

**Ahn
Chang-
Hong**

noon-mool

Ahn Chang-Hong

Ahn Chang- Hong



*noon-
mool*



AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
MUSEUM

AT THE
KATZEN ARTS CENTER

Contents

The Return of Gaze

BG Muhn 006

The Significance of Ahn Chang-Hong

Jack Rasmussen 008

Ahn Chang-Hong: Eye Work

Levi Prombaum 010

Works

Recent Work

Taxidermied Animals 27

Mask 71 / Faces 95 / Blindness 109

Early Work 123

Biography 149





The Return of Gaze

BG Muhn

Artist and Professor of Art at Georgetown University

Co-curator of Ahn Chang-Hong's solo exhibition, *noon-mool*

My first encounter with Ahn Chang-Hong and his work did not come until June 2019, when I visited his solo exhibition *The Heart of an Artist* at Arario Gallery in Seoul. It was also the first time I met him in person.

Even before meeting him, I had already formed a strong sense of the kind of artist he was through the media and through the visual intensity of his work. The imagery, atmosphere, and spirit of resistance embedded in his paintings felt strangely familiar to me. When we finally met that summer, it seemed as though we already knew each other, not through language but through art itself. As a multimedia artist myself, the encounter with both Ahn's work and his presence carried particular significance. I felt not only the force of his artistic energy but also a resonance lingering behind the act of creation itself. Our conversations allowed me to glimpse his intellectual world and artistic philosophy more directly. Experiencing an artist's work through physical presence and personal exchange is profoundly different from encountering it only through digital images.

That sense of connection has remained with me and continues to shape how I introduce Ahn Chang-Hong's vision of art outside Korea. Nearly five years after our first encounter, I finally had an opportunity to bring images of Ahn's work to Jack Rasmussen, C. Nicholas Keating and Carleen B. Keating Director, American University Museum, Washington, DC. Jack and I later traveled together to Korea to visit Ahn's studio on the outskirts of Seoul. By then, Ahn's reputation in Korea was firmly established, and the scale and atmosphere of his studio reflected decades of artistic achievement. Jack was especially interested in Ahn's current artistic direction, while I remained equally drawn to his earlier works, including the psychologically charged nude paintings that challenge conventional expectations of the body and representation. In November 2025, we returned again to Ahn's studio to select works for his solo exhibition at the American University Museum in 2026.

During both visits, I was especially eager to experience the environment in which Ahn has lived and worked for so many years. He lives alone beside his studio, separated from family, friends, and the distractions of ordinary social life. For many, such isolation might appear severe, yet for an artist it can become a sanctuary where intense concentration and artistic production are possible. Sensing the physical and emotional atmosphere of his studio revealed an energy embedded within his work that cannot be fully understood through reproduction alone.

Ahn Chang-Hong's art has consistently confronted the anxieties and contradictions of Korean society while refusing the comfort of fixed stylistic boundaries. His paintings move between realism and distortion, beauty and brutality, intimacy and violence. In his recent *Taxidermy* series, animals frozen in unnatural poses become haunting metaphors for contemporary humanity itself. Suspended between life and death, preservation and decay, these creatures expose the psychological unease beneath modern civilization. The works are visually seductive yet deeply unsettling, compelling viewers to confront their own complicity within systems of domination, consumption, and spectacle.

What distinguishes Ahn's work is not simply political commentary or social criticism, but the persistence of artistic reinvention. Even after decades of recognition, he continues to push his practice into unfamiliar territory, incorporating photography, digital manipulation, painting, and sculptural presence into hybrid forms that resist categorization. His work refuses complacency and continuously searches for new visual languages capable of expressing the fractured emotional condition of contemporary life.

For this reason, introducing his work to audiences in the United States for the first time is not merely the presentation of a major Korean artist. It is the introduction of an artistic vision forged through solitude, endurance, and an uncompromising confrontation with humanity itself.

The Significance of Ahn Chang-Hong

Jack Rasmussen

C. Nicholas Keating and Carleen B. Keating Director
American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center
Co-curator of Ahn Chang-Hong's solo exhibition, *noon-mool*

As we prepared to present the work of Ahn Chang-Hong, curator BG Muhn and I confronted precisely the kinds of challenges museums are increasingly being asked to address today: We must clearly communicate why we selected this artist and these works in the interest of curatorial and institutional transparency; directly address the questions the work raises and what we believe to be at stake in its exhibition; and, finally, we must try to anticipate possible misreadings and seek clarity in our publications and wall texts.

For this exhibition, we focused our curatorial attention on one of the most significant Korean artists of his generation, Ahn Chang-Hong, and on his body of work using taxidermy as both medium and metaphor. These works provoked a powerful emotional and philosophical response in us as curators, and we expect visitors will be similarly affected. Yet beneath the initial discomfort, more awaits the viewer. There is a compelling social critique and an important contribution to the ongoing negotiation of contemporary culture. Ahn's work examines how societies construct identity, preserve memory, and aestheticize trauma through forms of artifice that are at once unsettling and deeply familiar. His figures often appear suspended between life and death, humanity and spectacle, forcing viewers to confront the uneasy ways contemporary culture consumes history, suffering, and even the body itself.

Although rooted in the social and historical realities of Korea, Ahn's work ultimately speaks to broader human concerns. His installations suggest a culture that embalms its own narratives, fetishizes the past while neglecting the present, and stages history even as it fragments it. What makes the work significant is not simply its capacity to shock, but its ability to sustain difficult reflection long after the initial encounter. In presenting this exhibition, the museum is not endorsing consensus or comfort but affirming the role of art as a catalyst for inquiry, disagreement, and deeper understanding. Ahn Chang-Hong's work challenges viewers to remain engaged with complexity and, in doing so, demonstrates why controversial art continues to have such relevance today.

Ahn Chang-Hong: Eye Work

Levi Prombaum

Postdoctoral Fellow

Art History and Digital Humanities, Hebrew University

1
Unless otherwise noted,
all quotations in this essay
are taken from extended
studio visits with the artist
and written interview
correspondence with the
artist in fall 2025 and
spring 2026. Hereafter
cited as “Interview with
the Artist, Spring 2026.”

2
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

3
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

4
For broader discussions
of the use of taxidermized
animals in contemporary
art, see, for example,
Heather Cammarata-
Seale’s “Embodied
Paradox: Taxidermy
and Contemporary Art,
1990-Present,” PhD
Thesis, The Pennsylvania
State University, 2016;
Richard Crawford’s “Re-
Presenting Taxidermy:
Contemporary Art
Interventions in Natural
History Museums,”
PhD Thesis, University
of London, 2021; and
Brown University’s
2016 exhibition, *Dead
Animals, or the curious
occurrence of taxidermy
in contemporary art*.

On an otherwise uneventful day of life during the COVID-19 pandemic, the artist Ahn Chang-Hong stumbled upon a warehouse near Seoul where a non-operational natural history museum stored its artifacts. Seeing hundreds of decomposing and battered taxidermy specimens dumped in piles felt, in the artist’s words, “paralyzing – [it was] a visceral exposure of human barbarism and unfiltered violence.”¹

At the same time, Ahn understood his encounter with this tragedy as fateful. The very next day, he returned to the site with photographer Sungil Park, with the goal of documenting the set of shocking scenes that “condensed my lifelong preoccupations: the hollow shell of civilization, the brutality of capital, and the modern contempt for life.”²

For three months in 2023, Ahn worked alongside his photographer to capture images of the piles of taxidermized specimens, as well as to photograph each animal. The process was so intensive, and so filled with guilt and shame, that the artist became physically ill and bedridden for weeks. As he regained his health, he prepared to transform these works into paintings that would not just translate but also offer commentary on the cruelty he had witnessed. He spent the next eight months carefully selecting images, as well as printing and mounting the richly detailed works onto panels. He methodically stained the prints with a matte medium that made their imagery appear more immediate and carefully built-up rippling, tactile surfaces with semi-transparent acrylic gels. From here, Ahn used a wide range of painting strategies over 200 works, in service of visualizing “the desperate writhing of a life-force attempting to break free from the frame of death.”³

The individuals Ahn depicts in *Taxidermied Animals* are not what one usually expects when being brought face to face with the dead. There’s the subject: memorializing portraits of long-dead animals, here treated with the singularity and importance usually reserved for a recently departed human being. There’s the scale: the images are larger-than-animal, larger-than-human, and larger-than-life. They impose themselves into the space of the viewer, forcefully impressing themselves into consciousness. There’s also the jarring dissonance between content and style within each image: grotesque scenes of suffering and disfiguration are depicted on bright, poppy monochrome grounds, with dabs, stains, and splatters of paint drawn from a mash-up of advertising strategies and twentieth century painting techniques.⁴

The animals in the *Taxidermied Animals* series variously implicate, astound, repulse, mourn with, and indict the viewer, gathering together a number of discordant emotional registers. In some works (like *Sorrow 2025’9* and *Sorrow 2025’11*, pages 53 and 54), abstract shards and splatters, twentieth century signs of artistic freedom and of masculine virility, behave as if they are bullets that have pierced the “glass” of the picture plane. Maybe the artist is a poacher, and the viewer finds himself at a scene of a hunt; but more often, the shattering feels more like a jailbreak, plotted between animal and artist, to free the glimmers of a remaining soul from the frame of taxidermized “life.” In other works (like *Sorrow 2025’4* and *Sorrow 2024’5*, pages 46 and 47), in which animals are confined behind sinister grids of mangled chicken-wire fencing, the confrontation is unmistakable. A baby fawn, tears dripping down its eye, seems to plead for the viewer’s recognition. In another, the sideways-set, artificial eyes of a taxidermized badger are filled with painted tears. Its gaze alternates between empty and full, and it doesn’t so much address the viewer as it *stares right through them*. Other works, still, offer themselves as chilling encounters with a brutality that appears to be in progress (like *Sorrow 2024’2* and *Sorrow 2024’1*, pages 30 and 34). A baby langur sobs against a searing red background, its bright yellow fur splattered with red paint that doubles as blood. Or, tears pour from the eye socket of a wild

5
See Rachel Poliquin,
The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing
(Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2012).

6
“Interview with the Artist, Spring 2026.”

7
Sung Wan Kyung, “The Success of Discomfort,” in Ahn Chang-Hong: An Inconvenient Truth (Seoul: Gana Art Center, 2011), p. 50.

cat directly into its blood-stained mouth. Re-vivified, the animals testify not only to the struggles of life and death but to the series of injustices they have endured long since their passing.

Against this suffering captured in close-up, Ahn juxtaposes masses of taxidermized life relegated to the industrial waste bin, where animals from different continents and climates pile up, seemingly without limit. In some works, (like *Paradise 2024*’7, pages 64–66), smaller specimens (foxes, ducks, cranes, monkeys, sea creatures) are sandwiched between large animals (antelopes, tigers, beavers, ostriches, bears, boars). They are buried among human mannequins, as well: there is a plastic child who stares directly at the viewer, anatomical models of torsos, and the limbs of department store castoffs that litter the foreground and the background. However, transformed by Ahn’s looking, under the glow of a hazy atmosphere, an alternative life force emerges. The animal remains become a kind of shared ground: a motley and monstrous collectivity that asserts itself as the abused and discarded band together.

In many ways, the animals represented in Ahn Chang-Hong’s recent series of work harness all of the drama and grandeur that taxidermy has traditionally aspired to achieve.⁵ But their splendor isn’t found in regal poses simulated for time immemorial. It’s not based in the authority of rows of apex predators mounted high on hand-carved mahogany. And it has no purchase in far-flung ecosystems brought together in dioramic wildlife tributes. From the moment he encountered the neglect, cruelty, and decomposing animal life that fateful day, Ahn has dedicated himself to deconstructing those nineteenth-century fantasies that create a hierarchy between man and nature. Even more so, he is intent on re-signifying their force by rerouting the way his viewers look.

