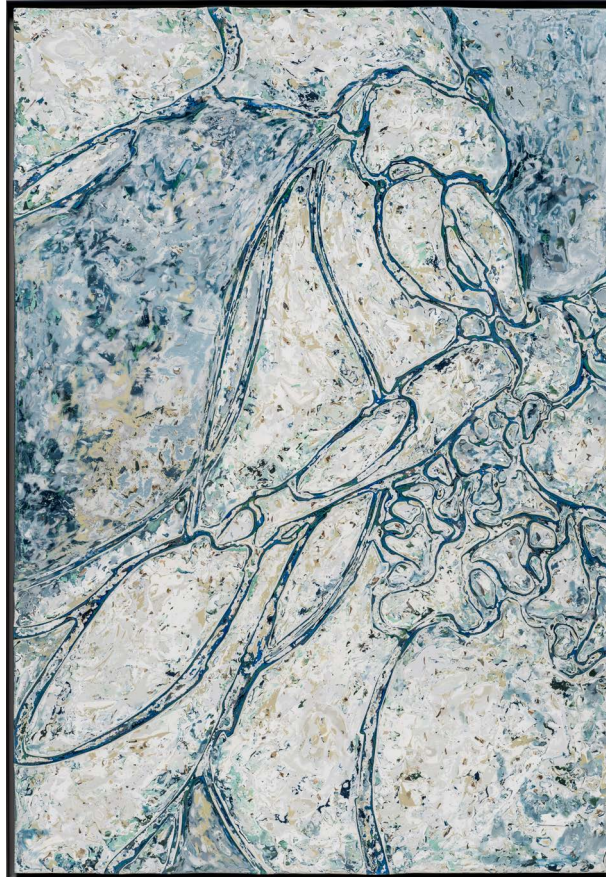


Press release

Lee Bul

30 March—13 May 2023
Opening Wednesday 29 March 2023, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
London Ely House
37 Dover Street, London, W1S 4NJ



Lee Bul, *Perdu CLXIII*, 2023. Mother of pearl, acrylic paint on wooden base panel, stainless steel frame. 163 x 113 x 6.5 cm (64.17 x 44.9 x 2.56 in). © Lee Bul. Photo: Jeon Byung-cheol

I choose what I work with very carefully. Everything has connotations, stories, and I utilise them. I borrow the general meanings materials have and embrace them in my work. — Lee Bul

Thaddaeus Ropac London presents paintings from Lee Bul's *Perdu* series for the first time in the UK, including new works created especially for the exhibition. Conceived as single and multi-panel works, these sumptuous mother-of-pearl

and acrylic paintings exemplify the artist's practice by bringing together past, present and future temporalities through the materials and references they incorporate. The exhibition marks the artist's first solo presentation in the UK since her landmark retrospective *Crashing* at the Hayward Gallery, London in 2018.

Lee Bul blends traditional methods and materials with a futuristic aesthetic, exploring the notion of utopia

and its imaginative potential to reveal its darker undertones. Born in 1964 to left-wing dissident parents under South Korea's military dictatorship, she draws on her childhood experiences, as well as European and South Korean culture, to create works that resonate across time and history, warning of the dangers of humanity's perpetual yearning for an ideal society.

