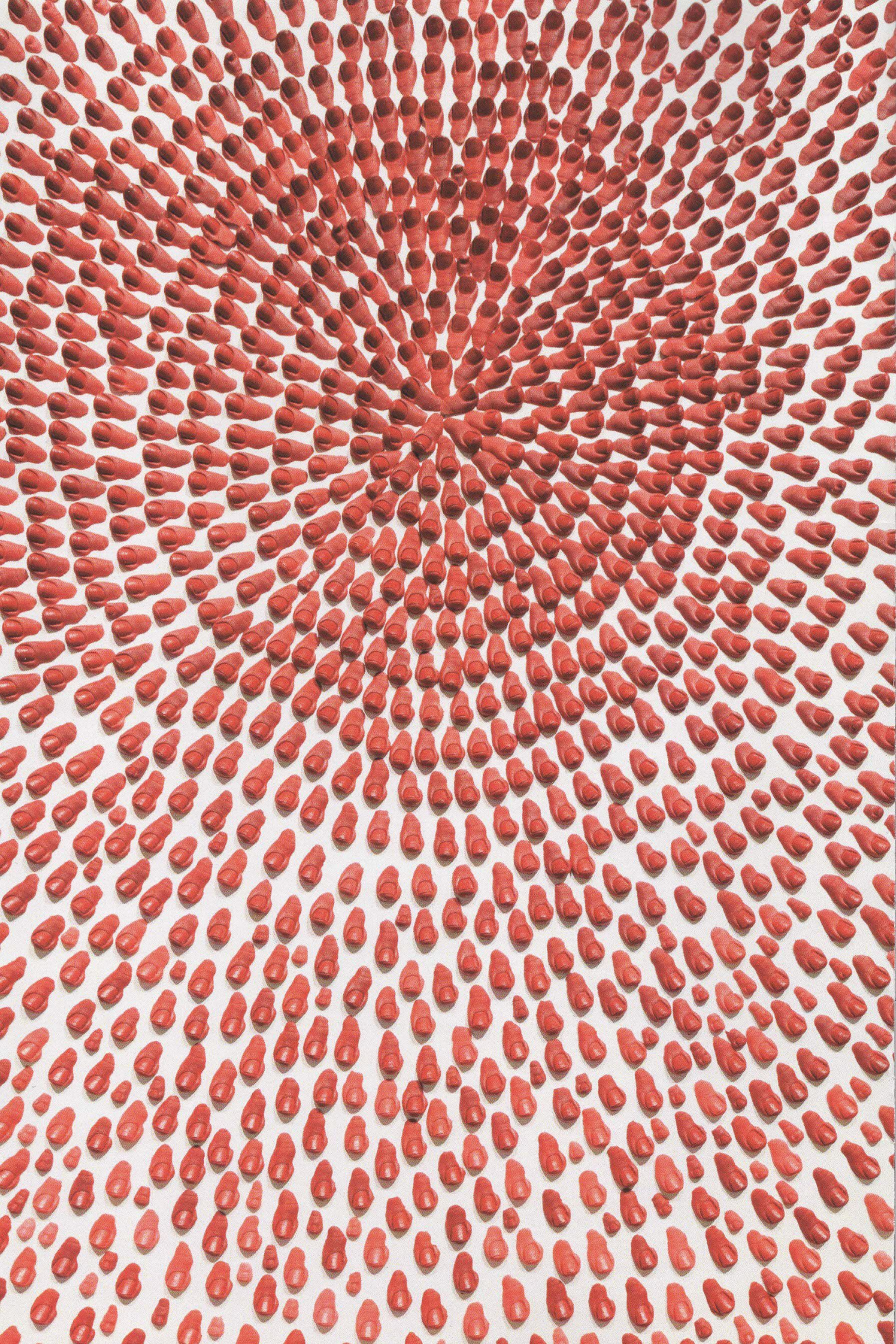




SITE LINES

ARTISTS WORKING IN TEXAS

APRIL 13 - AUGUST 18, 2019



SITE LINES

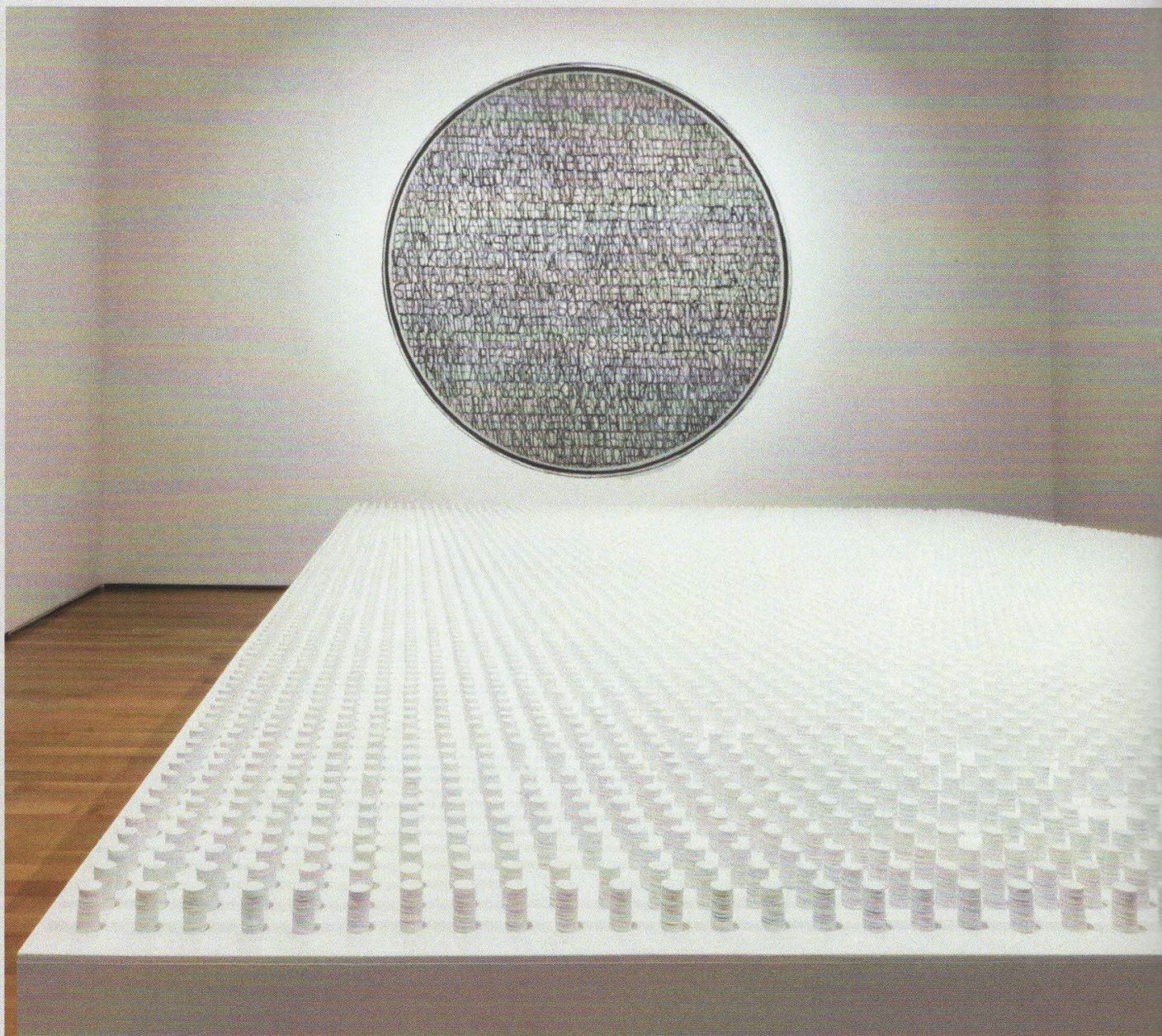
ARTISTS WORKING IN TEXAS

Each of the five Texas-based artists featured in *Site Lines* investigates the importance of place, the value of labor, and the resonance of cultural memory. In studios in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and Tyler, they are producing work that reflects their shared connectivity between Asia and their chosen state, while asking what does it mean to be “home”? Their creative explorations through a diversity of media contribute to a rich tapestry of perspectives represented in the region.

Ambreen Butt and **Abhidnya Ghuge** engage with the ephemeral limits of life and the fragile nature of physical existence, while celebrating the tenacity of the human spirit. Through installations, drawings, and collage, they question the ways in which individuals and communities are connected, and emphasize the cumulative aesthetic merits of applied effort.