It is worth lingering in the nineteenth century world that birthed such simulations of the real to understand Ahn’s work in terms of its resistive critical tendencies. On one hand, across Ahn’s shifts between the grotesque and the sublime, the artist’s work inhabits the emotional landscape of the Romantics: those cultural rebels who for centuries have critiqued Enlightenment promises of a modern society built on logic, order, and progress. Like these Romantics, Ahn sets his imagination free not to escape modern life but to dredge up its undersides and monstrosities for a collective reckoning. Yet, as the artist puts it, his “moral and artistic stance—dragging the pain and wounds that our era seeks to ignore onto the canvas, forcing the audience into a direct confrontation with reality,” also represents a practice dedicated to Critical Realism.⁶ Indeed, Ahn’s work combines dispassionate observation with deep empathy in order to maintain a practice of concretely reflecting the social ills of contemporary life. The artist is committed, in his words, to “freely navigating any method as a means to expose the bare face of truth.” Or as a leading critic puts it, in a proclivity for sparking revelation through “a method without method,” Ahn forces us to confront the systemic fractures of our contemporary world.⁷

This essay approaches Ahn Chang-Hong’s work through some of its strategies of confrontation. It inverts the metaphor of “eye work,” a term which has its origin in taxidermy as the art of placing artificial eyes to simulate liveliness in a specimen. Across Ahn’s work, his “eye work” represents both a confrontation with the spectacles of artificiality and an attempt to intervene in artificial forms of sight: those culturally loaded ways of looking that efface the weight of history and our obligations to one another.

Rather than offer a single, chronological overview of the artist’s career, this essay considers three kinds of overlapping “eye work” that appear throughout Ahn’s oeuvre, for which the *Taxidermied Animals* series marks but the most recent and potent iteration. First is Ahn’s expansive concept of

8

Ahn Chang-Hong,
"For a Life Together!,"
December 13, 2005.

9

"Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026."

10

Major presentations of
birds in Ahn's 1980s
work included in his solo
exhibitions at the Korean
Museum of Art in Busan
(1984), his solo exhibition
at Hangang Gallery in
Seoul (1986), and *The
Story of Birds and People*
at Gallery Novo in Busan
(1987).

nature, in which the artist processes human violence and traumatic histories with recourse to our enmeshment within, and responsibility to, the animal and natural world. Second is Ahn's affinities to, and departures from, the art of democratic resistance in 1980s Korea and the movements in which he participated and which so powerfully shaped his worldview. Third is Ahn's work's turn over recent decades to large-scale series and installations, which have turned the recurring motifs of sight and blindness into one of his work's primary subjects. The life-affirming looking that Ahn Chang-Hong cultivates continually draws from opposing strategies and affects, in an effort to foster the deep, active compassion needed to engage the contradictions of life today.

We must return nature, which has been privatized in our consciousness, to its rightful place.⁸

Shared Blood

The Animal Gaze

Dating back to a fascination and kinship that he has felt from the earliest moments of his life, Ahn explains that complicating "the relationship between humans and animals ... is a core philosophical theme that permeates my entire body of work."⁹ As his *Taxidermied Animals* series makes clear, in life and in death, Ahn treats humans and animals as distinct yet equally worthy beings. His narratives that feature animals often draw on anthropomorphism and allegory, symbolic codes to process human pain and struggle. In the artist's highly personal meditations on animal being, the focus of this section, Ahn comes close to abolishing the hierarchy of human-animal distinction in favor of images which underscore a fundamentally shared vulnerability as living things. The frailty of life captured in Ahn's work is not existential in abstract terms. Rather, the artist often focuses on the ways that systemic violence and neglect come to govern, contain, and shape all animal life, especially our own, irreversibly.

Since the 1970s, Ahn's work was forged in the context of democratic art and protest movements (an involvement that will be discussed in detail in the next section), from which the artist drew strength to reflect on Korea's past and present traumas of political violence. Ahn's ruthless, indicting images of animal bodies took on trenchant philosophical and ecological weight in the artist's celebrated, mid-1980s *Bird* series.¹⁰ Though Ahn began to integrate animals into his political commentary earlier in the decade; it was his 1987 solo exhibition, *The Story of Birds and People*, that explicitly named these suffering animals as ciphers for the human toll of Korea's democratic struggle. Some of the works on view offered improvisations with the legend of the phoenix. There were works like *Burning Bird*, where the majestic creature, trapped and dying in the corner of a cell, its wide,



fig 1.

Phoenix
1985, color on paper
123.5×184.5 cm,
48.62×72.64 in.



fig 2.

The Suffering Bird
1987, acrylic on canvas
97×130.3 cm,
38.19×51.3 in.

fig 3.
Are You Still Dreaming
 1994, acrylic on fabric.



blank eyes and open beak crying out to the viewer, recalls the mistreatment of young protesters and democratic dissidents. Other times, as in *Phoenix* fig 1, the indomitable spirit of persecuted protesters is symbolized through the phoenix's simultaneous death and rebirth. Pierced by multiple arrows through its neck, the body of a bird dissolves into dozens of chicks that take flight, or as the artist has described it, that "soar to the sky," a nod to the "sacrifices of fighters who never yield to brutal violence."¹¹

Many of the works in Ahn's bird series employ the crane, a sacred Korean archetype representing peace, dignity, and purity. In works like *Arrow-Struck Bird* (page 140), Ahn's meditation on the impacts of anti-democratic crackdowns shatters the image of crane as a source of Korean virtue. Contorted and brutally pierced by six different arrows, the bird in this image hasn't merely been hunted, but deliberately and mercilessly tortured, bringing to mind depictions of a suffering Christ or Saint Sebastian. The arrest of activists was further allegorized in works like *Flightless Bird* (page 141)—an image of a bloodied, caged crane that unsuccessfully strains in all directions and with all of its might to escape its confinement. In related works, like *The Suffering Bird* fig 2, a crane is ensnared by the thorny branches of a winter tree, its hollow stare a reminder of a harsh and lonely death. In exhibiting these works of animal pain and cruelty as masses mourned the torture and killing of pro-democracy activists, Ahn sent an explicit political message with an underlying, potent, spiritual charge, linking the effects of Korea's political violence to the health and fate of the culture writ large.

When Ahn returned to metaphors of animal containment in the subsequent decade, their images would feature a dialogue with the artist about the discounted value of life in a rapidly capitalizing society. "There is an undeniable difference between humans and animals," the artist recently explained. "Yet, this difference is not a matter of hierarchy or superiority; rather, it is a mirror that forces us to face a 'truth beyond language.'"¹² One day, in the early 1990s, looking into the eyes of his friend visiting his studio, Ahn remembered the gaze of an old chimpanzee that he used to visit at a deteriorating zoo on the outskirts of his former hometown of Busan. He immediately began to sketch him from memory. Recalling frequent visits to the zoo, Ahn wrote:

As I looked at the faces of the animals in their small cages, I realized how luxurious and oppressive my life was. I found myself asking myself questions of self-reflection and introspection, wondering if I had lived a life I'd never lived before. At times, I even fell into the illusion of being trapped within a cage and had a feeling of kinship.

One day, I saw an old chimpanzee far away behind the peeling paint bars. He sat motionless, gazing at the sky. Deep in thought, he didn't react at all when I approached. Was he dreaming of a temple? His eyes seemed to linger in the distance, following his thoughts. Those eyes, I'll never forget! Are you still dreaming of that place?¹³ fig 3

By capturing a gripping gaze behind thick bars, making sure to render the materiality and imperfections of the cage in as much detail as the chimpanzee himself, Ahn found a psychological

¹¹
 "Interview with the Artist,
 Spring 2026."

¹²
 "Interview with the Artist,
 Spring 2026."

¹³
 Ahn Chang-Hong,
 "The Birth of a Painting,"
 artist notes published
 online in 2018.

¹⁴
Ahn Chang-Hong,
“The Birth of a Painting,”
artist notes published
online in 2018.

¹⁵
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

mirror that captured more about his circumstances than interaction with other humans might permit. He also arrived at a vantage, capturing a captive gaze that troubles the boundaries between freedom and containment, which would return decades later in *Taxidermied Animals*. Ahn used a dense netting of pointillistic color contrasts to depict the chimpanzee’s melancholic face. He not only accentuates shared anxiety between artist and his subject, but also gravity and dignity, treating the chimpanzee with the status of an equal.

This message of shared vulnerability and shared fate with animals is present especially in moments where the artist represents death, as seen in a poignant encounter from the spring of 1999 that Ahn memorialized. When a deer farmer brought a trampled, days-old fawn to his studio, Ahn felt confronted with a striking mirror of a different order. The artist observed the fawn’s last few breaths, and took care of the animal as it died:

The shadow of death in its slender legs, and in its eyes that were blacker than black glass beads, passed directly through my pupils. It came through my optic nerve, passed through my brain, and stabbed my heart like a needle of pain.¹⁴

Though he was filled with regret for letting the farmer take it back, instead of giving it a proper burial, Ahn recreated a memorializing image in what became one of the most resonant, spiritual works from this period. Viewers confront the brute fact of the animal’s fragile body and piercing, dead stare in a flower field whose all-over tremors of color and pattern create a celestial atmosphere. Stark oppositions of loss and beauty are reframed here as something more cyclical. The shimmering land, turned heavenly sky, has already begun to absorb the young fawn’s body, which promises to nourish the earth in turn. fig 4

When the artist experienced illness over the next decade of his life, a strain of his writing emphasized the vulnerability and loneliness that humans and animals share. Yet, while Ahn’s work often treats the animal as a surrogate for the human body wrestling against a cold world, the work also argues that animals symbolize, in the artist’s words, “a certain state that humanity strives to reach... an escape from conventional boundaries. While humans are confined within the ‘frames’ of civilization and social norms, an untamed, wild instinct and a raw vitality still flow deep within us.”¹⁵

This is expressed powerfully in Ahn’s series, *Bed Couch*, in which the artist invited friends, family,

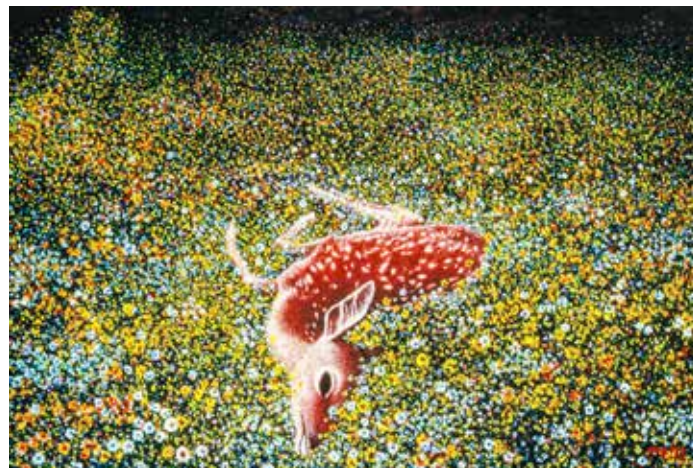


fig 4.
In the flower garden II
1998, acrylic on canvas
120.5×194 cm,
47.44×76.38 in.

16
Exhibitions showing major portions of this series have taken place at Savina Museum of Art, Seoul (2009); Busan Museum of Art, Busan (2009); Artside Gallery, Seoul (2017); and Arario Gallery, Seoul (2019).

17
Ahn Chang-Hong, "For a Life Together!," December 13, 2005.

18
A major selection of this series was exhibited at Casa Museo Guayasamín & La Capilla del Hombre, Quito, Ecuador (2021).

and neighbors to pose for him nude in his studio, rendering each subject in vivid detail.¹⁶ Though they stirred controversy for their uneasy atmospheres and unabashed, hyperrealistic depictions of imperfect bodies, Ahn underscores the beauty of human flesh in many forms: young or old, taut or weathered or tattooed. Allowing such a diverse array of bodies onto the frame became a strategy of contesting the ways that human sexuality is sensationalized, managed, commodified, and exploited. While Ahn frequently captured a sense of vulnerability in this series, his work also underscores a throughline of companionship and intimacy. In one work, for example, a nude young man poses tenderly with his dog (page 132); both creatures assured in their own skin. For Ahn, reminding viewers of their animality is an invitation to enter a shared wildness that societal constraints should never entirely extinguish.

Nature's Witness

Ahn believes human beings hold a similar responsibility to animals as they do to the land on which they live. Just as Ahn's animal depictions involve a sense of mutual witness and enmeshment—it is the animal's shared, denied, pained, or even deadened gaze that awakens in the artist a sense of true kinship—so does the land look back: reminding us of our "duty to coexist with nature," to "look at nature with true love."¹⁷

Ahn has imagined the role of the artist as fostering a primal connection to the earth. For example, in *Giant's Sleep* (page 137) a surrogate of the artist's body appears mapped onto Korea's geography. He is blanketed by the ridges and valleys of the country's iconic green mountains, so that body and landscape become coterminous and loaded with meaning. While it is possible to read the land as a source of sustenance and rest, the artist has also become a cipher for the collective: a figure that is exceptionally connected to the soil and to all that its inhabitants have experienced.

