own work, from how it seeps into what I do. But some people told me that they liked my work because it came from a personal place. Others said, “I cannot relate to this work because it is too personal. You really need to get out of that mindset. The more you can detach yourself from your work, the further you can go, because your audience will become bigger.”

MF: It makes me think about the history of cinema and some auteur film directors whose stories were inspired locally, and who, when they gained fame and international production opportunities, started to make more abstracted films about universal values

and their movies lost their depth. Their early films—about a local community in a given country—were so rich that they touched viewers from other cultures. I think the truth of experience is actually of huge value, even for non-narrative modes of making art that visual art largely represents.

BGH: I think so. I cannot work on a project that I don't have a personal, emotional stake in. It is really important for me. Some people ask me, "How do you select all these texts?" It is somewhat intuitive—I go with something that really resonates with me. It doesn't mean that I agree with it. I mean that it has to shake me emotionally, and I can be full of anger and rage as well as sadness.

MF: You echo Ana Mendieta's words in her diary. Mendieta wrote about the work that she created in response to the rape-murder at the University of Iowa—which was hanging not far from yours in my 2018 exhibition *The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.*—that she could not feel theoretical about that. So maybe art is at its best when intellectual analysis and passion come together.

You said something important—that your family was a key part of your audience. Yesterday, you told me that your following work would be made with your niece in mind. Can you talk about it?

BGH: So, actually, my niece is almost 21. She is an adult. But when we were hanging out, we played this very, very popular video game called Genshin Impact. It is one of those video games that took over the world. Basically, you pick a character and roam in the world of the game. You can go into a battle. You can collect items. It is a kind of an open-world exploration game. There is a narrative, but I was more curious about what her stake in it was, why she was spending so much time in it. She showed me things you can do there. She was spending a lot of time customizing her characters, customizing her collection of items—the game is really about collecting rare items that gamers are invested in finding. I found it interesting that it was not about going through an adventure and getting to the end of the game. That's not the goal. It is about negotiating your own existence within this world—constructing your own little world. I was interested in her investment because she always said she was not interested in art. I took her to museums when she was younger and she always rolled her eyes. But at the same time, I saw this kind of creative energy and investment in the time she spent in the game's world and I was really intrigued by that—you know, there is the stereotype that playing video games is just a waste of time.

MF: Is this game about collecting in a sense that it trains your brain to want things, teaches you to orient your life around possession of objects? Or is it more open?

BGH: It is more open. There are actually set goals and an elaborate story arc.

MF: So it is not just about collecting objects.

BGH: This world is open enough that there are opportunities for open-ended interactions. I am interested in the creative investment of the player. I wanted to be in such a world in some way, just not surrounded by manga-like characters with large breasts and eyes, but by something else that I could create.

MF: Your most recent work, on view at The 8th Floor, is a VR artwork where we enter a similar world. It is your first VR art so we will see where you take it next. I experienced it yesterday and we spoke about me being rather oblivious to the gaming world and the VR world. It is just not my realm. But your VR work moved me tremendously, it did some magical things to me. After we talked in the gallery, I was coming back home thinking that the impact your work had on me actually subverts my critique of VR and gaming—that I could not imagine people emotionally growing while spending time in VR. What happened to me was that I grew emotionally in your VR world. You proved that one can communicate very complex ideas and provoke complex feelings using VR as a medium. A medium never limits us, and maybe I am stating something obvious here, but it was somewhat revelatory for me when it comes to VR. So I guess that you test how much you can communicate through various mediums, especially to younger generations, as an artist, someone who wants to communicate.

BGH: Right, but I am also curious as a person and a citizen. I am curious about what this technology can do, what its possibilities and limitations are, and how I could use and subvert it as an artist.

MF: In order to ask the next question, I need to figure out how to tell the readers what your VR piece is like without revealing the experience. We enter a world where we see some figural elements—parts of the bodies and, at some point, a human figure—elements usually absent from your work. I think that you introduced them here as a result of exploring how much you can work with text—which is your first and most important means of communication—in VR. I am guessing text didn't work as well as usually, and you challenged yourself to use a new visual language, and it is very interesting to see what esthetics you chose. But essentially, we realize after a while that we entered a world where people were assigned particular tasks—let's call them jobs—and are trapped in these mundane activities that define their lives. They are caged by what they are given to do, and their functions and activities are repetitive, dull, and tiring.

