

BAMPFA Mounts First North American Retrospective of Lee ShinJa



On View from August 6, 2025 through February 1, 2026

***Lee ShinJa: Drawing with Thread* Features Five Decades of Work by Celebrated Fiber Artist, Including Works Never Before Seen Outside South Korea**

(Berkeley, CA) January 16, 2025—This summer, the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive will launch a major retrospective of the acclaimed fiber artist Lee ShinJa, marking the artist's first comprehensive solo exhibition outside of South Korea. One of the most important artists to emerge from Korea's postwar era, the 94-year-old Lee has spent more than half a

century advancing the field of Korean fiber arts through a multifaceted practice that incorporates traditional craft techniques with modernist innovations in color, composition, and dimensionality. Spanning the full scope of the artist's output from the 1950s through the 2000s, *Lee ShinJa: Drawing with Thread* will feature more than forty of her monumental weavings and smaller-scale works—the majority of which have never been exhibited outside South Korea.



Widely renowned in South Korea—where she was most recently the subject of an acclaimed retrospective exhibition at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon in 2023—Lee first began making artworks in the 1950s with found materials such as grain sacks, mosquito nets, and yarn sourced from secondhand garments. Across her long career, she has expanded the boundaries of fiber art practices by incorporating new innovations in embroidery, dyeing, knotting, and weaving to create increasingly large-scale sculptural forms. One of her most iconic works, *Wall Hanging* (1971), was exhibited at Korea's National Art Exhibition in 1972, where it was heralded as a major inflection point in the history of Korean tapestry by breaking with traditional textile conventions.

Lee ShinJa: Drawing with Thread will be organized chronologically with an emphasis on the experimental nature of Lee's practice, which has alternated over time between found and made materials as well as between figurative and abstract designs. Alongside her large-scale works, the retrospective will also present woven maquettes and preparatory sketches that provide fresh insight into the development of the artist's practice.

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“Lee ShinJa is one of the most visionary artists of our time who has long understood the artistic possibilities of fiber,” said Victoria Sung, Phyllis C. Wattis Senior Curator at BAMPFA, who is curating the exhibition. “Lee’s exhibition follows in the footsteps of recent exhibitions at BAMPFA, including important solo shows with Key Sekimachi and Rosie Lee Tompkins, adding to the Bay Area’s rich history of fiber and textile arts.”

“With the recent resurgence in interest in fiber arts by a pioneering generation of women, it’s important to look toward Asia to expand the lens of this burgeoning canon. Lee ShinJa was working and showing as a peer of Sheila Hicks, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and other well-known fiber artists in major exhibitions in the 1960s such as as the Lausanne Tapestry Biennials in France,” said BAMPFA’s Executive Director, Julie Rodrigues Widholm. “We are thrilled to assert her importance among the greats of international fiber art.”

About Lee ShinJa

Lee ShinJa graduated from the Department of Applied Arts at Seoul National University in 1955 and later majored in Fabric Design in the Department of Industrial Crafts at Hongik University. In 1965 she became a professor at Duksung Women’s University, where she was the first Dean of the College of Arts and fostered younger generations of artists for more than thirty years. Lee participated in the fifth and seventh National Art Exhibitions of the Republic of Korea in 1956 and 1958 and was honored with the prestigious Minister of Education Prize. Lee’s work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions at Korean institutions, including Press Center (1965), Gallery Hyundai (1983), Seoul Arts Center’s Hangaram Art Museum (1993), and the Republic of Korea’s National Academy of Arts (2003). In 2023, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) in Gwacheon, South Korea, presented the retrospective exhibition *Lee ShinJa: Threadscapes*, shedding new light on the artist’s remarkable oeuvre.

About BAMPFA

Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) ignites cultural change for a more inclusive and artistic world. BAMPFA has been uniquely dedicated to art and film since 1970,

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with international programming that is locally connected and globally relevant. It holds more than 25,000 artworks and 18,000 films and videos in its collection, with particular strengths in modern and contemporary art and historical Chinese painting, as well as the world's largest collection of African American quilts. As part of the University of California, Berkeley, BAMPFA is committed to artistic diversity through its robust slate of art exhibitions, film screenings, artist talks, live performances, and educational programs that shed new light on the art of the past and connect our audiences with leading filmmakers and artists of our time. BAMPFA sits on the edge of campus and downtown Berkeley, where it welcomes visitors from across and beyond the Bay Area in a repurposed building designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

Exhibition Credits

Lee ShinJa: Drawing with Thread is curated by Victoria Sung, Phyllis C. Wattis Senior Curator, with Tausif Noor, Curatorial Associate.

Image credits

1. Installation view, *Lee ShinJa: Threadscapes*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, 2023. Image courtesy of the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.
2. Lee ShinJa, *Image of City*, 1961. Cotton, linen, and wool thread on cotton cloth; colling, free technique. Courtesy of the artist and Tina Kim Gallery.

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