Ahn's recent *Faces* series takes on this artistic responsibility by wielding dualities—of human and environment, inert and animate material, humor and trauma—to highlight the collective memories buried within the natural landscape. In an homage to a common spirit which flows through the Korean people, Ahn cast a series of abstract faces that use the ground as the support. He digs pits on his rural property, sculpting some facial features directly into soil molds, while other features are made from colorful salvaged industrial material. He then casts each work with cement: a dry, man-made material often associated with the estranging quality of urban living. The artist notes that the cement's texture and qualities transform when it absorbs soil, stones, and roots. The humorous faces that emerge are imbued with a quality of the ancient, and Ahn's sculptures become the long-lost cousins of the carved stone protectors that one might find outside Korean towns or shrines.

The rough, cracked, joyful, and highly personal visages that emerge throughout *Faces* are an homage to the endurance of the Korean people, whose spirit comes through over and against cement's lifelessness, and are a reflection on the hybrid nature of humanity in modern society.¹⁸ Additionally, the people that surface in *Faces* are part of Ahn's process of exhuming and giving voice to the dead. The artist explains:

During the Korean War and the movements for democratization, countless individuals were secretly buried in pits across mountains and fields. Perhaps [*Faces*] stems from a sense of debt toward those "buried people" who left no names behind. The artistic calling—the belief that "Even if history is buried in the earth, its wounds must be unearthed"—became the driving force behind this technique.

19
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

20
Ahn Chang-Hong, “Artist
Note,” in *Sad Evaporation*
(Gyeongnam: Gyeongnam
Art Museum, 2019), p. 57.

21
Ahn Chang-Hong,
“The Birth of a Painting,”
artist notes published
online in 2018.

By retrieving these forms from the earth, I transform a “buried past” into a “present presence.” This method ensures that the work is not merely a representation of history, but a physical fragment of the land itself—bearing witness to the truths that were once meant to be hidden forever.¹⁹

By reframing the earth from an inert backdrop to an active participant in processing grief and ensuring resilience, Ahn’s work understands nature as an active repository of shared memory that refuses to be privatized in human consciousness. In acts that not only connect, but also collectivize, nature—the land and its inhabitants, humans and animals, the living and the dead—the artist urges his viewers to claim a shared responsibility to nature and to one another.

The gap between light and shade, the gap between desire and restraint, the gap between here and there, the borders between all opposite values in this world. Art is not a byproduct of norms and conclusions, but a flower that blooms more beautifully amidst the tensions of ambiguity, instability, and conflict.²⁰

A Singular Minjung Vision

After finishing high school in the 1970s, Ahn remained in Busan, the city of his youth, as he decided to pursue an art career independently of formal training. In Busan, he got married, had children, and invested in a solitary and highly productive studio practice. While his paintings of the 1970s were often expressions of a melancholic life under South Korea’s military dictatorship, Ahn’s politics and painterly perspective irrevocably sharpened when he found himself at the epicenter of the protests that would result in the overthrow of authoritarian rule that had stifled South Korea for the last decade. In 1979, anti-government protests in Busan and Masan (“Buma”) began at universities and spread throughout the area to include tens of thousands of workers and young people. Ahn joined in, and he watched his city devolve into war as a result of the government’s aggressive anti-demonstration tactics:

The soldiers, with their murderous eyes, carried their bayonets and guns without name tags. People were mercilessly beaten with military boots and rifle butts. People were left with their heads broken and covered in blood. They didn’t discriminate between men, women, young and old, no matter how educated they were. I was blinded by rage. Every day, I fought through tear gas, screaming until my throat bled. For the first time in my life, I saw the true nature of fear and terror, and I felt the powerlessness of painting and the shame of being an artist. So, I had no choice but to step out into the streets, shrouded in tear gas and charcoal smoke.²¹

These protests, tragically, did not lead to swift change. A new dictatorship soon formed, consolidating its power by similar means just seven months later, as it mercilessly punished protesters resisting martial law in the city of Gwanju. It would take eight more years of sacrifice and organized democratic struggle from the Korean masses to bring the era of South Korean military dictatorship to its close.

Ahn turned to painting anew to process the pain and shock of all he was witnessing, developing

22

Ahn recently explained that he looks “past the romantic vision of the family as a simple blood-related sanctuary,” and instead views it as “an existential unit that shares historical trauma and bears witness to one another. In South Korea, the family is not merely a cozy nest; it is a ‘community of pain’ that has endured the turbulent storms of modern history with its very body.” From the moment he began processing the Buma massacre, the artist unapologetically addressed the wounds of the past as they informed the tragedies of the present. “Interview with the Artist, Spring 2026.”

23

In addition to participating in an early Reality and Utterance in 1983, Ahn also took part in the fifth and sixth official exhibitions of the group in Seoul in 1984 and 1986.

24

Many thanks to BG Muhn for sharing more about the history and complexity of this concept. For a discussion of hahn and the Minjung movement, see Hye Lim Nam, “Conceptualizing Sorrow and Hope: The Discourse of Han in South Korea,” in *Journal of Transcultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (2019): pp. 54–88.

25

For an English history of the Minjung Movement art, see Sohl Lee, *The Minjung Art Movement: Decolonization and Democracy in South Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2026).

a visual language that would shape his work into the 1980s and beyond. This included putting the disturbing impressions of the Buma Massacre to canvas, as he did in the work *Memories of That Day* (page 143). Drenched in a grim, earthy palette of browns and ashen grays, bodies crouch, huddle and collapse in collective trauma. Each face is stripped down to a ghastly, mask-like void, defined by hollow eyes that stare out in a state of frozen horror. Yet Ahn’s mask-like forms first appeared in contemporary paintings that are haunting at a different register, entitled *Family Portrait* (page 145). With an intuitive understanding that recent traumas often reactivate earlier, unresolved traumatic moments, Ahn turned, in the months after the Buma atrocities, to recreate images of typical Korean families from the mid-twentieth century, covering the period between the Japanese colonial occupation and the Korean War. He enlarged sepia-toned studio photographs, including his own family’s photos, carefully keeping sitters’ poses and dress yet dramatically defacing them: using blackened eyes and mouths agape as representations of horror, silencing, and injustice.²²

As he sought to articulate the successive, collective, generational grief and unresolved resentment produced from colonization, national division, and dictatorship, Ahn’s work coincided with conversations taking place across a newly forming Korean political wave dedicated to social change called the Minjung (people’s) movement. Precipitated by the resistive energy that fomented in the wake of the Buma and Gwanju Uprisings, artists associated with Minjung fiercely rejected government-sanctioned abstract modernism in favor of art that would take shape from popular culture and respond to the closures of life under dictatorship. One of the first Minjung artist groups to form, which Ahn joined a few years later, was Reality and Utterance, the leader of a Critical Realist approach that the artist explains “soon became the ideological rudder that guided the future direction of the Minjung Art movement.”²³

One of the chief theoretical architects of Reality and Utterance’s contributions to Minjung art was Won Dong-seok. Won not only emphasized the democratic and ethical responsibility that artists hold to the lives that they represent; he also encouraged artists to use unfiltered depictions of modern life that would relay the emotional concept force of hahn. This complex Korean concept has no exact equivalent in English, but it’s often understood to encompass a sense of collective trauma, grief and sorrow, and resilience and longing.²⁴ The hahn captured in Ahn’s work took shape from his exploration of the brutal costs, physical and psychological, of South Korea’s political, economic, and social turmoil on ordinary Koreans. The artist developed these themes in the early 1980s in his *Dangerous Games* series (page 142), featuring drawings of children’s play that devolves into violent and deathly rituals, as well as in paintings and drawings throughout the 1980s that confront the viewer with everyday conditions of poverty, neglect, and abuse.

Reality and Utterance’s impact was equal parts aesthetic, psychological, and political. With a mix of sources drawn from advertising, folk art, and everyday life, these artists gave shape to an experience of deep and pervasive discontent. The necessity of their “utterance” and affirmation of art’s resistive force took diverse forms: from populist prints, allegorical paintings, kitschy mockery of elite and bourgeois escapism, and mash-ups of modernist strategies that drew attention to the traumatic splits of political violence at the heart of Korean life.²⁵ At the same time, Ahn often felt disillusioned and disappointed by many artists’ approach to their work. Where the artists’ philosophies continued to resonate was with a stream of Minjung Art criticism, advanced by theorist and curator Seong Wangeong, that praised raw social provocation and dark, psychological confrontation as strategies that could productively destabilize both consumerist and state narratives.²⁶

It is in the context of South Korea’s rapid embrace of capitalism post-democratization that Ahn’s



fig 5.
Snap Shot with a Stuffed Tiger, 1992.

confrontational critiques using animals entered forcefully back into the frame. In some works, like *Vacation of Sundori* (page 134), overly tanned and muscled bodies don't just watch, but take part in a spectacle of two dogs mating on the beach. The artist not only took aim at a brute primality sustaining fantasies of excess wealth, he also considered the interchangeable positions of the artist and the "pet." While paging through a magazine one day, for example, Ahn was struck by a well-behaved dalmatian: "Suddenly, I thought that he was like the painters of this era." Ahn represented himself as this very dog a few years later in a double portrait with a prominent patron, capturing the sense of compromise and resentment that the artist community was feeling about its reliance on "generous and affluent masters."²⁷

So, too, did references to taxidermy begin to appear in Ahn's critiques of modern society. In *Snap Shot with a*

Stuffed Tiger fig 5, a proud father looks at the camera as his young child poses with a toy gun atop a taxidermized tiger that's frozen in terror. Ahn's choice of animal is potent: the sacredness of the tiger as a traditional guardian spirit is desecrated in this snapshot, and the casual disrespect brings to mind older attacks on Korean culture. Tigers were among the first animals in Korea to be hunted and taxidermized by the Japanese in the early twentieth century, under the pretense of removing dangerous wildlife and turning it into educational material. Ahn's commentaries on the present-day were ever-attuned to an intergenerational trauma based on erasure of an indigenous ecology and the internalization of colonial subjugation.

What continued to distinguish Ahn's work from many of his Minjung contemporaries was the conceptual motor underpinning of his constantly transforming visual vocabulary, what the artist calls an "Aesthetics of Negation." This is not only a negative aesthetic but also a surfacing of the grotesque, hideous and ugly facets of contemporary existence in an effort to draw attention to absurdity and human suffering.²⁸ It entails what Ahn calls a "cross-pollination of techniques" as well as a "tension between styles" and emotions—from the cynical and outraged to the earnest and tender—to get to the heart of the tragic conditions that society collectively faces.²⁹

We can consider this through two uses of animal life that Ahn began incorporating into his work around the turn of the millennium—flies and butterflies. On the one hand, Ahn paired abject representations of flies and dung to offer critiques about contemporary corruption. One famous work, for example, shows thousands of hyperrealistic flies that gather into a pile spelling out the Korean word for excrement. Provocatively titled "Power," it concretized the artist's arguments about the relationship between elitism and decay.

On the other hand, in Ahn's return to archival photographs as the site of historical trauma, a different set of caring affects entered the canvas under the framework of remembrance, alongside a number of butterflies. In works like *Forty-Nine People's Meditation* fig 6, which takes as its departure the forty-nine-day cycle of reincarnation in Buddhist cosmology, Ahn takes discarded identification photographs and humanizes his sitters by painting their eyes closed, bestowing a sense of rest they may have been denied in life. Thickly saturated butterflies, symbols of life's fragility, flicker atop their

26
Seong Wan-gyeong wrote two foundational essays about Ahn's work in 1987: "Portrait of an Independent Living Person" published in the April 1987 issue of *Gana Art*, and "Ahn Chang-hong, or the Trap of Beauty," published in the catalog accompanying the artist's solo exhibition at Gallery Nouveau.

27
Ahn Chang-Hong, "The Birth of a Painting," artist notes published online in 2018

28
Lee Byung-hee, "Korean Biopolitics and the Aesthetics of Death: Ahn Chang-Hong's Human Figures Between 1976 and 1999," in *Art Theory and Practice* (2021).