BGH: You mentioned something about how you see the body parts: you almost never see an entire person. This was intentional, sort of “you are defined by what you do.”

MF: These people are kind of trapped by their work or how the job market defines them. Most importantly, their jobs stereotype them for the society, meaning that everybody else sees them as able to perform only this one function and we slowly come to realize that these people are most likely immigrants. We also see some text as we travel through this world—the names of dozens of court cases. What are they?

BGH: These are cases related to immigration law that reached the U.S. Supreme Court between the 1880s and the 1970s. What I was particularly interested in was how the Court decided who was eligible for what rights. Often, these rights relate to who can be a citizen. And even then, citizens are divided by the rights they have. For example, can you own land or not? Can you own property or a company or not? Can you receive an education? Can you access federal services? There are rights related to who is considered as one of 'us' and not the others, the aliens. First, Whites of European descent and, after the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, also African Americans, were the only two groups eligible for citizenship. Everyone else... well, except for Mexicans, whose case was a little different. It's complicated, because they were living in Texas when it was annexed in 1845. So, the U.S. government wasn't sure what to do with people of Mexican descent because they didn't want to give up the land, and the government realized, "Okay, we need to make some kind of exception for these people." Back then, nobody else was eligible for citizenship, and my work is about how the Court drew the line between groups of people by giving them different rights.

MF: I understand that it was rather fluid. Rights were given and taken away. There is nothing solid about the concept of citizenship, across history and geography. Do you remember the oldest of these cases from the 1880s that you referred to in your work?

BGH: One of the oldest is *Chae Chan Ping v. U.S.*, where the court reaffirmed the highly discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, essentially abdicating the court's role in overseeing questions of immigration.

MF: You told me yesterday that you came across some documents regarding Eastern European immigration. Did some of these court cases concern White immigrants?

BGH: No, I mentioned an old article published in *The Atlantic* about how the U.S. should limit their immigration. It was written by a man who was, at some point, the president of MIT, a very well-respected statistician, meaning he was regarded as a respected scholar and scientist representing the rational mind. He wrote that people from Eastern and Southern Europe were not eligible for citizenship and should not come because they can only perform the most menial, lowest-ranking jobs. That's all they can do. And as a result, when they come, all of a sudden Americans don't want to perform these jobs and become lazy. So these immigrants take our jobs away, lower our wages, and debase our dignity...

MF: Was there any difference in stereotyping Eastern Europeans versus Filipinos or Chinese or was it the same song, repeated with each subsequent wave of immigration?

BGH: I think there was definitely a difference. It is interesting how Chinese women and Filipino men were considered sexually amoral and...

MF: Dangerous?

BGH: Right. They're different, more exotic, but not in a good way. In essence, the argument was that these people will corrupt the American people. I think the idea of corruption is put in opposition to the notion of purity of the American settlers, people who arrived on *Mayflower*...

MF: Your focus on immigration emerged from your interest in women's rights, and it is encouraging to see yet another artist who started from feminism, and then, since feminism often means concern with everyone's rights, became involved with all kinds of exclusions. One begins with one's own exclusion, and then goes deeper and further to begin to see certain parallels, certain differences, and becomes interested in the very concept of exclusion. But let's stay with the work that we've been discussing. Were you interested in the fate of migrant women in particular, or is this a work about all migrants—all who are not considered citizens?

BGH: In some philosophical sense, all migrants are women, in the sense that they are often structurally divested of power, living a vulnerable and precarious existence. I think it is about people who are subject to multiple exclusions, whether that's because they are women, or children, or from certain countries. And I think these categories intersect, and certain groups of people all of a sudden find themselves in this web of exclusions.

MF: I think there are two clues in your work—or at least I noticed these two—visuals that suggest that the universe we enter is a world of migrants. Some of your imagery reminded me of the killing of Asian women in a massage parlor in Atlanta in 2021. And there is of course a looming context of what is going on at our Southern border: the fate of, not just Mexicans, but immigrants from El Salvador, Honduras...

BGH: And Guatemala and Venezuela...

MF: So, some imagery in your VR world evoked associations with specific groups of migrants. What made it a powerful experience for me was that they were so compartmentalized and determined. You can almost tell who does which job, even though the work itself is barely shown. It is merely suggested.

