



BANG GEUL HAN, *TERRE DE TENDRE (LAND OF TENDERNESS)*, 2023. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

ARTIST BANG GEUL HAN CHARTS BORDERS AND DESIRE LINES

By Jenny Wu

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REVIEWS

“Land of Tenderness,” Bang Geul Han’s solo show at The 8th Floor, maps the personal experiences of migrants onto viewers’ physical surroundings. Han’s research-based practice mobilizes data mining, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality toward critical and activist ends. Her show, now [on view](#) through May 13th, features videos, photographs, sculptures, and installations—including a floor-to-ceiling tapestry woven from shredded legal papers concerning the rights of migrants and women.

The stand-out piece in the show is its titular work, *Terre de Tendre* (2023). To experience this work, the viewer sits down and puts on a virtual reality (VR) headset.

The headset takes the viewer through a spare and fast-paced security checkpoint. Like a piece of luggage, the viewer is transported in a gray screening bin into a vast digital landscape that could have resembled Albert Bierstadt's vision of the American West had it not been for Han's punchy and idiosyncratic interventions. As the screening bin bobs down a strait headed for the ocean, the viewer has a 360-degree view of the surrounding mountains, which are covered in a digital skin.



INSTALLATION VIEW OF "BANG GEUL HAN: LAND OF TENDERNESS" AT THE 8TH FLOOR, MARCH 2023. PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM REICH. FEATURING *TERRE DE TENDRE (LAND OF TENDERNESS), 2023.

Continuously replicated on the mountainsides are hands performing suspiciously soothing gestures: getting manicures, polishing toilet handles, folding hotel towels. As someone who has passed through U.S. Customs on numerous occasions, I am reminded of the videos that loop in airports as travelers queue to enter the country. Pesky and propagandistic, these videos espouse, in multiple languages, the U.S.'s self-proclaimed hospitality, abundance, and inclusivity. Like a migrant stuck in the liminal space between nations, the viewer of *Terre de Tendre* takes a circuitous route into a supposedly tender land. The border stretches into a surreal frontier as more mountains are generated. Meanwhile, large foamy letters spelling out AI-generated text about immigration rulings and migrants' personal testimonies collide with the viewer's "boat" until waters turn treacherous and a spectacular disaster strikes, shaking the viewer in a way that only the most immersive and thoughtfully executed VR pieces can.

Terre de Tendre was inspired by the *Carte de Tendre*, a 17th-century French allegory of desire as a waterway through a bisected country. In both cases, a journey on water charts the progression of love, through innocence, tumult, and, in unfortunate cases, oblivion. In Han's work, the viewer is transported to another land not only by technology but also by desire. The hands performing acts of maintenance and care embody what researcher Laura U. Marks has termed [haptic visuality](#), a type of vision that "functions like the sense of touch," dialed up via total immersion. Yet Han interrupts the fantasy woven by these hospitable images by sporadically glitching them, making entire swaths of the landscape go dark.

Just as [Hsin-Chien Huang](#) has used the visuals of VR to simulate large-scale ecological catastrophe, and [Tin Drum and Sou Fujimoto](#) have used mixed-reality headsets to guide viewers' bodies through nonmaterial architecture, Han harnesses a distinct facet of this technological medium—in her case, its immersive haptics—for the purpose of consciousness-raising. By figuring the gap between physical and virtual touch, Han draws attention to the aching chasm between origin and destination, between a superficial invitation and a true state of inclusion.

Jenny Wu is a writer and independent curator.

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