29
"Interview with the Artist, Spring 2026."

fig 6.
*Detail from Forty-Nine
 People's Meditation, 2004.*



fig 7.
*Commemorative Photograph –
 Spring Days Are Gone, 2006.*



portraits, balancing weightiness and transcendence. In contemporary recreations of tattered and unidentified group photographs, butterflies erupt from the cracks as pained yet beautiful symbols of lost community and persisting life force. fig 7

Ahn's consistent accounting for, and care for, the spiritual dimensions of the subjects in his painting is a key counterweight and complement to the spirit of critique that drives his aesthetics of negation. It is a path that has allowed him to create popular art that does not conform to a specific set of visual attributes, but which is dynamic enough to encompass the love and worry for the Korean people that are at its center. He recently described his art as a distillation of the "awe" and "concern" he holds for his society:

I have celebrated that raw, rugged energy that rises again even after being trampled. I deeply respect the spirit of resistance among Koreans who have continuously fought against absurd power to achieve democratization. Conversely, I am deeply concerned by the self-destructive attributes lurking behind this dynamism. Having passed through an era of upheaval at such a breakneck pace, our society tends to easily discard its pain and trauma under the banners of "success" and "growth," rather than honestly healing those wounds. It is my belief that a society that forgets its past is destined to repeat its tragedies.³⁰

The "eye" in my work absorbs diverse cultural contexts—mythological, religious, shamanic, folkloric, and resistant—functioning as a diagnostic window that dramatically exposes the inner abyss of the marginalized individuals in modern society.³¹

³⁰
 "Interview with the Artist,
 Spring 2026."

³¹
 "Interview with the Artist,
 Spring 2026."

³²
 "Interview with the Artist,
 Spring 2026."

If what once oppressed us were "bayonets and bullets," in modern society, it is "capital and images." I am most wary of the phenomenon where modern individuals turn into ghost-like entities behind a flamboyant consumer culture—beings "taxidermied" by the system. I lament a climate where material values take precedence over human dignity due to the ill effects of rapid capitalization.³²

False Consciousness in Plain Sight

While Ahn's work sometimes relies on sustained, shared eye contact between the viewer and the subject of his works in order to support its message, more often, the confrontation between the artwork and the viewer hinges on the intensity of Ahn's subjects having been denied or stripped of the faculty of sight. This condition of sightlessness emerges as early as the stark black stares of the *Family Portrait* series, where existential cries materialize from the emptiness of the sitters' faces. It returns forcefully and distinctly in the reclaimed photographs that make up the *Forty-Nine People's Meditation*, where the artist tends, elegiacally, to the inaccessible history behind a sitter's eyes. And it takes on the additional elements of joy, wonder, and mystery in *Faces*, where an ode to Koreans' resilience offers, in places of external sight, a collective, interior, oracular kind of vision. As this essay has explored, this confrontation with sightlessness recurs regularly throughout Ahn's career in visceral, haunting depictions of animals who have died. This is the case for the birds whose tragic deaths stood as surrogates for the fate of democratic protesters, and it underpins the emotional turbulence held in the uncanny, glossy eyes of *Taxidermied Animals*, who, through Ahn's vision, stare unflinchingly back at us with demands for recognition.

Over the last decade, the theme of blindness has taken on greater centrality and greater proportions in the artist's career: Ahn's art reflects, in stark terms, a visual false consciousness that limits our ability to see systems that prioritize profit over human life. This focus was accelerated by the heartbrokenness and shame he experienced in the months following the tragic sinking of the Sewol Ferry in 2014, where, of the more than 300 people who died, nearly 250 were young students. The ferry disaster was a direct consequence of the deregulation and privatization of the transport industry, in which safety regulations were ignored and precarious labor standards were put in place in the name of profit. Moreover, it was widely criticized as a state-managed disaster, in which both the government and the media downplayed the scale of the tragedy and washed their hands of responsibility for the failed rescue effort.

It was in this aftermath, unable to find comfort or release in painting, that Ahn sculpted an enormous, streamlined bust—a human head that sat atop a broad neck, seven-feet tall and four-feet in diameter. It was painted gold, with simply rendered lips and mechanical, black, empty pupils for eyes. Imposed on its light features were the harsh lines of barcode markings, complete with serial codes, that emphasized, above all, that this human form was for sale. The numbered markings that Ahn placed on this monument's forehead begin with a date: April 16, 2014 — the moment of the ferry disaster. He gave a name to the sculpture from a title of a movie he recently watched about flesh eating zombies: *Blindness*.³³

Over the next few years, *Blindness* turned into an extensive series ruminating on different tragic milestones throughout modern Korea's history: this included the execution of Ahn Jung-geun, a legendary independence activist who resisted Japanese occupation in the early twentieth century; the assassination of Kim Koo, one of the strongest advocates for a unified Korea before the breakout of the Korean War; and the passing of President Roh Moo-hyun, a human rights lawyer and advocate for the working class who took his own life after enduring a humiliating corruption investigation. The series also encompassed more archetypal figures, like fighters, who in the artist's words, are "individuals thrown into an arena of survival no different from the gladiators of ancient Rome." Creating sculptures so large demanded intensive work, related to the series goal of "elevating individual tragedy into a universal tragedy of humanity."

³³ Ahn Chang-Hong, "Artist Note," in *Sad Evaporation* (Gyeongnam: Gyeongnam Art Museum, 2019), p. 57. Major selections from the *Blindness* series have been exhibited at Johyun Gallery, Busan (2017) and Gyeongnam Art Museum (2019).

34
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

Casting and refining these massive heads requires immense physical labor. This is a process of internalizing the subject’s pain through my own body. Standing before these giant forms, I encounter the subject not just as a creator, but as a fragile human being.³⁴

35
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

It is indicative of the way Ahn’s work has increasingly invited viewers to connect the scale of work and the scale of history’s tolls. The phenomenological address of work like *Blindness* is such that,

36
Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art After Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

the colossal objects become an “environment” that the spectator must enter. By walking among the wrinkles, fissures, and rough stains of the massive forms, the viewer becomes part of the work... Ultimately, the reason my *Blindness* works are larger than life is because the weight of the truths we have turned away from are just that heavy.³⁵

37
In addition to being shown alongside major presentations of the *Blindness* series, Ahn’s masks have been widely shown, including at Casa Museo Guayasamín & La Capilla del Hombre, Quito, Ecuador (2021), Savina Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul (2022), and Yeosu Museum, Yeosu (2024).

These questions of scale in Ahn’s work also dovetail with questions of repetition. That is, if one kind of viewer activation comes from the size of the sculpture and its corresponding historical tragedy; another kind of activation comes from the experience and quality of this installation’s collectivity, the sheer number of connected visual forms with related, painful meanings. It touches on an important artistic distinction between the series and the serial that Ahn’s later work troubles. The artist works in series, where he works in an expressive manner to capture his individual relationship to a specific subject or condition, and he also works with serial forms, where he thinks conceptually about the system-wide conditions that produce disasters without end. In the mid-late twentieth-century, in a shift from the series to the concept of seriality, scholars have noted that artists re-thought the passage of time: linking the conditions of mass production and automation to contemporary life’s sense of inevitability and endlessness.³⁶

38
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

It is not simply a lack of self-awareness, but its endless reproduction, which concerns the artist in his related series, *Mask*.³⁷ Large, shallow heads, five feet tall and hung on the wall in low-relief, feature a few uniform elements: nose, lips, and forehead rendered in rough, plastered textures, and thick, smooth bands that represent blindfolds for the eyes. The few sculptures that are without blindfolds feature the same robotic, vacant pupils as the *Blindness* series. And, like the works in *Blindness*, every mask is vibrantly, even delightfully, colored. Through scale and repetition, however, Ahn takes the language of advertising and pop and turns it on itself to “expose the ‘violence of capital’ and the ‘illusion of desire’ simmering beneath the surface” of contemporary society.³⁸ Indeed, the masking which the artist depicts suggests captivity more than theatricality, invoking a stifling artificiality and delusion required to survive today:

39
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

The ultimate significance of the mask in my work lies not in “stripping away the mask,” but in “forcing us to face the fact that the mask itself is our distorted reality.” Through this multi-layered symbol, I pose a piercing question to the audience: “Is the mask you are wearing protecting you, or is it slowly killing you?”³⁹

Both the blindfolds, and the few visible eyes, that appear in the *Mask* series refuse to stay put. They drip, decompose, and cry, moving this body of work from a cold commentary on collective entrapment into a more visceral and moving experience. Just as he has committed himself to preserving the artist’s hand, labor, and presence as he experiments with production on a larger scale, so does Ahn treat every anonymous face that he renders with a great level of human compassion. The

fig 8.
Untitled, 2021
 digital pen drawing on
 digital photo.



artist has noted elsewhere about his use of tear symbolism in his work, that “these tears are not a sign of defeat. They are a prayer for healing and solidarity, a desperate cry that even in a world of cold stone and hollow shells, the pulse of life has not yet been fully extinguished.”⁴⁰

In the last half decade, applying the bodily associations of painted drips to inanimate objects, Ahn has offered further commentary on what he’s called the “spiritual depletion” of Korean life amidst economic abundance. His *Ghost Fashion* series, for example, features models in everything from traditional hanboks to trendy contemporary fashions who pose under beautiful studio lighting (pages 124 and 125). The catch? The humans wearing the clothes have completely disappeared, and in their place are fabrics that are not only uncannily animate, but also which bleed, perspire, and decompose. Here, too, Ahn finds rhymes with history. In a work in his related series, *Tears*, the artist digitally alters a photograph of a stone Buddha which sits in the garden of the Gyeongju National Museum, a ritual object which was likely beheaded in a foreign invasion many centuries ago. Across these works, the artist explores how the resonances of past traumas express themselves through the spiritually corrupting forces of capitalism. fig 8

It is for all those denied clarity, as well as for those who have been denied life, that Ahn Chang-Hong’s art cultivates a critical, enigmatic, and powerful look. The curator, Kang Soojung, recalling the famous passage by Friedrich Nietzsche about the dangers and potentials of confronting darkness in oneself and one’s society, has written about the strength of Ahn’s work to provoke confrontation by “gazing into the abyss.”⁴¹ Yet as Ahn’s gaze turns unexpected objects, events, and subjects into symptoms of an abysmal present — illustrations of the perils of life under advanced capitalism — his sensitive approach also affirms our irreducibility to these conditions. Working object by object, image by image, and subject by subject, the artist’s practice is a bulwark against an all-too-present feeling of desperation and inescapability.

⁴⁰
 “Interview with the Artist,
 Spring 2026.”

⁴¹
 Kang Soojung, “Gazing
 into the Abyss,” *Korean
 Artist Project* (2011).

With Open Eyes

Throughout his career, Ahn Chang-Hong has built an artistic imaginary premised on advocacy for lives marginalized and erased by systematic violence. This is especially true of his *Taxidermied Animals* series, which presents some the most confrontational, mournful, and demanding images

42
“Interview with the Artist,
Spring 2026.”

of his career. They are difficult images, Ahn’s work reminds us, because keeping one’s eyes open is difficult work. “In an age of information overload and the hyper-consumption of images” the artist explains, “the artist’s role becomes even clearer: to question standardized values and to safeguard the dignity of the individual.”⁴² The abuses he documents and the life force he so fiercely guards in his images does not come as a summation, but as an invitation, and a demand, to continue looking. That this latest series marks one of his grandest ambitions is proof of the continuity of vision and unyielding values through which the artist meets the present.

**Ahn
Chang-
Hong**
Taxidermied
Animals
2024-
Present





Sorrow 2024'2
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.



Sorrow 2025'I
2025, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.



Sorrow 2024 'I
2024, mixed media on photo panel
135×135 cm, 53.15×53.15 in.



