

AEROPLASTICS | ju young kim
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Exhibition text by Linda Franken

Mussels are at home in oceans around the world. Some highly adjusted to the specific conditions of their habitat, others more adaptive – invasive, even. When absorbed into the ballast water of cargo ships, their eggs and larvae relocate involuntarily from one region to another. Extracted from their native waters, they find themselves thousands of miles away in environments to which they either adapt or succumb.

Ju Young Kim (*1991 in Seoul, KR) places mussel shells on a tray table formed of curling whiplash lines. Split open and cast in bronze, their surfaces reflect in the mirror mounted underneath. Their original models sourced near Korean shores, these mussels now find themselves in an installation of airplane parts: *Eight miles above sea level 4974 miles and 16 hours to reach you* consists of a three-seat bench placed on a blue carpet covered by a 1:1 sized section of an aircraft fuselage. Stripped down to their aluminum silhouettes, the airplane seats carry no indicator of when or where the journey might start and end. The headrests are replaced by small panels of stained glass, a craft we might associate with more homey places or objects. Their patterns recall latitude and longitude lines of an aeronautical chart. Similar to the sinuous lines of the seat's tray table, their soft colors and shapes contrast the functional timelessness of the airplane architecture around them.

What happens to us up in the troposphere? Just like mussels protect their delicate insides, airplanes shield us from the harsh outside conditions above the clouds. They weave invisible threads between geographies, seasons and systems around the globe, transporting us from one reality to another. Encapsulated in this highly artificial environment, we detach from time and space, and enter a state of in betweenness. In her practice, Kim traces the internal and physical distances you confront when your life is separated between continents. Her works draw on the transit spaces regularly inhabited by transnational travelers and thereby explore processes of identity, transformation and belonging in between places you may call home. How much of yourself comes with you every time you leave? What stays behind?

In her first solo exhibition at max goelitz, the visitors find themselves amid Kim's *AEROPLASTICS* series. Through sculpture and installation, she combines aircraft components with architectural elements in Art-Nouveau style. Mounted to the gallery wall is an aircraft ceiling panel including a stained glass lamp whose light is slowly fading in and out. A panel with a stained glass window is protected by a sharp curved grille. A stained glass wall lamp adjoins an aircraft exit sign. Two mirrored steel frames direct our gaze into and outside an aircraft, an empty airline trolley shows fragments of nautical and aeronautical charts on its surface, and nearby a second tray table hovers on three curled steel legs. As you look around, the distribution of these elements strangely resembles an apartment, its furniture alienated from its purpose, in between high tech and nostalgic, transit and home.

By the use of glass, Kim further translates the duality of her installations to a material level: In its chemical-physical state, glass is neither traditionally liquid nor solid. It does not have the long-range order of a crystalline solid, nor does it have the free-flowing properties of a liquid at room temperature. Its atomic structure is disordered like a liquid, but it is rigid and retains its shape.

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As part of her exhibitions, Kim develops editions for which she collects objects she comes across during her travels. Gathered in pouches, they can be souvenirs or items you would find in an amenity kit, such as a toothbrush, a comb, or an empty container for cremes. The artist describes these objects as ghost versions of their actual selves, miniatures made specifically for the hours we spend overcoming long distances. She often adapts these items. The toothbrush is engraved with Art Nouveau floral motifs, the image of an Art Nouveau salt shaker decorates a salt sachet. On the latest pouch, the artist printed fragments of a map, traces of a tool we need to navigate skies and seas. Or to locate ourselves when in between.

Linda Franken is an Assistant Curator at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin. In addition to her curatorial work, she oversees the production of artist books, such as *Kameelah Janan Rasheed - In the coherence, we weep* (2023). Prior to joining KW, she worked at Studio Julian Charrière and Kéré Architecture. She graduated from Stockholm University in 2021 with a Master's Degree in Curating..

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