BGH: Yes, I wanted to make a connection between the historical context of these Supreme Court cases with what is happening now. It is a kind of mirror effect—what is happening now has happened before, but we somehow forgot about this. History repeats itself but not exactly in the same way, strangely in a more violent fashion. Images of migrant camps are circulated freely, and I always think about the emotion I feel seeing them. Is this empathy? Is this shame? Is it anger? Or is it something in between?

MF: We came to the very heart of your working method which is not to echo the images that we know from media, but to focus on text, a more elusive medium, instead. It is the medium that you have used consistently for the past almost 20 years. I think you mastered the use of language in art, but you keep challenging yourself—using text in VR is different from using it in a video.

BGH: Oh yes, totally. It was really difficult, because you can't control what people see in VR. They are surrounded. Viewers can look in a different direction while you are trying to call their attention to something else, and it can be a very frustrating experience for someone like me who is trained as a painter. I still think in terms of painting where everything happens on a 2D plane. Here, I almost want to shout, "No, no, don't look there, look here!"

MF: Because so much happens and it happens in three dimensions, our attention to text is limited, while you cite the names of Supreme Court cases we are not familiar with, or quote complicated legal language. In the second VR work in the show, you used parts of text which are not so complicated but it is still challenging to read a paragraph while immersed in a VR world. Our perception is different from when we watch video.

Your VR work about migrants leads us straight to the importance of the Fourteenth Amendment in your art. Your interest in it is clearly the pivotal moment in your practice, connecting your earlier body of work with this VR work—what is its title for the record?

BGH: *Terre de Tendre*.

MF: I thought it was *The Land of Tenderness*.

BGH: Yes, but in French. It is a reference to *Carte de Tendre*—an imaginary map created in the 1650s by a group of women in France at a salon-style gathering. This map exists somewhere between cartography and language because cartography is a lot like a language with which you can map out various concepts and realms. They charted different paths—to love, indifference, or possible dangers in relationships. The map was supposed to show women, or men, I guess, how to find true love. You have to go through these little villages with curious and funny names—you have to avoid going to the Town of Backstabbing or Meanness, but you should visit the Town of Valiant Letters, for example. There is a Town of Romantic Letters and a Town of Friendship...

MF: Well, that's really like a game!

BGH: Precisely. So when I saw this map, I thought that it might be a really great place to launch my project. I was interested in it, because it was made by this group of women who were intellectually and culturally engaged, but essentially deprived of literary voice, given the social norms of the time. The map was included as an illustration in the novel called *Clélie*, a seventeenth-century French romcom novel. I was interested in mapping out a path. I thought, what if I use this allegorical map to map out the way to true actionable empathy, something utopian?

MF: Well, it certainly worked on me.

It is fascinating that you made a work about migrants, law, and the concept of citizenship, and you entered it through an open-world game environment that is actually inspired by

a seventeenth-century novel...

BGH: About love. The map actually looks like female reproductive organs, with ovaries and a uterus. You're traveling in a canal, with land on both sides. It is not quite as apparent in the immersive VR experience; it only makes sense if you look at it from above. You are in it, as if you were in a uterus.

MF: Let's go back to the Fourteenth Amendment. I think it became a keystone, a sort of a central point in your current art practice. You arrived at the importance of the Fourteenth Amendment working on projects regarding women's reproductive rights. *Roe v. Wade*, as well as *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the decision which declared that the right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples, were based on the right to privacy—a human right not recognized directly in the United States Constitution but implied in the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments. The first article of this amendment adopted in 1868 after the American Civil War, grants citizenship to all people born or naturalized in the United States, including formerly enslaved people. The work where you bring together these two subjects—women's rights and citizen's rights—is titled *Threshold*. Can you talk about this work?