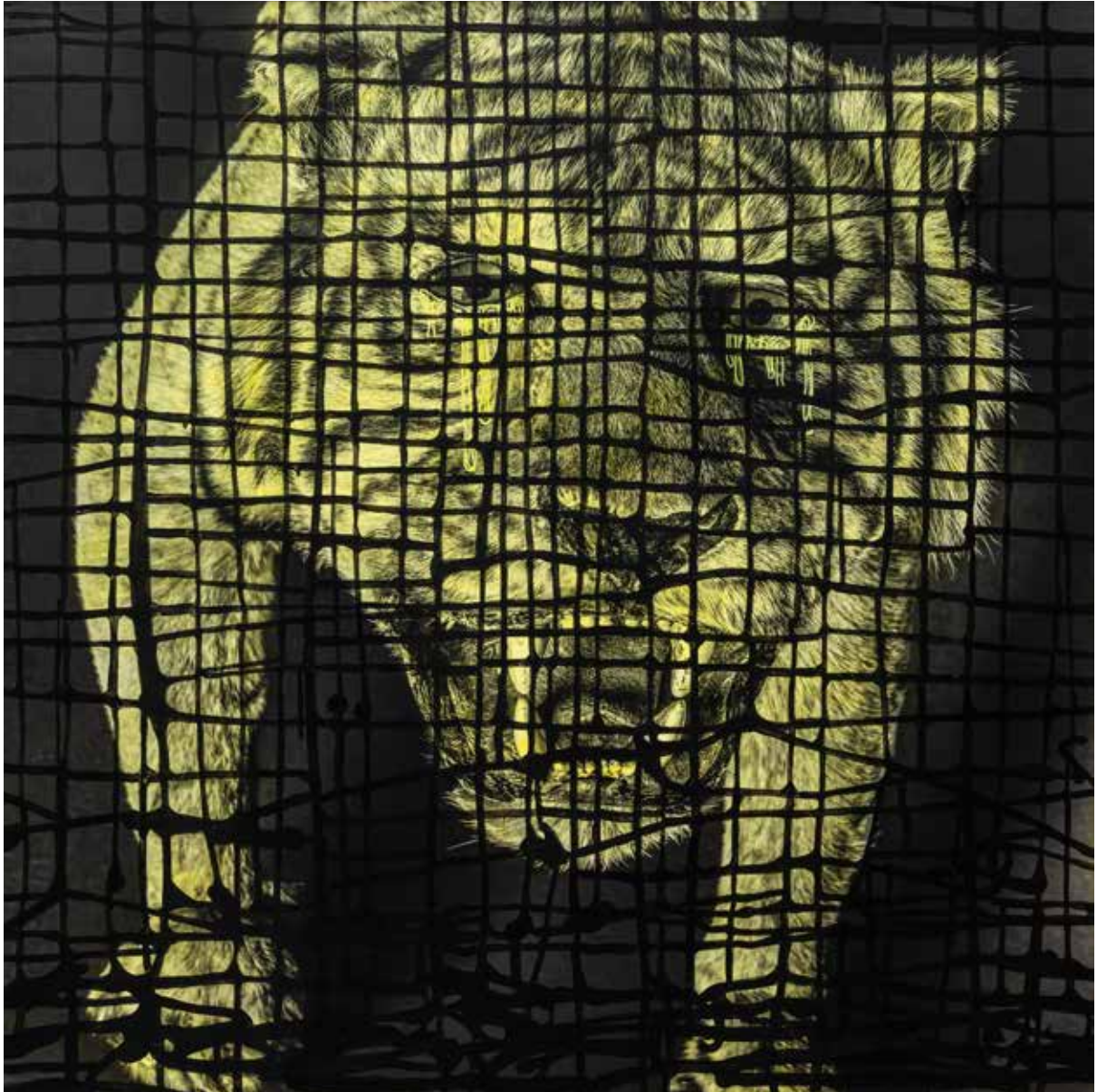


Sorrow 2024 '3
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.



Sorrow 2024'7
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×111 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.

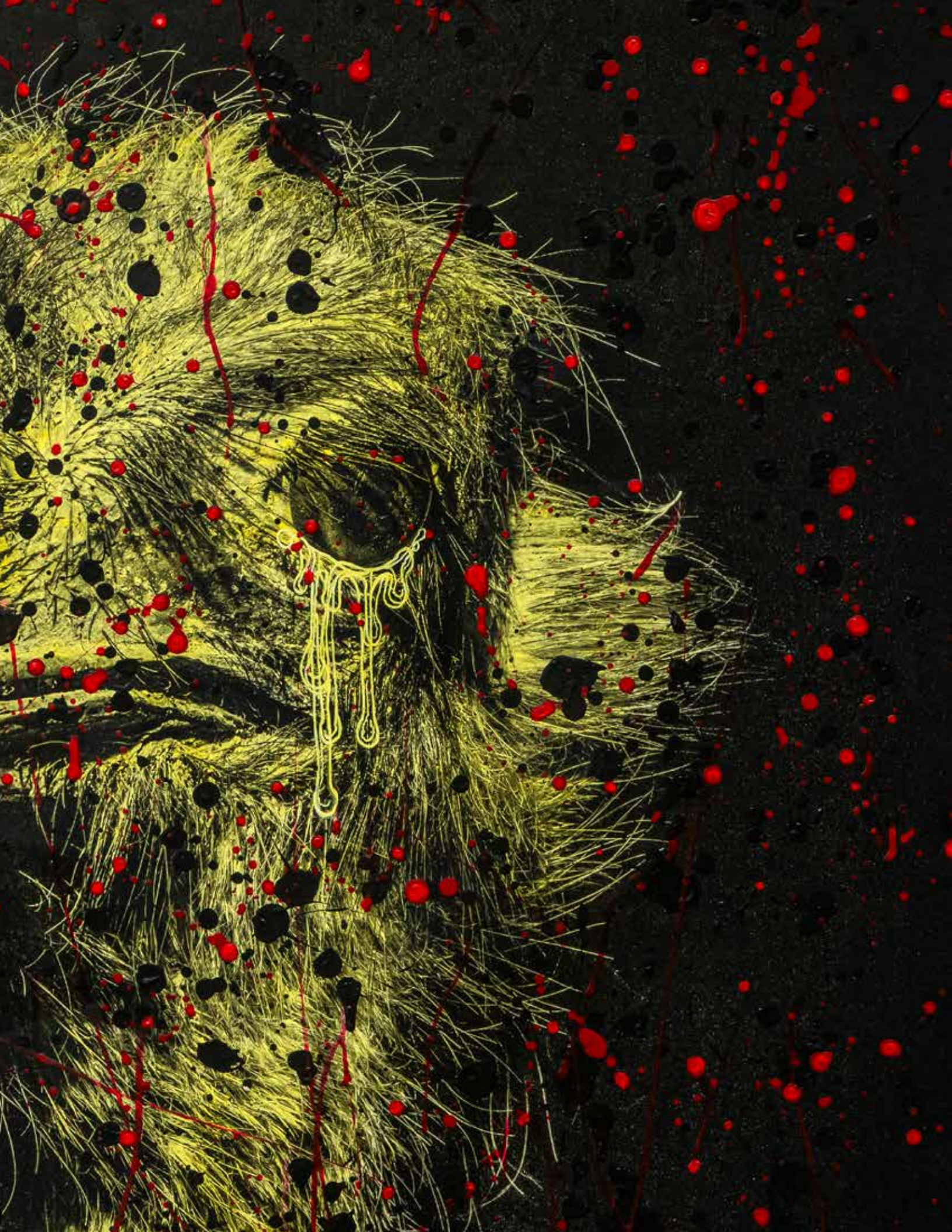
Sorrow 2024 '15
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.



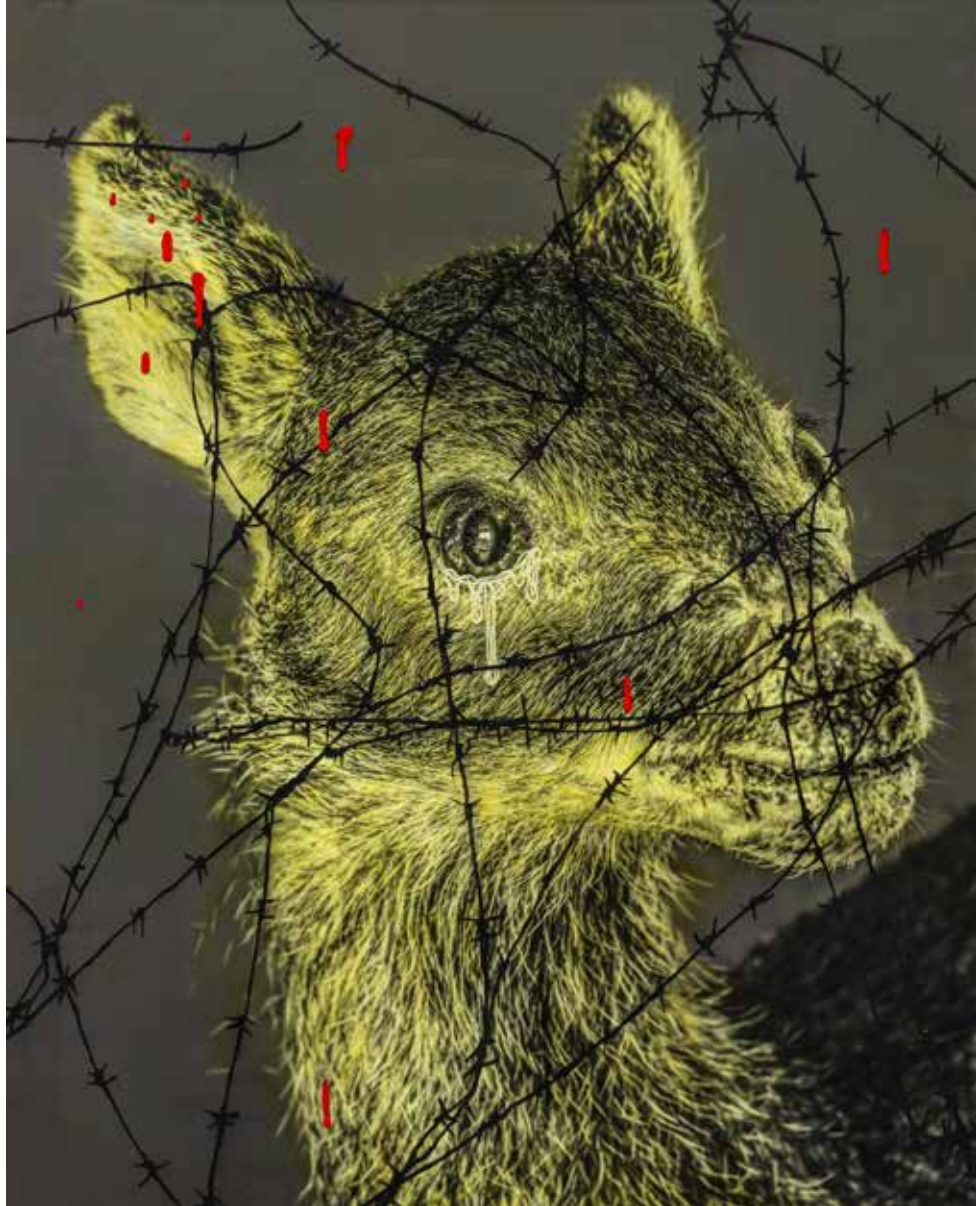
Sorrow 2024'6
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×122 cm, 51.2×48.03 in.







Sorrow 2024'13
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.





Sorrow 2024 '4
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.



Sorrow 2024's
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.

Sorrow 2024 '8
2024, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.





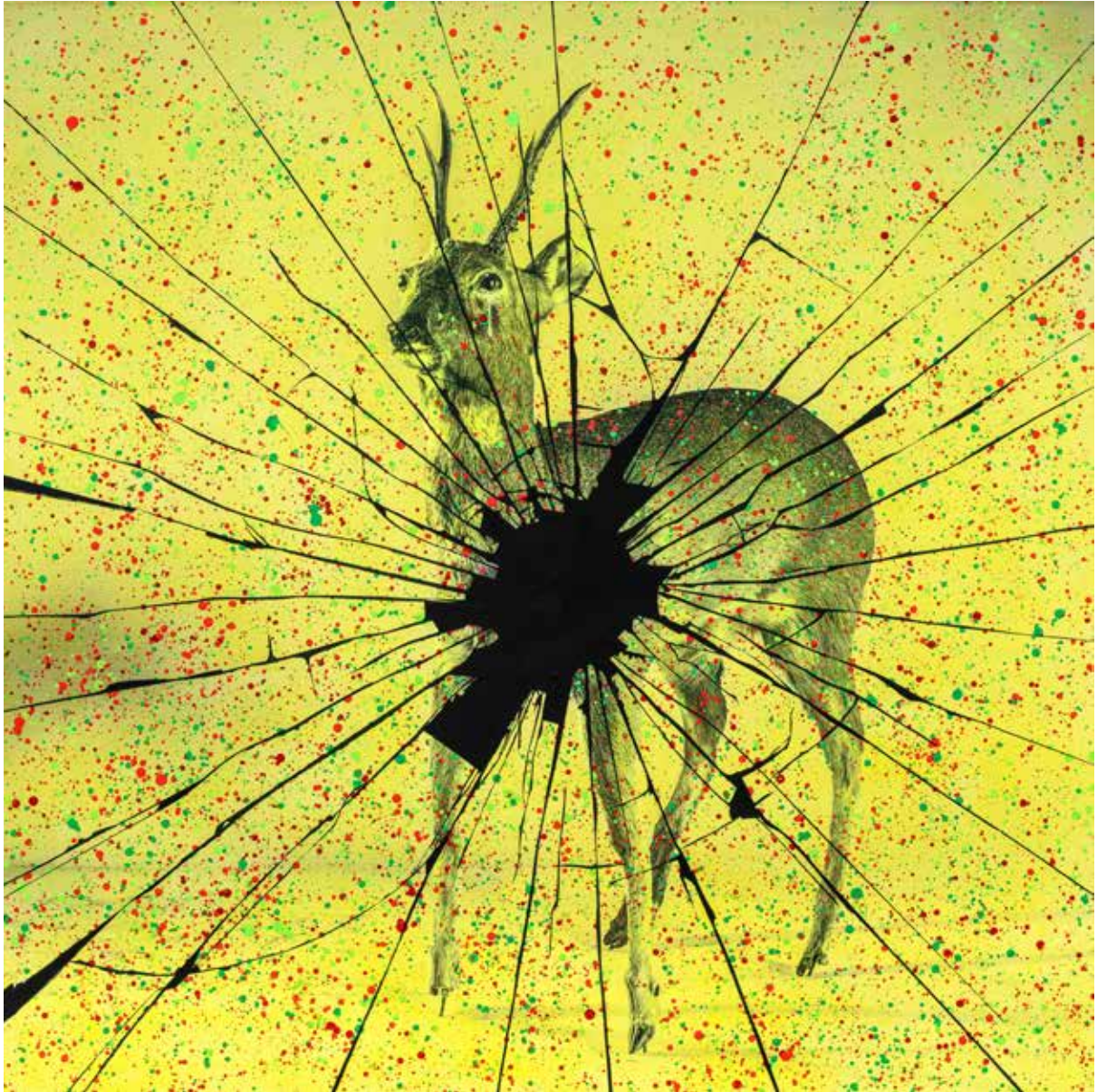


Sorrow 2025'9
2025, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.