Beili Liu views her artistic process as a method of recording time and its inexorable passage. Her selection of humble materials such as paper and cotton are imbued with value through the work of her hands, and her labor is recorded in these objects. Through installations and video, **Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba** and **Prince Varughese Thomas** investigate the various impacts that time and events have on specific communities, and the idea of place as an individual expression of countless influences and accrued histories.

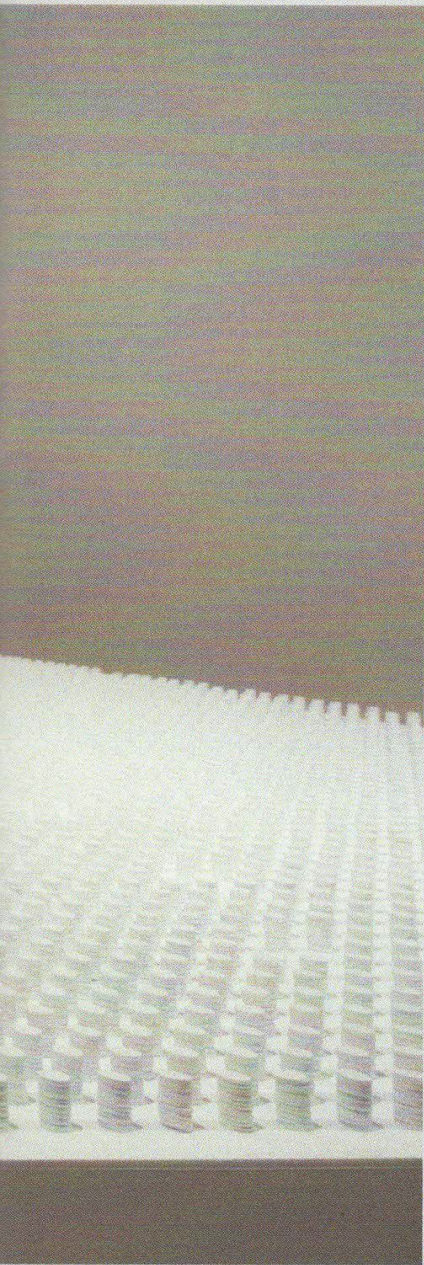
Illuminating the myriad narratives of leaving home and establishing one's self in a new location, these five artists reference a vast expanse of cultural influences, ranging among China, India, Japan, Pakistan, and Vietnam. Through focusing on related aspects of urban-rural, socioeconomic, and gender divides, they assert a shared humanity by emphasizing common experiences and aspirations. *Site Lines* draws connections between each of the five, and invites reflection on the power of place in a time of global mobility.