BGH: I started working on it when I found out about the leaked spreadsheet in which the U.S. government tracked pregnancy status of undocumented minors in their custody between 2017 and 2019. A lot of data in the spreadsheet involves highly personal and sensitive information. The document was kept by the Office of Refugee Resettlement [ORR], which oversees the settlement of new refugees, and also undocumented minors crossing the border. They are responsible for placing them with sponsors or in shelters, but U.S. officials also gathered information on how far along they were in their pregnancy, and how they became pregnant—whether it was the result of sexual assault or not, who was the father, and so on. This information was used to help deter these young women from getting an abortion. Staff members regularly updated and noted whether women requested a termination of pregnancy or not. There were a few known cases, according to *The New York Times*, where staffers were sent to a shelter to specifically discourage the pregnant girl from having an abortion. I read about it in the context of Judge Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination, and I was wondering how these two stories were related. It turned out that one of the girls was denied the right to leave the shelter to terminate her pregnancy and sued the U.S. government in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia for violating her constitutional rights. She won, but a panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit stayed the verdict in an unsigned order by two judges, including Kavanaugh. Then, the *en banc* D.C. Circuit reversed that order, with Kavanaugh dissenting. He argued that while U.S. citizens have the right to abortion, because of *Roe v. Wade*, this woman, because she is here illegally, does not. It is basically saying that constitutional rights do not extend to migrant women.

MF: The Court expressed its interest in an unborn fetus, more than in this woman.

BGH: Exactly. An unborn fetus of an undocumented person has more rights than she



does.

After finding that spreadsheet, I tried various ways to engage with it artistically—in a drawing, painting, and video. And then, I arrived at this gate.

MF: *Threshold* is a sculpture—a traditional Korean wooden gate with an LED element.

BGH: Right, a scrolling LED display, similar to a stock market ticker tape display, embedded in the gate's threshold.

MF: It displays the data of these undocumented minors.

BGH: Yes, including how they got pregnant and where they are held, and more. I think that as an artist, what I like to do is to bring out connections that are otherwise hidden, even if I don't quite see them myself to begin with. It is only while making a piece that I tend to have these realizations, "Yes, it makes total sense!"

Around the same time, I was researching how women got abortions before modern medical procedures were available. I found many bizarre rituals and superstitious beliefs that women followed. Among them, I learned that in fifteenth-century Korea there was a belief that if you ground the threshold of a wooden gate, and then ingested the filings, you would miscarry. I couldn't yet pinpoint how these stories would interact, but I wanted to see what would come out of the process if I attempted to put them together.

MF: It seems that we just made a full circle back to rooting the work in a locality versus going for the generic universal, and this is a great example of an artwork where you talk about two different countries, two far ends of the globe, two moments in time separated by 600 years, two legal systems, two social structures, and yet, both of them are familiar to you. You have a connection that you can point to, and therefore you can make it universal, meaningful, or relatable for others. And I think you do the same in your VR piece.

Your *Threshold* is a threshold in many ways. It is also a step for you on the way to this new VR work, where you focus on migrants, following from your previous body of work, *Warp and Weft*, also on view at The 8th Floor. *Warp and Weft* literally intersects, or interweaves, reproduction rights in the United States with various laws regarding the poor or migrants, largely communities of color. Let's talk about this body of works and how it invokes the right to privacy. The right to privacy is a major human right and it is recognized explicitly in the constitution of most countries. It is not specifically mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, but there are at least two amendments where it is vaguely implied.

BGH: The right to privacy seems to function as a conceptual lynchpin within the Fourteenth Amendment, guaranteeing citizens equal protection via due process, leading to notions of bodily and familial autonomy, personal interiority and agency that are outside state interference and control. I started *Warp and Weft* around the time of Amy

Coney Barrett's confirmation to the Supreme Court—about the same time I was working on *Threshold*. It didn't happen yet, but the prospect of the end of Roe suddenly felt all too palpable, together with the erosion of the rights the Fourteenth Amendment had protected until then. I printed out the documents that I was reading—the leaked ORR spreadsheet, Kavanaugh's dissenting opinion, as well as the 1976 spending bill, which included the first iteration of the Hyde Amendment. I had stacks of printouts, and I thought that maybe I could do something with them. I started cutting each document into thin strips, gluing them into long strands, and weaving them together — being literal about intersecting these disparate but related documents. This is how it began.

