Lee Bul live forever Act One

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Interview  LEE BUL AND CLARA KIM
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During the last decade, Seoul-based artist Lee Bul has investigated issues of femininity and body politics, technology and society, art and gender. Working across media, she first gained notice with interventionist performances staged in settings such as the streets of Tokyo, which addressed social taboos and issues related to the politics of the female body. In Lee’s sculptural works of polyurethane, fabric, sequins, porcelain, and silicone, a recurrent motif is the cyborg—a hybrid figure of human and machine—which is a visual trope embodying both our fear of the unnatural and our desire for perfectibility. Referencing popular culture, science fiction, Japanese manga and anime (comics and animation) as well as art-historical precedents, Lee’s cyborgs explore the tensions embedded in the interplay of nature, culture, and technology.

For her exhibition at the Art Institute, Lee will show new work that expands upon her investigation of the body in a technologically mediated society. Related to the 1999 Venice Biennale installation of karaoke booths, her new series of pod-shaped capsules are self-enclosed environments designed to heighten the suspension between the vicarious and the visceral that the artist finds to be the most fascinating aspect of the phenomenon of karaoke. Somewhere between flight and entertainment, Lee’s karaoke projects explore the collective memory constructed around pop songs and the experience of the body in a technologically obsessed culture.

Lee Bul’s Live Forever is part of a range of exhibitions and public programs at the San Francisco Art Institute which emphasize experimental and experiential work. Focusing more on artistic process than on product, this exhibition includes preparatory drawings and the Styrofoam model for the karaoke capsule, which will be shown at The Fabric Workshop and Museum in the fall. While in residence in San Francisco, Lee also produced a new video work exploring her interest in lounge bands that inhabit that strange nomadic realm of hotels. Filmed at the Tonga Room in the historic Fairmont Hotel with Art Institute students working as her production crew, the new production is exhibited in the gallery as a trilogy of videos: Amateurs + Anthem + Live Forever.

This publication mirrors the process-orientation of the exhibition by documenting Lee Bul’s other karaoke projects. It includes images of the preparatory drawings, the model and the video along with an essay on karaoke by cultural critic Roland Kelts and an interview with Lee Bul. A second volume will document the exhibition produced at the Fabric Workshop, and will be available in Fall 2001. The first of a new series, Projects in Process, this book furthers the Art Institute’s goal to not only commission, but to also contextualize new work created by artists in residence. We cannot imagine a better way to begin than by documenting the extraordinary projects and processes of Lee Bul.

—Karen Moss and Clara Kim