PRINCE VARUGHESE THOMAS

"As the viewer enters the space, on a white platform stacked in counts of 25, sits over 194,000 U.S. pennies all painted white. A single penny in its own right is very insignificant and devoid of any real value. And, like pennies being thrown into a jar at the end of a day, the total deaths in any given day of war can be easily processed, reconciled, and forgotten. But to be confronted by the vast numbers all at once is a far more difficult thing to ignore and, I hope, an emotionally arresting experience."

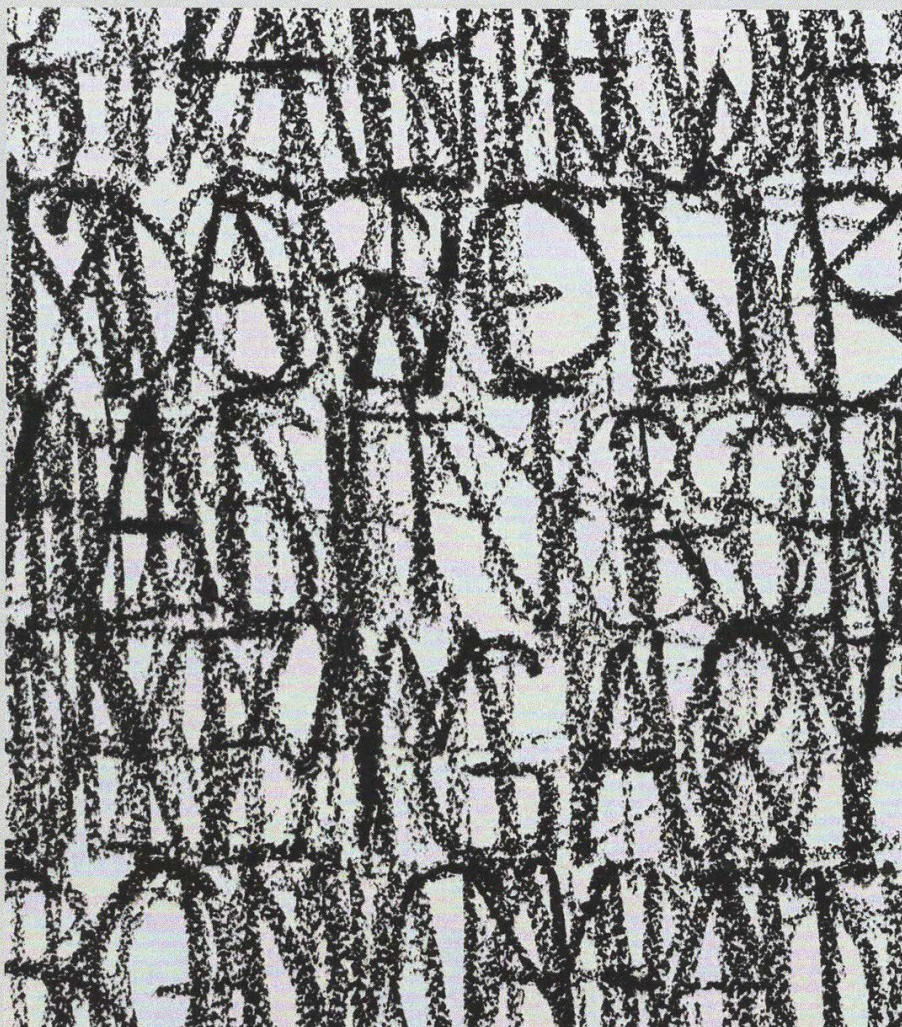
Prince Varughese Thomas (b. 1969, Kuwait) first arrived as a child in the United States in Houston, and lived between India and the U.S. throughout his youth. His two works in the *Site Lines* exhibition, *Body Count* and *K.I.A. (Texas)*, demonstrate his focus on the impacts of geopolitical events on particular communities and the fraught nature of human existence in larger global systems. Revisiting an initial installation at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art in 2012-2013, Thomas has continued to track the mounting loss of life, both civilian and military, related to the ongoing conflict in Iraq.



Body Count's primary material of pennies suggests the seemingly inconsequential nature of any one life considered separately, but as they amass on the plinth, their collective value becomes apparent, hauntingly rendered in white, the color of mourning in much of Asia.

The counting system for this piece is as follows: each stack of pennies represents 25 civilian deaths, with one gap between the stacks indicating a separation of months, and two gaps indicating a separation of years. The long central gap in the composition denotes the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, formally ending the Iraq War. This gap is now situated roughly in the middle of the work, indicating the continuing impacts of fighting related to the Islamic State in the area.

