

## Claudia Koh

### *Words from the Curator*

Claudia Koh's art is deeply autoethnographic, where she makes with her own experiences as *woman*, tender, and interconnected with the spaces she encounters and inhabits.

Koh confronts her own presence and posture in her worlds. Envisioning her next creation, she questions, "*Where am I going to be? What do I want to touch?*"<sup>1</sup>

Her process is one of imagination and translation. Koh blends in and morphs with her environments, using natural elements to mimic the position and shape of her body. She accentuates colors to emphasize pressure points and varied tones to emulate the weather. She plays with material and scale to evoke particular sensations and extends herself without limits on form.

For Koh, perception is both "*a reaching out to the world*"<sup>2</sup> and a reaching within herself. Her works evoke Yi Fu Tian's *Topophilia*, an "*affective bond between people and place*."<sup>3</sup> Engaging with her surroundings, she balances the symbolic and sentimental, delicacy and desire, control and surrender.

In a way, Koh's practice can be seen as an examination of place. She borrows from her Singaporean and Chinese upbringing to embed cultural meanings in nature. She places herself in landscapes where she is most at peace and explores the sensation of being stripped bare, returning to the earth.

*What can it feel like to be vulnerable and, in the uncomfortable, seek comfort?*

Koh's paintings are at once metaphors and mirrors of herself. She muses on self-portraiture, "*I can be anything I want*."<sup>4</sup> There is intimacy and distance between the painter and the piece, duality and unity, fragmentation and healing.<sup>5</sup> "*Sometimes I feel like I'm not here and don't want to be here. But at least I'm there*."<sup>6</sup> Approaching her canvases, she asks, "*How much space can I take up?*"<sup>7</sup>

Through painting, she makes herself present in life. Facing her presence, expressively and heavily depicted, she gains deeper acceptance of herself. "*Everyone deserves to take up space in the world*."<sup>8</sup>

Solace and understanding have always been the lifeblood of Koh's craft. Reflecting on her growth and learning as an artist, she pulls out a series of childhood portraits she made at nine years old and laughs, "*I'm doing the same thing now*."<sup>9</sup> As for how she wants her work to speak to those who see it, Koh responds, "*I want to comfort people with my art. Nothing can surpass that*."<sup>10</sup>

*For Koh, the human experience is a nuanced relinquishing and embrace.*

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<sup>1</sup> Claudia Koh, in conversation with ModA Curations, Feb 29, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Yi Fu Tian, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Koh, in conversation with ModA Curations, Feb 29, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Mimi Y Yang, "Articulate Image, Painted Diary: Frida Kahlo's Autobiographical Interface," essay, in *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 314–41, 323.

<sup>6</sup> Claudia Koh, in conversation with ModA Curations, Feb 29, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*.

## **Works Cited**

Koh, Claudia. Conversation with Esther Fan, ModA Curations. Feb 29, 2024.

Tuan, Yi Fu. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990.

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