

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

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NEW YORK

Bang Geul Han

THE 8TH FLOOR

17 West 17th Street 8th Floor

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Bang Geul Han, *Warp and Weft #05, 2022*, woven paper tapestry, thread, 20' x 6' 9". From the series "Warp and Weft," 2021–.

Bang Geul Han's exhibition here, "Land of Tenderness," addresses how language can be both embodied and obfuscating—an abstract tool of power that, nonetheless, struggles to encompass the full weight and breadth of personal experience. Her subject matter is emotionally charged: US immigration policy, anti-abortion statutes, and sexual violence. By contrast, the texts she uses as artistic material is often flat or opaque, culled from class-action lawsuit cases, Supreme Court justice opinions, and state laws, among other sources.

Han's show includes two VR works that remix cruel immigration stories via large-language-model AI software. The easiest to grasp (and most conceptually successful) is *Ø (Island)*, 2022, which requires headset-donning viewers to "chase" letters, flying like a flock of birds, through a dark space. When the forms approach animated birdcages, they coalesce for a few brief seconds into testimonies from migrant children about being separated from their parents at the US border with Mexico.

The works that evidence Han's physical labor, however, have a greater emotive pull. Take *Apology Bracelets (Harvey)*, 2022, a set of more than one hundred macramé friendship bracelets that spell out disgraced film producer Harvey Weinstein's apology published by the *New York Times* on October 5, 2017. His trite words, spliced into short woven phrases surrounded by hearts and stars, reveal his emotional stuntedness and lack of genuine contrition. At the same time, Han's handmade accessories hearken back to adolescent cliques and the "gossip" shared therein—sometimes meaningless drama, other times important warnings.

For the "Warp and Weft" series, 2021–, Han weaves textiles from narrow strips of paper printed with the full texts of legal documents that detail restrictions on reproductive and migrant rights. Plaiting these records together, Han illustrates the intersections of decisions that render certain populations (women of color, undocumented immigrants) exceptionally vulnerable to abuses of power. Up close, Han's neat and geometrically patterned works dissolve into a morass of legalese: In one, a Department of Homeland Security logo is partially visible; elsewhere, we see the phrase "a hospital that provides birthing services . . . at all times"—ominous in the context of our new, *Handmaid's Tale* reality limiting abortion access. Alongside the weavings, Han shows photographs of herself, wearing the textiles while sleeping, reading, and sitting on the toilet. Covering her face and nude body, the artist straddles a line between intimacy and anonymity.

— Wendy Vogel