The charcoal drawing on the wall, *K.I.A. (Texas)*, memorializes the 427 soldiers based in Texas that have died in the conflict to date. Their names are layered as if time has collapsed in on itself, bound in a circle evocative of the Japanese Zen Buddhist circle, or *ensō*. The *ensō* can represent both enlightenment and the void. In this way, the two groups of individuals embodied in the installation can be seen to communicate across time and space, or as the artist describes, embody the “dead meeting the dead.”



above: Prince Varughese Thomas, Installation view of *Body Count* (detail), 2008 – 2019, 194,272 U.S. Pennies, Courtesy of the artist, Photo © Paul Hester

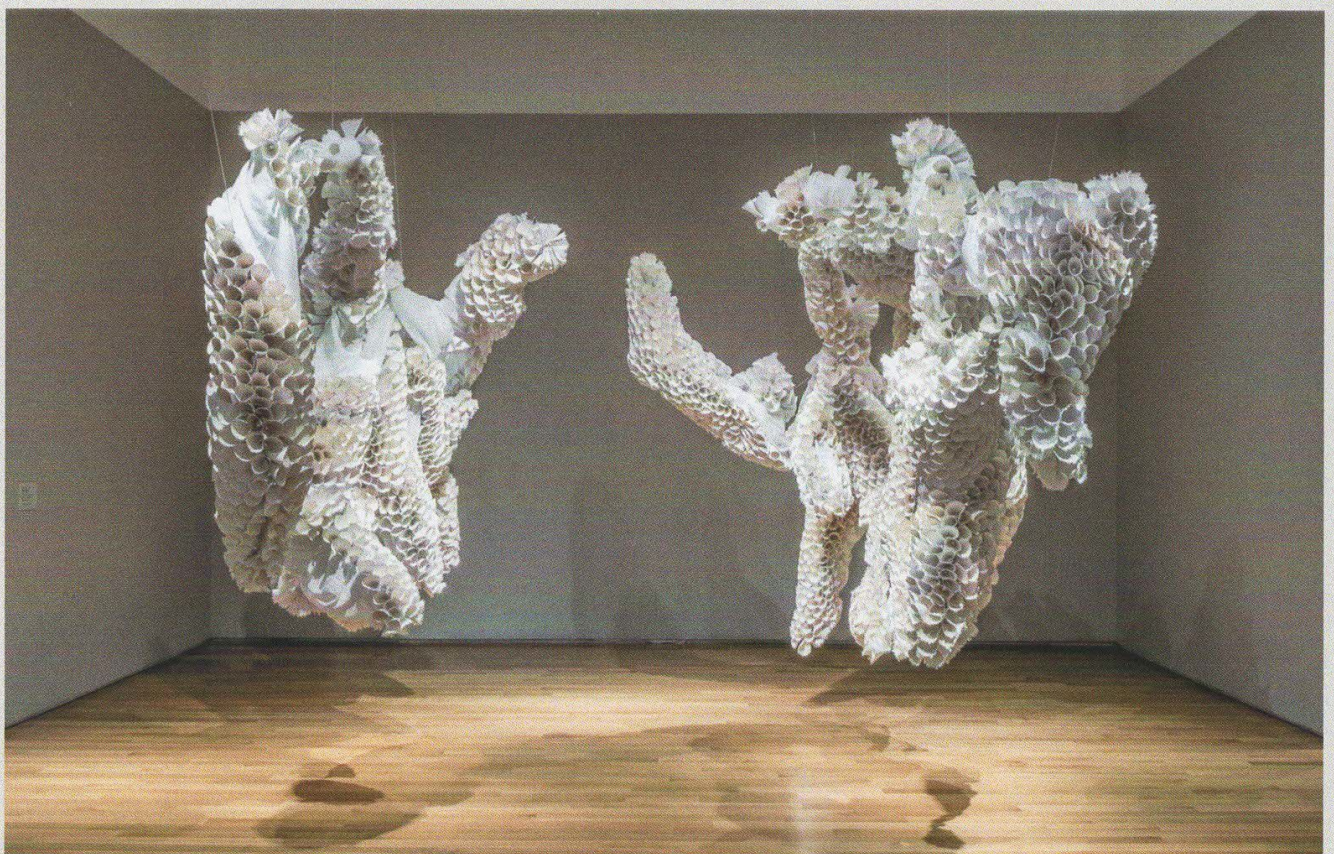
right: Prince Varughese Thomas, *K.I.A. (Texas)* (detail), 2019, Charcoal wall drawing, Courtesy of the artist, Photo © Paul Hester

ABHIDNYA GHUGE

"As a first-generation immigrant from India, my ideas of human disposability have undergone a drastic change. In my mind, each life, irrespective of its color, gender, or social status, is immensely valuable. Growing up in a culture where a female life is lived in a dichotomous state of being a doormat and a deity, one is a burden on the family yet an object to be owned, traded, and exploited. She has a voice, yet she cannot speak. She is tender as a caring mother, yet powerful enough to destroy the cosmic demons. Contrary to this submissive, suppressive role of a female, I have seen a cultural landscape in America that allows for a life to not only grow, but flourish in the pursuits of its dreams, where paths are made clear and voices are heard."

Abhidnya Ghuge (b. 1967, Mumbai, India) emphasizes the interconnectedness of each individual in her installations and drawings. Using simple white paper plates as the central material of her massive forms, she prints each plate using hand-carved woodblocks, and then folds and places them in large frameworks of chicken wire. Where a paper plate may easily be discarded at the end of an event or gathering, these plates are imbued with value through her focused attention and effort, and are transformed into a greater whole through their connection as independent parts. The work of carving blocks, pressing patterns on to the plates, and rendering them as three-dimensional forms is Ghuge's poignant reminder of the dignity of human labor.