Sorrow 2025' II
2025, mixed media on photo panel
130×110 cm, 51.2×43.3 in.



Sorrow 2025 '12
2025, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.

Sorrow 2025'10
2025, mixed media on photo panel
130×130 cm, 51.2×51.2 in.







Paradise 2025

2025, mixed media on photo panel, 300×425 cm, 118.1×167.32 in.

Paradise 2024'4
2024, mixed media on photo panel
300×254 cm, 118.1×100 in.

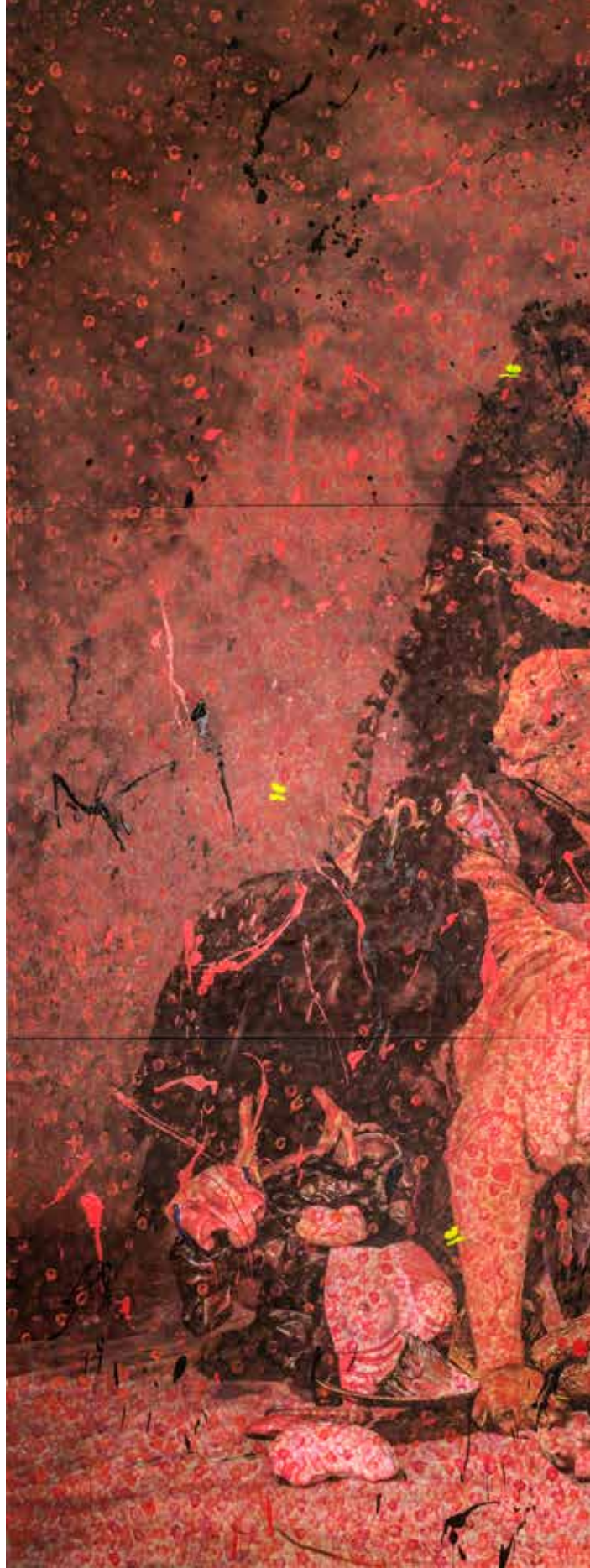






Paradise 2024' I

2024, mixed media on photo panel, 300×426 cm, 118.1×167.72 in.

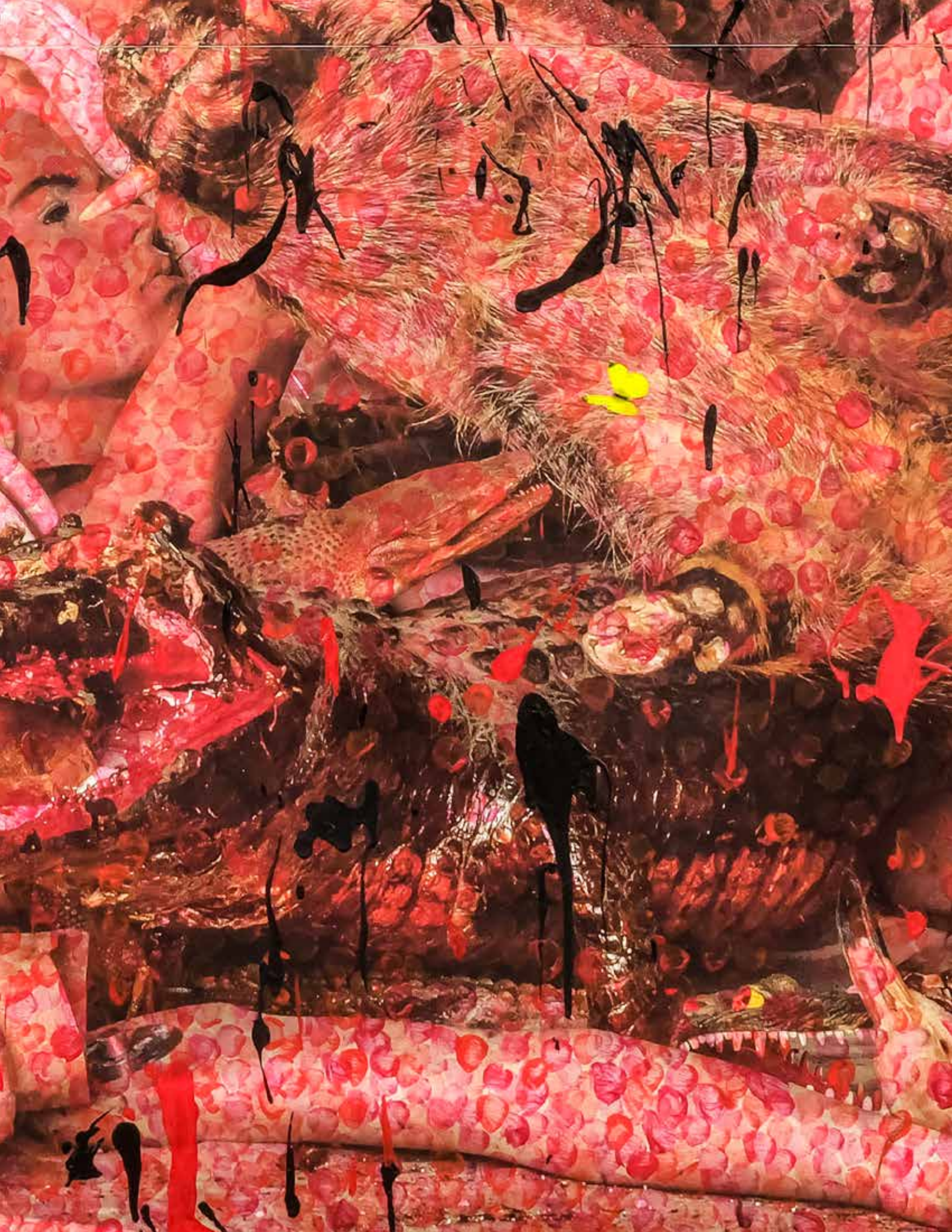




Paradise 2024'7

2024, mixed media on photo panel, 300×370.5 cm, 118.1×145.87 in.









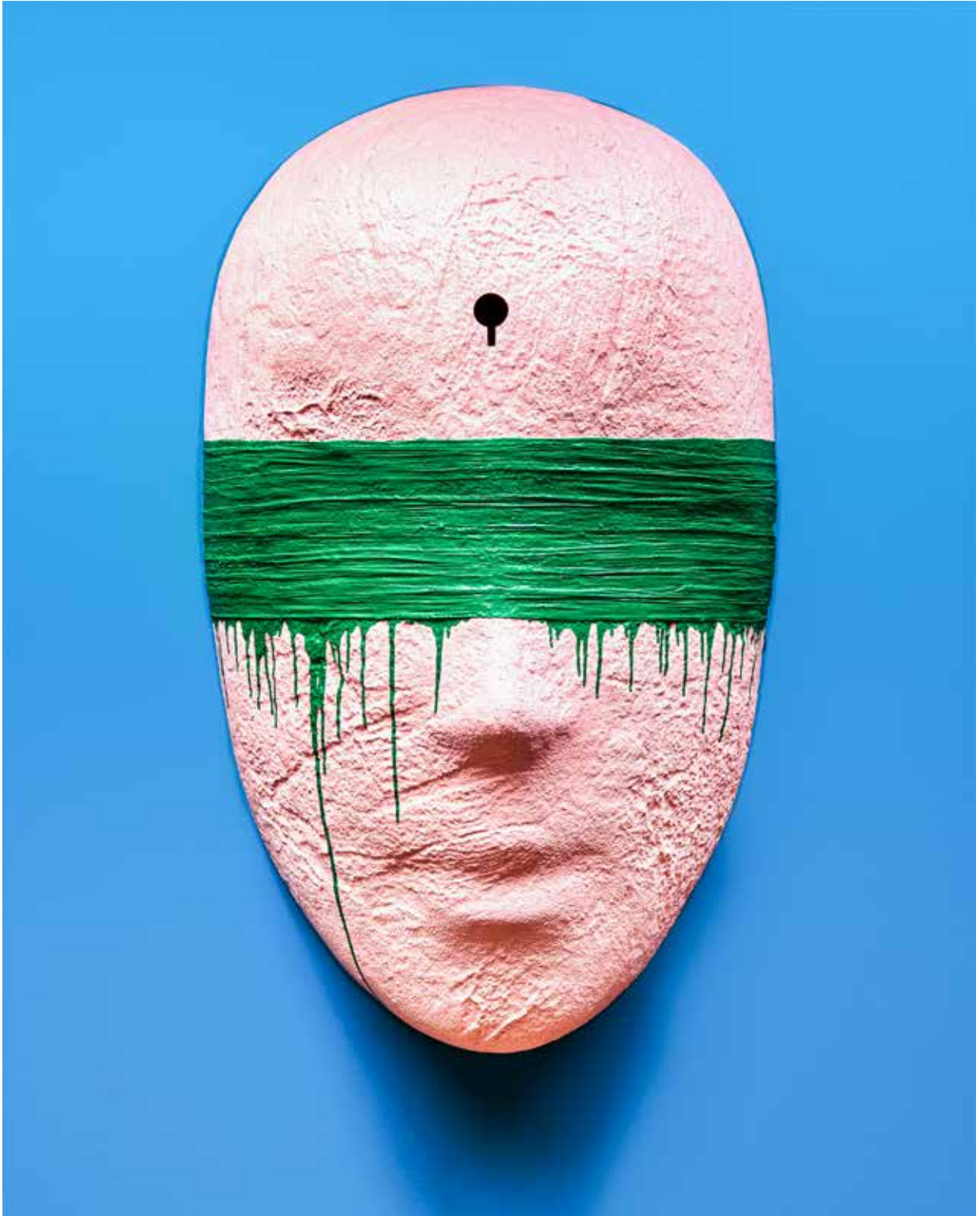
Paradise 2024 '8

2024, mixed media on photo panel, 200×315 cm, 78.74×124.01 in.

