

CREATIVE FRIEND GROUP NEW YORK BAR

with KAYA (Kerstin Brätsch & Debo Eilers) and Margaret Lee

Jun 16 - Jun 26, 2023

There's an element of uncertainty when existing in public urban spaces: people, including oneself, are unpredictable, and ultimately inscrutable. Certain depths of understanding within oneself and others can never be fully seen or comprehended. On the dimensional plane where our outlines are able to meet, overlap, and exchange frequencies, the inscriptions we leave on its surface give testament to the fact that we lived and existed together.

Along the bar, Margaret Lee's sculptures resemble small creatures made from accumulated detritus from her studio — foam, collected screws, and other fixtures. Their circuit board entrails spill out, exposed, in contrast to their smooth and tidy bodies, while their antennae-like hardware and blinking lights become signaling beacons where they cluster. Transmitting messages through very simple means, they pulse with more life than the screen based technologies that saturate our lives. The luminous silver of Lee's painting recalls the exterior of a subway train or other type of dulled metal public infrastructure. In her paintings, Lee frequently references different types of public facing walls within the city, their surfaces encrusted with the marks of urban use: remnants of wheat paste paper, layers of tar and soot oozing from cracked subway stations, and the dented satin silver of subway trains. Tracing the marks of these public surfaces is integral to the experience of sharing space with others in the city.

For many years, a plexiglass mirror laid on the floor of KAYA's studio, accumulating scratches and other marks of sharing time and space with the other objects, artists, and visitors of the studio. Developed from this initial object, KAYA's two mirrors float along one wall of the long hallway, which appears both compressed and stretched by intense and unsettling green lighting. Each mirror is framed by a tangle of resin coated fur-like material punctuated by rough strands of metal wires sprouting along its borders, resembling the cilia of an amoeba. Spiky etched drawings flit across the plexiglass mirrors' distorted surfaces. The marks, which look at once ancient and futuristic, evoke symbols and ruins; instructions for a ritual to be performed using the artworks. KAYA's work often draws meaning from points of tension. As a collaboration between a painter and a sculptor, the duo developed their material language through a continuous back and forth of addition and destruction. Through collaboration, shared language becomes a mode of understanding beyond mappable logic.

Two scultural lamps are situated throughout the space. Handmade by Lee, they replicate the material construction of her nail and screw sculptures. Specifically made for this installation, they prioritize functionality over form. The purple LED light cuts through a flattening overhead green glow and the warm incandescent bulb provides another point of orientation within the labyrinthine basement space.

** CFGNY is extremely proud to be showing KAYA and Margaret Lee's works. They have generously provided mentorship and guidance to us since before the beginning. Without their companionship, we would not be the artists nor the people we are today. **