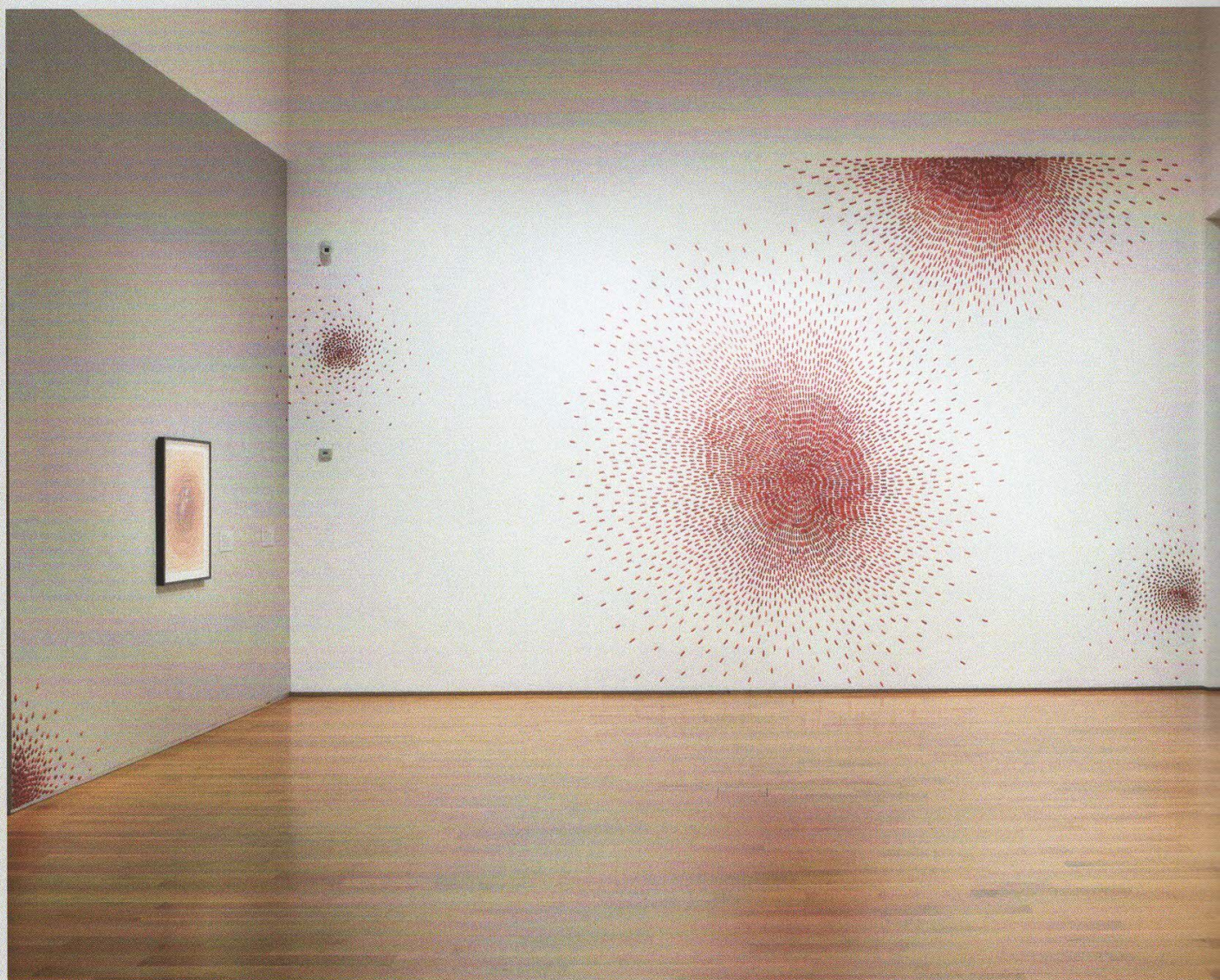
In the artist's drawings, she reflects upon personal relationships and the rich textures of exchange that develop between individuals. Linking back to Ghuge's childhood practice of creating patterns and designs in henna or *mehndi*, her drawings feature vegetal patterns that call to mind complicated fractal geometries, and perfectly embody the complex nature of human communication.





left: Abhidnya Ghuge, Installation view of *Immersion*, 2019, Hand-dyed, woodblock-printed paper plates, chicken wire, cotton, Courtesy of the artist, Photo © Paul Hester

right: Abhidnya Ghuge, Installation view of *Immersion* (detail), 2019, Hand-dyed, woodblock-printed paper plates, chicken wire, cotton, Courtesy of the artist, Photo © Paul Hester