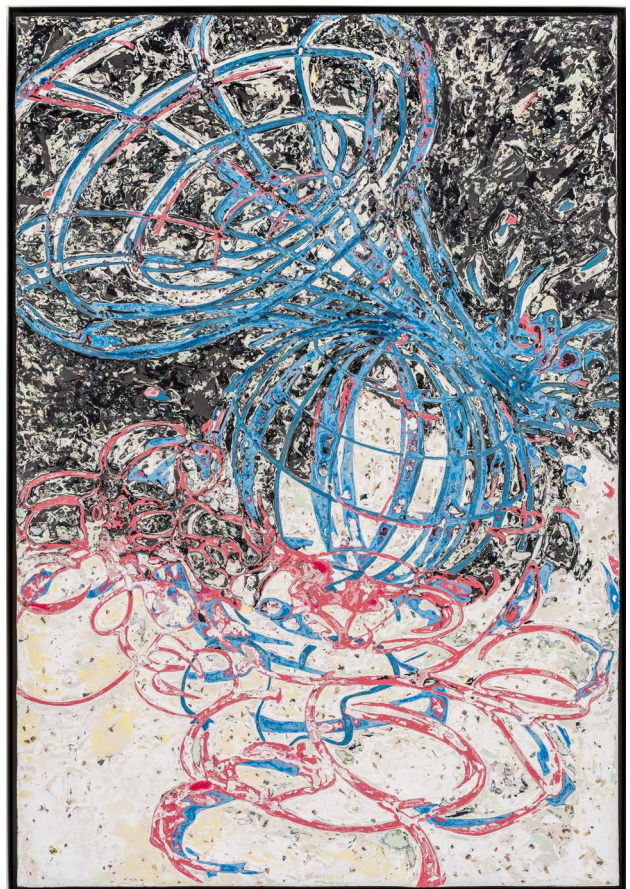


Lee Bul, *Perdu CXVII*, 2021. Mother of pearl, acrylic paint on wooden base panel, stainless steel frame.
Triptych: 189.5 x 83.3 x 6.6 cm (74.61 x 32.8 x 2.6 in).
© Lee Bul. Photo: Jeon Byung-cheol

The title of the works alludes to the French writer Marcel Proust's novel *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*; 1913–1927), evoking universal themes of memory and nostalgia. At the same time, 'perdu' is an arcane military idiom used to describe a sentinel assigned to a particularly remote and dangerous location and might be read in the context of the ongoing conflict between North and South Korea.

On a formal level, the *Perdu* works are related to the *Cyborg* sculptures and subsequent *Anagram* series the artist began creating in the late 1990s. Displayed on the first floor of the gallery, Lee Bul's vibrant paintings are inhabited by part-organic, part-mechanical anthropomorphic creatures. Appearing as though in motion, they allow the viewer to contemplate the human fascination with technological progress and related anxieties that surround the search for perfection.

Throughout her practice, which spans three decades, the artist looks for references and materials that embody contradiction. 'I choose what I work with very carefully,' states Lee Bul, 'everything has connotations, stories and I utilise them.' Mother of pearl, found on the inside of some shellfish, interests her because it 'is related to organisms that come from the inside out' – the organic/inorganic composite material is solid in appearance, yet is able to produce an iridescent substance to repair damage made to the shell.



Lee Bul, *Perdu CXXV*, 2021. Mother of pearl, acrylic paint on wooden base panel, stainless steel frame. 163 x 113 x 6.5 cm (64.17 x 44.9 x 2.56 in). © Lee Bul. Photo: Jeon Byung-cheol

This dualism is central to Lee Bul's critique of utopia, the ultimate failure of which she sees as inherent to the notion itself. 'For me, utopia in its paradoxical essence is a nostalgic, even elegiac, idea', she explains. This ambivalence is carried throughout her oeuvre, which seems suspended in time and space, somewhere between a dream, reality and nightmare. By confronting viewers with the shortcomings of idealism and the human condition, it is this underlying darkness that gives the *Perdu* works their poignancy and power.

About the artist



© Lee Bul. Photo by Hye-Ryoung Min. Courtesy of the artist.

Lee Bul lives and works in Seoul, South Korea. Her 1997 installation *Majestic Splendor* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York used rotting fish encrusted in sequins as a commentary on the ephemeral nature of beauty and the powerlessness of women, causing a furore and establishing her international reputation as an emerging artist. In 1999, she was selected by curator Harald Szeemann to participate in the International Pavilion at the 48th Venice Biennale, where her work was also shown in the Korean Pavilion. Lee Bul has had solo exhibitions at the New Museum,

New York (2002); Le Consortium, Dijon (2002); Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2004); Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris (2007); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012); Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (2013); National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2014); and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2014). She has also been the subject of multiple exhibitions at Art Sonje Center, Seoul in 1998, 2012 and 2016.

The artist's major retrospective *Crashing*, curated by Stephanie Rosenthal, opened at the Hayward Gallery, London and travelled to the Gropius-Bau, Berlin in 2018–19. This was followed by *Utopia Saved* at The Manege, St. Petersburg in 2020; and *Lee Bul: Beginning* at Seoul Museum of Art, South Korea in 2021. Recent group exhibitions include *Les Portes du possible. Art & science fiction* at Centre Pompidou–Metz, France; *Kaleidoscope Eyes* at Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, South Korea; *Face-à-Face* at Musée d'art moderne Grand-Duc Jean (Mudam), Luxembourg; and *13 Women* at Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA), CA, USA. Lee Bul's first solo presentation in the Nordic countries will be held at Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden, between 11 March and 27 August 2023, and will be followed by a solo exhibition at Sara Hildén Art Museum, Tampere, Finland, between 22 September 2023 and 14 January 2024.

Lee Bul received the Ho-Am Prize in The Arts in 2019, awarded to people of Korean heritage who have contributed to the enrichment of culture and arts for humankind.

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