Then, in consequence, I decided to look closer at immigration laws, but I couldn't find any contemporary immigration legislation, because there is none. Congress hasn't passed any new immigration laws in quite some time. It led me to wonder why people complain about the fact that it is now harder to get a Green Card, or an artist's visa, or an H-1B visa. And it turns out that it is indeed more difficult, but not because any new laws were passed, but because of these executive orders, directives, and memoranda that get passed down to various agencies to make the process more difficult. So I started to look at the kinds of these orders and memoranda and I saw some weird parallels. Many new restrictions on abortion turn out to be the instances of bureaucratization of the process to make access to abortion more difficult. For example, there are certain exceptions—if pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, etc., one can get an abortion, but the process to prove that you were a victim of these crimes is so difficult that it is almost impossible to get an abortion this way. So on one hand, there is this bureaucratization, and on the other, there is criminalization. For example, spouses of student visa holders were not allowed to work. Before, if somebody got caught working at a local coffee shop, it wasn't the end of the world, more like a slap on the wrist, "Pay the fine, and don't do this again." But there has been a push to make these kinds of infractions into deportable crimes—the same as burglary and assault. So we had criminalization and bureaucratization working hand in hand. This happens a lot within the U.S. legal system—these intersecting exclusions. If you look at the anti-poverty law, it is the same.

MF: That's 1986, right?

BGH: 1996. It essentially criminalized poverty, by bureaucratizing and making the process of applying for and receiving services and benefits more difficult. There are so many things that you have to prove, otherwise you are ineligible for help and services. For example, there is the work requirement clause, which, in theory, should help the unemployed back into work, but, in practice, generates multiple obstacles. If you have an unstable and constantly shifting employment status, it can be almost impossible to satisfy the burden of paperwork. Even professional case workers complain about spending most of their time filing paperwork rather than finding their clients meaningful jobs. Studies found that the work requirement actually perpetuates poverty by trapping people in low paid jobs. I think it has a lot to do with language. I am looking at how language is used to make legally available services inaccessible—and these strategies are very much the same across various areas subject to regulation. But once it becomes

clear that Courts and governmental agencies are using similar tactics, you begin to see that certain communities become victim of these aggregate policies and legal opinions—they are excluded from owning property and from getting services like healthcare, housing, welfare, and so on. And then you are wondering why they are not doing well. Is it because they are not working hard enough? There is this whole American myth about the self made man...

MF: That you are the master of your fate and have the power to become anything you want, like choosing a guaranteed path to happiness in video games. It sounds like we are going back to the use of language in your work—and I would insist on using the term language rather than text. Text is a visual semblance or a representation of language, but your focus really is not on the esthetics of typesetting on the screen. Language makes for a very powerful content. You said at the beginning that you use language with an intention to whisper, to reveal what we are maybe not supposed to know. You reveal it not by writing your own but by using publicly available texts, the laws of this country, available but not understood enough. This may very well be an answer to my question about your intention for your imagined audience—I think that you may want to empower people, empower your audience, give them knowledge.

BGH: I do believe that knowledge frees you in some way. It doesn't have to, I guess, but it can give you freedom and emancipation. I do want to share knowledge and reveal certain connections that are there but maybe are not being looked at.

MF: And yet, your *Warp and Weft* series uses the form of tapestry—it is a very physical, tactile work. So far, you have used almost all known art mediums to expose the language of our culture. Except for painting. I have never seen you paint language yet.

BGH: That's right.

MF: What I have seen, over the last six years, are: generative software, AI, video animation, installation, sculpture, and woven paper. We have not discussed the thread bracelets that are yet another woven, very physical element of the exhibition. Can you talk about the connection between their form and content? Why did you suddenly choose something so tiny? Your works are usually large. And this one has a very physical, let's call it crafty, presence...

BGH: I started making the bracelets before weaving the *Warp and Weft* series—in 2018 or late 2017. I worked on them a little bit, stopped, and finished them last year. It was like with the spreadsheet I used in *Threshold*... I read Harvey Weinstein's statement over and over again, thinking... I was trying to summon an impossible generosity to forgive him in a way, or rather, trying to understand him... like, you know, maybe he's like your creepy uncle. This was before all these women came forward with their stories, contributing to this monstrous record of his rapes and sexual assaults. I was reading and kept getting angrier and angrier, and I wanted to—similarly to how I felt about Donald Trump's hot mic recording—take it apart. I think taking it apart is an important