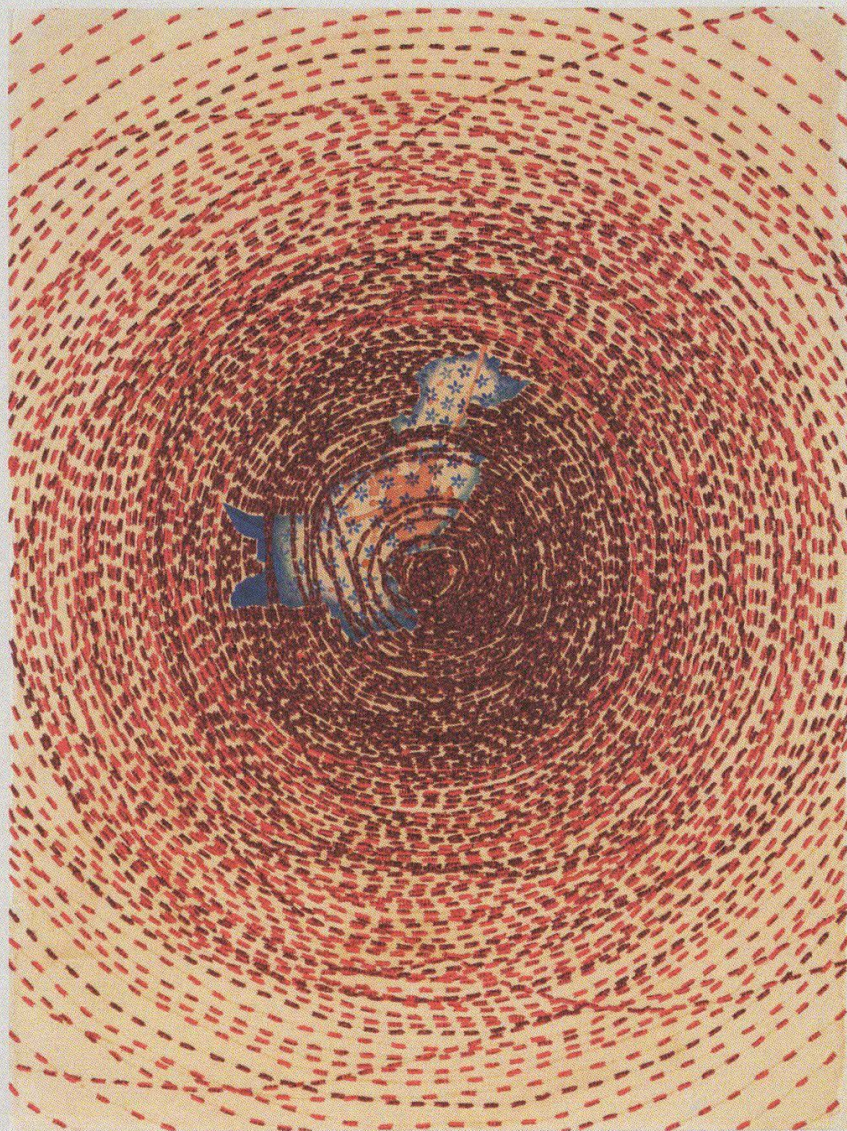
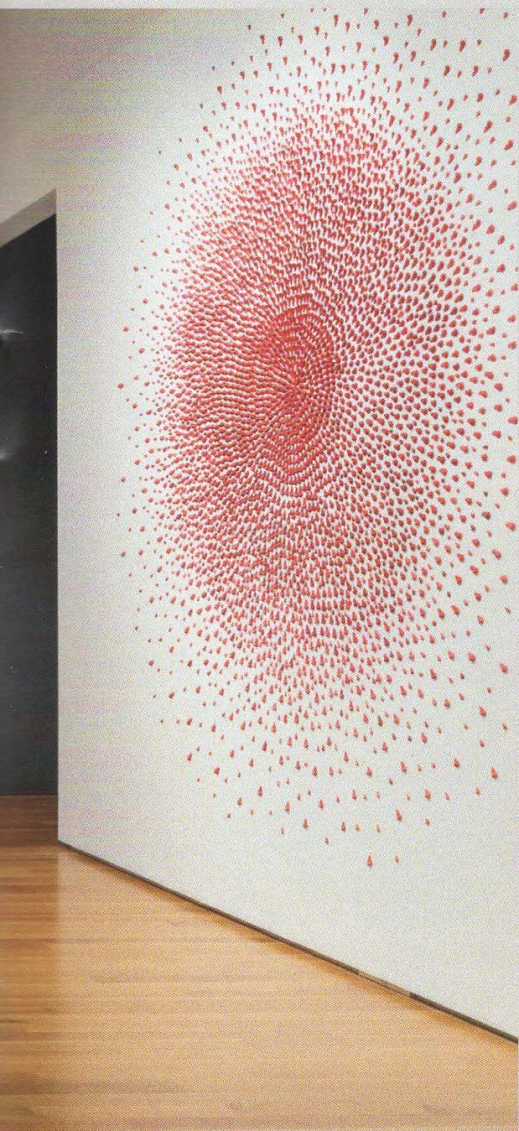


AMBREEN BUTT

"My work arises from two seemingly exclusive and often paradoxical traditions of Indian/Persian miniature painting and contemporary Western art forms; my artistic practice incorporates, interprets, and negotiates both. My work gives form to the complex interactions and existences of those who live within and between disparate cultures. The narratives that I construct take on layered and juxtaposed elements that reflect these complexities, generating a new vocabulary for the elements of Western art, and yet recontextualizing traditional miniature painting by updating its technical and conceptual process.

While I draw upon deep traditions in my art, the work consistently responds to events within contemporary political culture, and the effect of these events on individual lives. Through my work, I address issues of power and vulnerability, and question the authority and hierarchy of social and political structures. As a global artist, I am engaged in the exploration of multiple truths and questions of human rights, war, and violence."

Ambreen Butt (b. 1969, Lahore, Pakistan) connects the long history of miniature painting to contemporary life through her adaptations of the main tenets of the tradition in which she trained at the National College of Arts in Lahore. She realizes these adaptations through media



such as installations and collages. In *Site Lines*, her series *Say My Name* focuses attention on the young civilian victims of American drone strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Each collage is comprised of seemingly countless repetitions of the individual's name on a tea-stained background. From her perspective as a mother of young children, she began the series to memorialize these youngest victims of international conflicts.

In *I Am My Lost Diamond*, the artist fills the walls with what at first appears to be florets or other natural patterns. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent the forms are comprised of resin-cast toes and fingers. After a friend narrowly escaped a bombing in Pakistan, the artist felt compelled to critique cultural valuations. Where someone might be extremely distraught to lose a valuable stone such as a diamond from a ring, Butt redirects emphasis to the finger that bears such a ring, and the precious fragility of human life.

left: Ambreen Butt, Installation view of *I Am My Lost Diamond* (detail), 2011, Resin-cast digits, Courtesy of the artist, Photo © 2019 Nash Baker

right: Ambreen Butt, *Abdul Wasit (17)*, 2018, Collage of text, watercolors on tea-stained paper, Courtesy of the artist

JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA

"I don't have a particular expectation from the audience. I think art needs to function like magic, which leaves an impression rather than a solution. When we watch a magician perform, the magic only leaves us with a kind of question of wanting to know something more or better, sometimes puzzled, sometimes surprised. And this also is the same for myself to experience my own work. I want to experience the work with bits of impressions of life allowing me to connect to a variety of thoughts."

Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba (b. 1968, Tokyo, Japan) has transited between and within cultures his entire life, having parents who are Japanese and Vietnamese, and from living in Japan, Vietnam, and the United States. In his video work *The Master and the Slave: Inujima Monogatari*, we witness a ritualized leave-taking ceremony (*miokuri*) that anyone relocating to a new environment might understand, as the island residents keep tethered to those leaving as long as possible through the colored ribbons attached to the departing vessel.

Inujima is an island in Japan's Okayama Prefecture, which has an extremely small population and former industrial features such as a

right and below:
Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba,
*The Master and the Slave:
Inujima Monogatari* (still),
2013, Single channel
digital video, 9 min.,
Courtesy the artist and
Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo

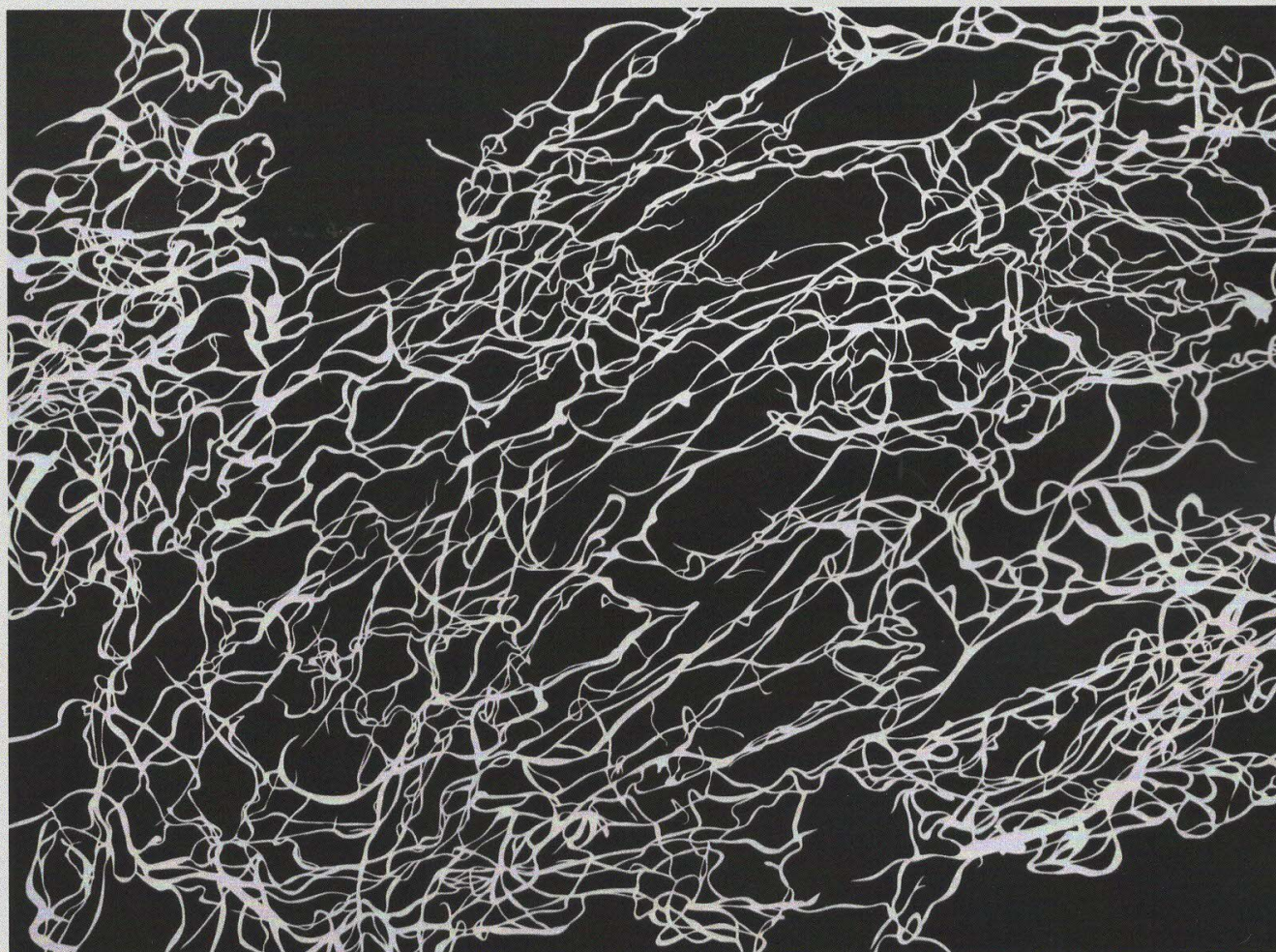




refinery and quarry. As Inujima struggles to remain connected to the larger segments of Japan, Nguyen-Hatsushiba views its imbalanced relationship as a larger metaphor for other parallel associations such as humankind and nature, and the individual and society.

As the narrative of the work unfolds, natural features of the rock walls in the former quarry transform into creatures and break free, and workers repurpose the industrial environment for their own entertainment. The artist emphasizes the effect that individual imagination has on the accrued power and histories of specific places.





Beili Liu, *Affine/Fragment #1*, 2012, Hand cut paper, graphite, on birch panel, set of 3, Courtesy of the artist

BEILI LIU

“Moving from village life in rural China, to the bustling factory city of Shenzhen, and finally to the United States, my personal history has been intimately tied to issues of materiality and labor. I am a maker. I learn with my hands. They have a memory of making from generations past. I am especially interested in the ways materials record the passage of time, invoking the impermanence I see as an underlying truth in life. My interest in labor connects to my interest in material and the hand-making process. The intuitive rhythms of my hands at work create a deep meditation that infuses my work with intimacy.”

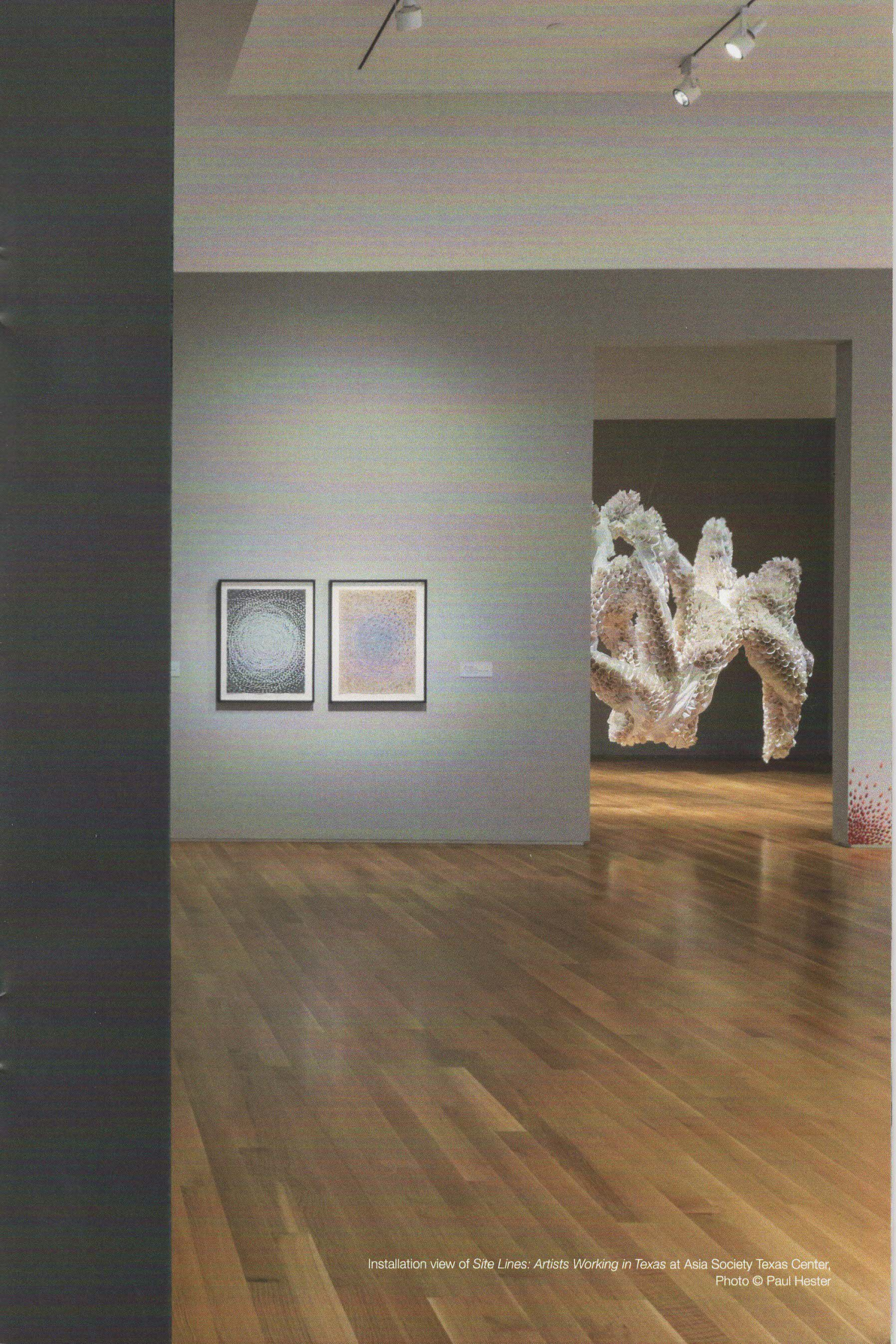
Beili Liu (b. 1974, Jilin, China) is known for her large-scale installations but simultaneously has a complementary practice of working in two dimensions in the studio. This artistic process, featuring humble materials such as paper and cotton which are transformed by her hands, functions as a method of capturing time, and stressing its fleeting nature. Her works featured in *Site Lines* accentuate the physical fragility of substances such as hand-cut paper, charred vellum, and spirit money or joss paper, while emphasizing their capacity to convey ideas and aesthetic concerns.

Through repeated physical actions, Liu creates a form of meditative studio practice, allowing works to materialize from and refer to the various cultural systems that inform her experiences. Her emphases on process and materiality appear in both her installation and her studio work, and feature a rich analysis of labor, gender, and living as part of a cultural diaspora.

Beili Liu, Installation view of *Wish Gold* (detail) 2009, 2019, Chinese spirit money (yellow paper), incense, set of 25, Courtesy of the artist, Photo © Paul Hester







Installation view of *Site Lines: Artists Working in Texas* at Asia Society Texas Center,
Photo © Paul Hester