step. The words become separated from each other. But then, I also felt like my emotional response was immature. I thought, “I’m not thinking logically, I’m thinking irrationally about this through my anger. I’m becoming this little girl.” Rather than disregard this sense of immaturity, I wanted to bring into the work my younger self, in the form of what I loved to do when I was a girl— friendship bracelets. This is how these two came together. It is a very intuitive, emotional process that leads to a particular form I choose for an artwork. When I first made these bracelets, I was going to sell them individually as part of a flea market-style performance, as a kind of cathartic experience of giving away these meaningless words. But then, when I had all of them together, I actually liked their power, the time and obsession that went into making them... There is something empowering about looking at them together, as if many girls came together to speak out. So I decided to keep them as a set. The work is titled *Apology Bracelets (Harvey)*.

MF: You often separate words in your artworks in order to make them meaningless, and then bring them together to show how powerful they are. You also repeatedly create this kind of a juxtaposition in your works between one man of power and millions, thousands, or hundreds—depending on the offence—of women who have been abused, sometimes by language, sometimes actions. The man’s actions are justified while women’s experiences are silenced by language, and you juxtapose them in a sort of dialog. You make these two sides face each other—men of power speaking on one side, and women, many of whom are still nameless, often for their protection, but mostly because they are silenced, on the other. I kept asking you about your audience. What are some opinions about your work or exchanges that you have had with men?

BGH: When I first showed the tapestry *Warp and Weft #3* at the Bronx Museum, this tall gentleman came up to me and asked me to explain the piece to him. So I said that the warp was made of the very restrictive healthcare codes regarding abortion from five different states, and the weft was made of recent Supreme Court opinions that helped gut the Voting Rights Act, heavily impacting black and brown communities. The man said something like “Huh, interesting. Why those two together? What’s the connection?” He was the first man I talked to about the work. That’s why I remember him. Up until then, most people reacted, “Yes, obviously these abortion laws impacted communities of color the most.” I thought that maybe it was embarrassingly clear, but this guy was completely blind to the connection. It was really interesting that he couldn’t see the reason why I had interwoven these two texts at all.

MF: Well, hopefully on the way home he gave it more thought. It is a testament to the social dimension of feminist art. You are not making your works into the void. You may be whispering, but it is a piercing whisper. Did you have any hostile reactions to your works; the reactions of people who felt personally attacked, or who felt very uneasy about your works?

BGH: No, not to this particular work. I haven’t been approached by such people, but I am sure they exist.

MF: Maybe because you don't make your works visually disturbing, which I think invites the audience to make an effort, do their own work figuring out what these works actually say, and reflect. They don't hit the viewers. They can hit them a little later as they make one think.

**Bang Geul Han** Born and raised in Seoul, Korea, in 1978 and based in the US since 2003, Bang Geul Han's work has been shown in venues including The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Queens Museum, NURTUREart, A.I.R. Gallery, The 8th Floor at The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, Smack Mellon in New York City, and Centro Internazionale per l'Arte Contemporanea in Rome. She is a recipient of a number of artist residencies and fellowships, including Creative Capital Award, Artist in the Marketplace program at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Workspace program, A.I.R. Fellowship, MacDowell Fellowship, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and Center for Emerging Visual Artists in Philadelphia, PA. Han received her MFA (2005) in Electronic Integrated Arts from NYSCC at Alfred University in Alfred, NY, and her BFA (2002) in Painting from Seoul National University in Korea. Han's work has been reviewed and featured in 4Columns, Art Papers, Art in America, The AMP, The New Yorker, The New York Times, and The Brooklyn Rail. Han works and lives in New York City.

**Monika Fabijanska** is a NYC-based independent art historian and curator specializing in women's and feminist art. Her exhibitions include *Women at War* (Fridman Gallery), listed among ten best art shows of 2022 by *The Washington Post* and *Frieze Magazine* and touring nationally; *Betsy Damon. Passages: Rites and Rituals* (La MaMa Galleria), one of *The New York Times'* best shows of 2021; *ecofeminism(s)* (Thomas Erben Gallery, 2020); and groundbreaking *The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.* (John Jay College CUNY, 2018). Her writing appeared in the volume *Trauma-Informed Pedagogy* (Emerald, 2022), *ASAP Journal*, *Women's Art Journal*, as well as *The Brooklyn Rail*. [www.monikafabijanska.com](http://www.monikafabijanska.com)