**Ahn
Chang-
Hong**

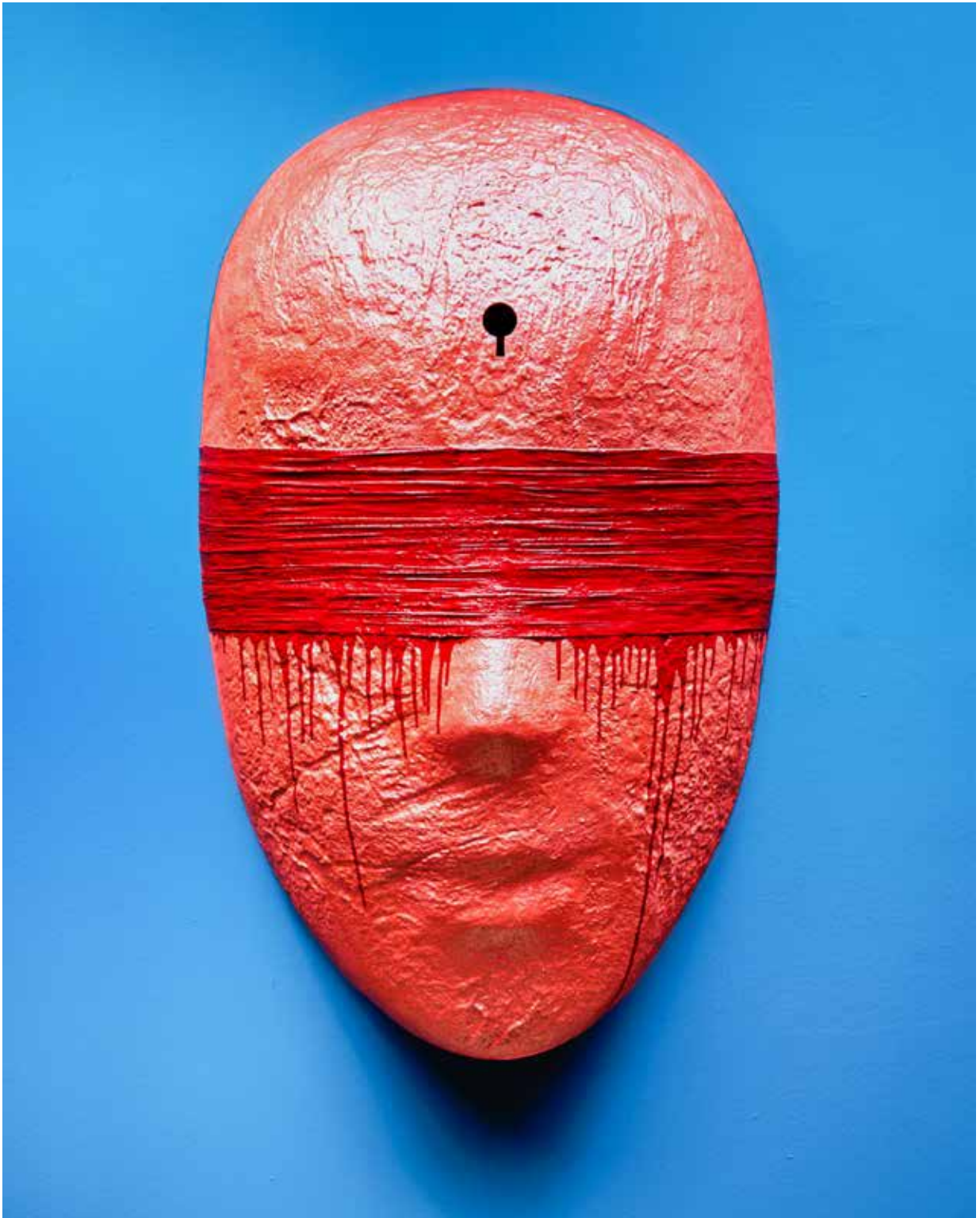
**Mask
2019**

Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.





Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



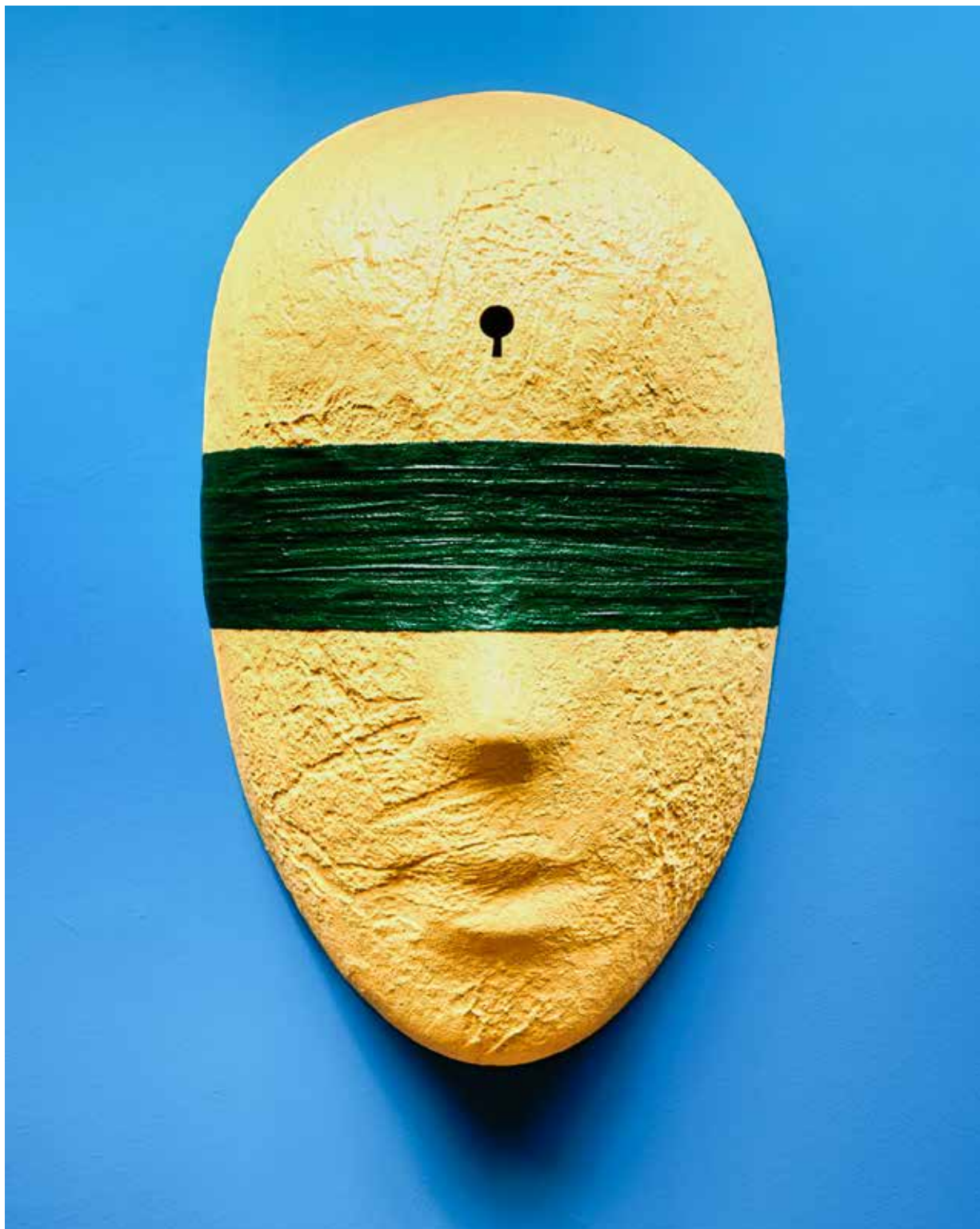
Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



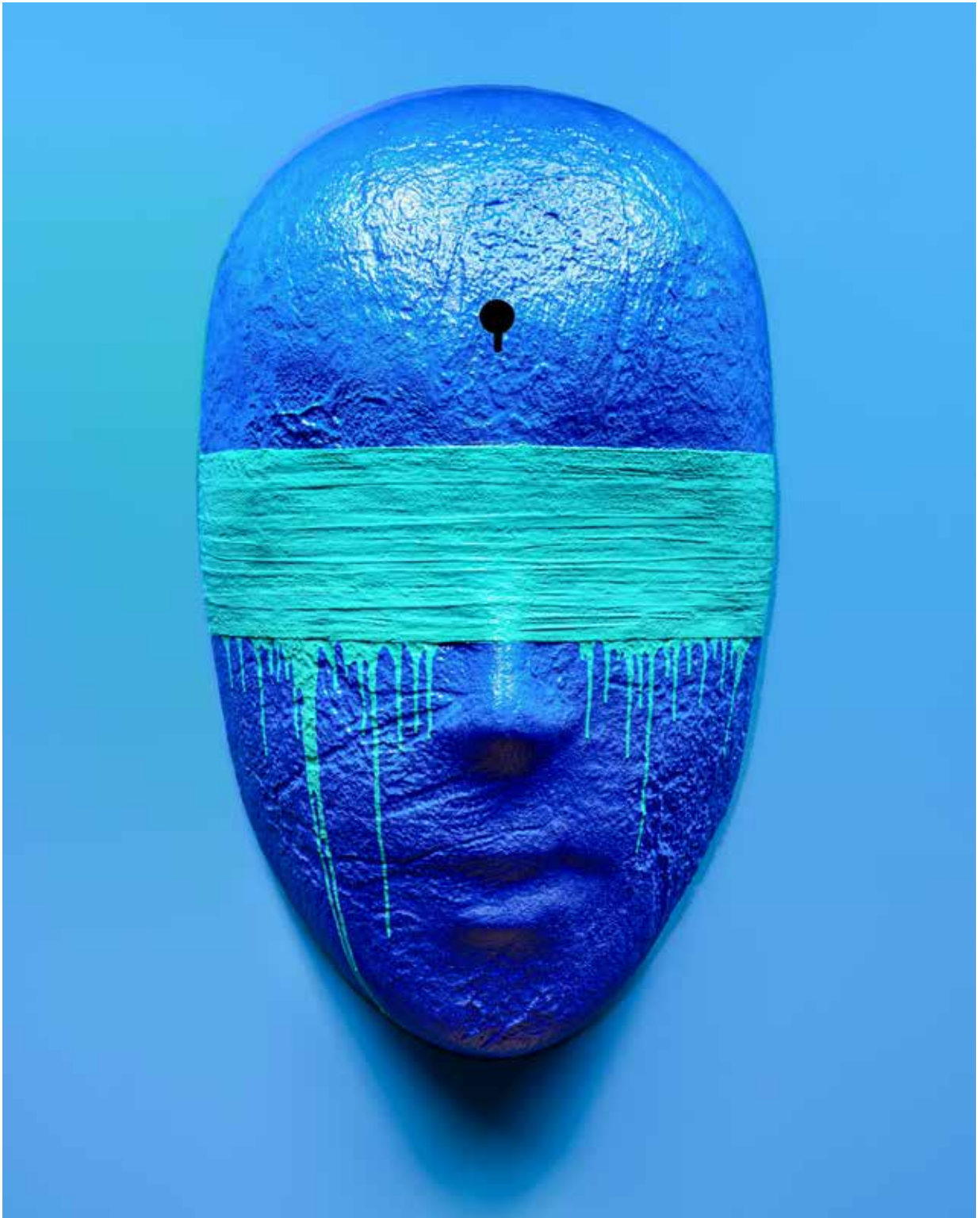
Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



Mask
2019, mixed media on FRP
155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.

Mask

2019, mixed media on FRP

155×110×50 cm, 61.2×43.3×19.7 in.



**Ahn
Chang-
Hong**

**Faces
2018**

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
16×24 cm, 6.3×9.45 in.





Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
21×32 cm, 8.27×12.6 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
22×30 cm, 8.66×11.81 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
23×30 cm, 9.05×11.81 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
28×30 cm, 11.02×11.81 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
28×30 cm, 11.02×11.81 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
22×32 cm, 8.66×12.6 in.



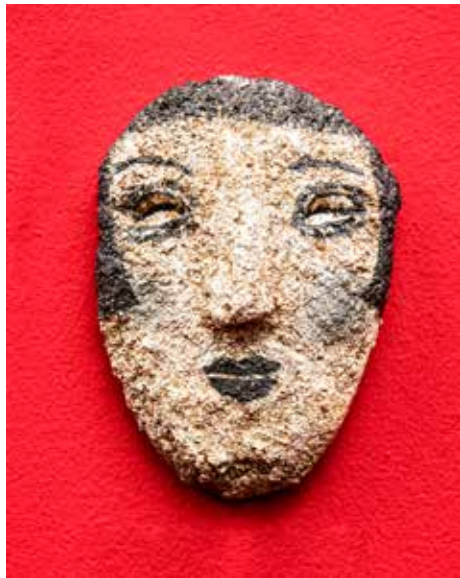
Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
21×30 cm, 8.27×11.81 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
21×31 cm, 8.27×12.2 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
22×32 cm, 8.66×12.6 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
20×30 cm, 7.87×11.81 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
21×30 cm, 8.27×11.81 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
22×31 cm, 8.66×12.2 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
17×26 cm, 6.7×10.24 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
16×23 cm, 6.3×9.05 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
20×29 cm, 7.87×11.81 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
21×28 cm, 8.27×11.02 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
12×22 cm, 4.72×8.66 in.



Faces

2018, mixed media on cement
19×27 cm, 7.48×10.63 in.

Faces

2018, mixed media on cement
13×25 cm, 5.12×9.84 in.

Faces

2018, mixed media on cement
17×24 cm, 6.7×9.45 in.

Faces

2018, mixed media on cement
16×23 cm, 6.3×9.05 in.



Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
15×27 cm, 5.9×10.63 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
15×20 cm, 5.9×7.87 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
12×20 cm, 4.72×7.87 in.

Faces
2018, mixed media on cement
13×21 cm, 5.12×8.27 in.

**Ahn
Chang-
Hong**

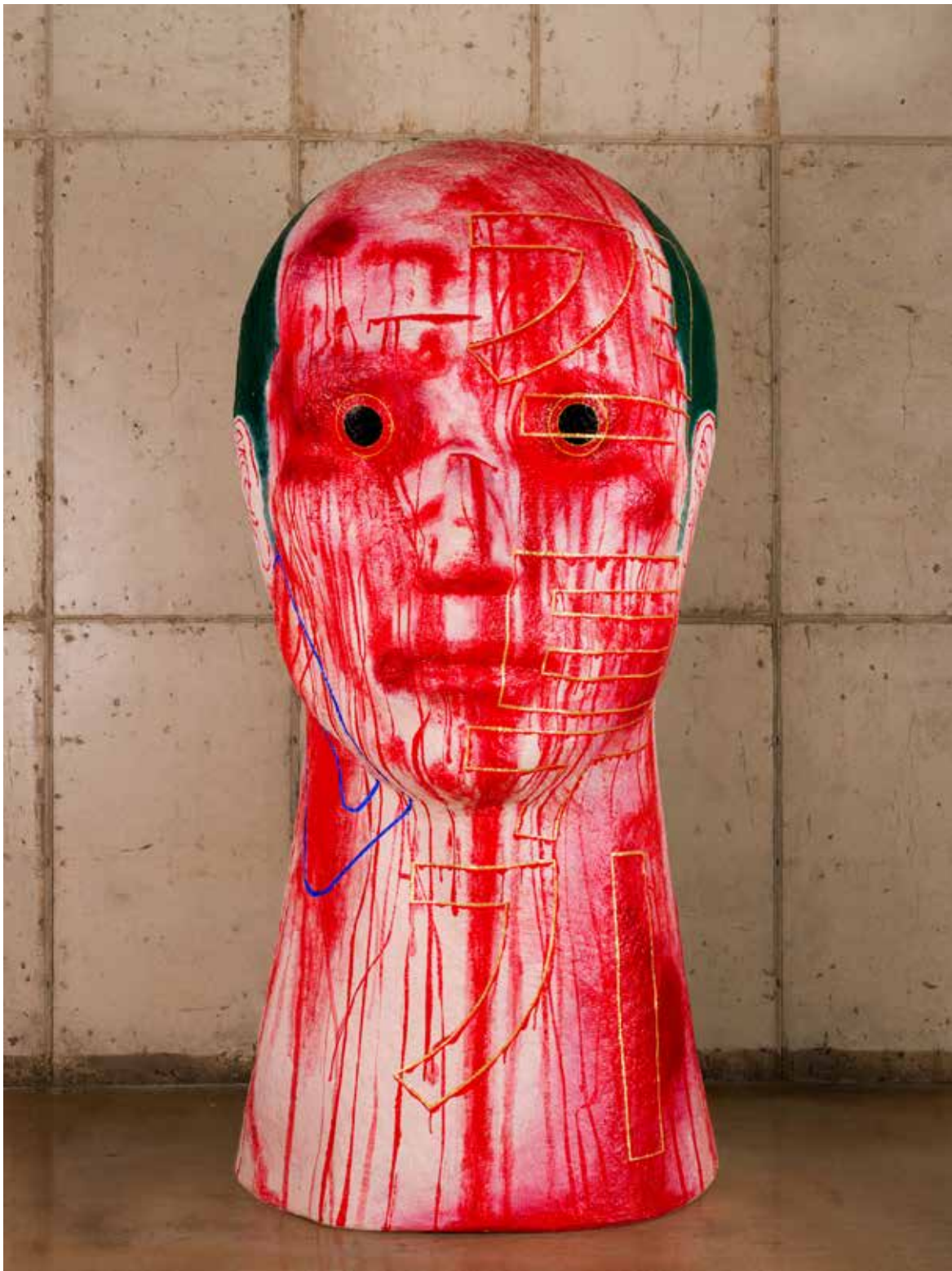
Blindness

2016-2026

Blindness 2016' I
2016, acrylic on synthetic resin
213×117×110 cm, 83.85×46.06×43.3 in.



Blindness 2016'2
2016, acrylic on synthetic resin
213×117×110 cm, 83.85×46.06×43.3 in.





1944

444357199



Blindness 2016'3

2016, acrylic on synthetic resin

213×117×110 cm, 83.85×46.06×43.3 in.





Blindness 2016' 4

2016, acrylic on synthetic resin

213×117×110 cm, 83.85×46.06×43.3 in.

Blindness 2019'5
2019, acrylic on synthetic resin
213×117×110 cm, 83.85×46.06×43.3 in.







Blindness 2026'1
2026, acrylic on synthetic resin
240×160 cm, 94.49×62.99 in.

**Ahn
Chang-
Hong**

**Early
Works**



Ghost Fashion 8
2021, oil on canvas
162.2×112.1 cm, 63.86×44.13 in.



Ghost Fashion 9
2021, oil on canvas
162.2×112.1 cm, 63.86×44.13 in.



Love in 2010
2010, acrylic on canvas
194×97.5 cm, 76.38×38.38 in.



Woman Standing
2010, acrylic on canvas
194×97 cm, 76.37×38.19 in.

Tattoo Man
2010, acrylic on canvas
194×114 cm, 76.37×44.88 in.





Bed Couch
2010, acrylic on canvas
130×194 cm, 51.18×76.38 in.



Bed Couch
2010, acrylic on canvas
70×194 cm, 27.56×76.37 in.



A Certain Youth
2009, acrylic on canvas
120×44.6 cm, 47.24×17.56 in.



Bed Couch
2009, acrylic on canvas
112×162 cm, 44.1×63.78 in.



Vacation of Sundori
1995, acrylic on canvas
73.8×42.7 cm, 29.05×16.81 in.



Love in 1994
1994, acrylic on canvas
65×100 cm, 25.59×39.37 in.



Act like a Model 3
1991, acrylic on canvas
90.0×72.7 cm, 35.4×28.6 in.



Giant's Sleep
1988, acrylic on canvas
81.7×31.5 cm, 32.16×12.4 in.

Endless Escape II
1989, acrylic on paper
110×80 cm, 43.3×31.5 in.

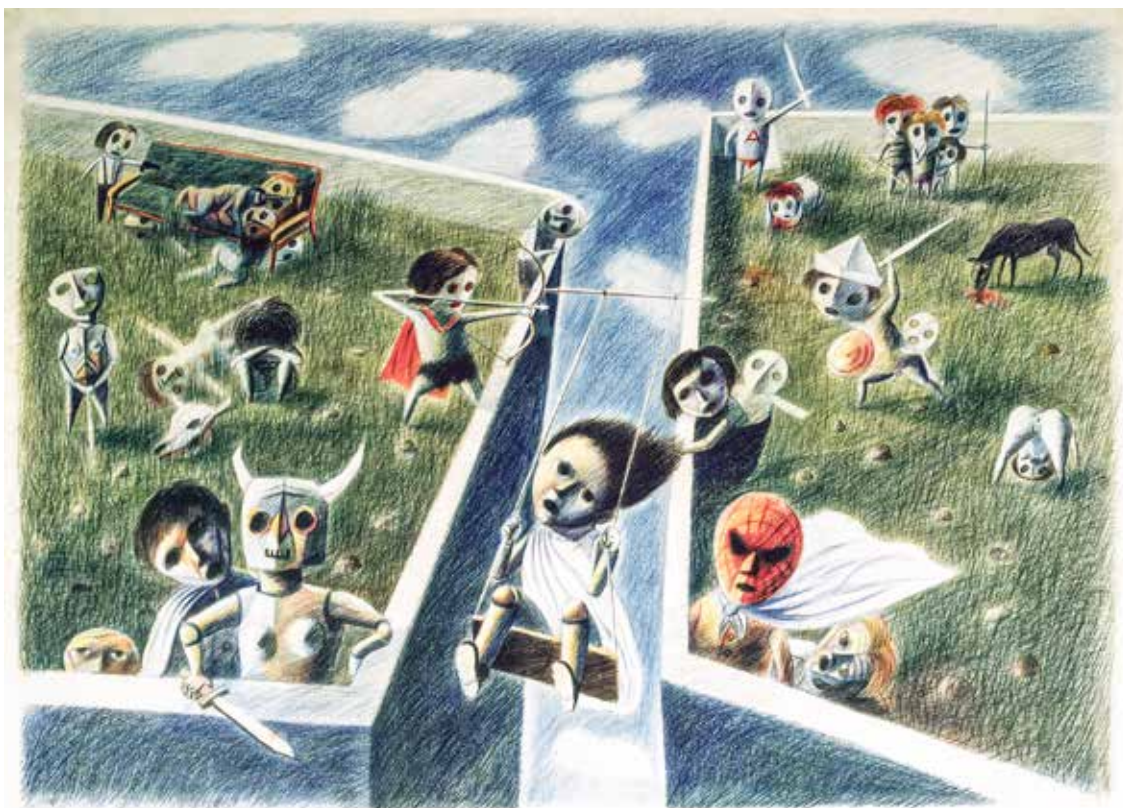




Arrow-Struck Bird
1986, color pencil on paper
79.5×101 cm, 31.3×39.76 in.



Flightless Bird
1986, pencil, conté, ink on paper
73×106 cm, 28.74×41.73 in.



Dangerous Game
1984, color pencil on paper
97×126 cm, 38.19×49.6 in.



Memories of That Day
1980, oil paint, water-based paint on paper
114.6×170.8 cm, 45.12×67.24 in.

Family Portrait
1982, oil on paper
114×145.5 cm, 44.88×57.28 in.





Biography

Ahn Chang-Hong (b. 1953) stands among the most significant painters of his generation in Korea, renowned for his unflinching exploration of history, memory, violence, and the fragility of human existence.

Ahn Chang-Hong's oeuvre seamlessly traverses the boundaries of medium and methodology, encompassing painting, sculpture, and multimedia. Characterized by a cohabitation of the wretched and the resplendent, his artistic practice defies singular categorization, marked instead by an ongoing pursuit of diversity and formal innovation.

Within his visual language, a compulsive obsession with and indulgence in mortality coexists with a profoundly empathetic gaze toward damaged, marginalized, and wounded beings. Operating as both a detached observer and a historical chronicler, Ahn relentlessly exposes the inherent brutality of humanity. Ultimately, his practice is defined by an uncompromising resistance to societal conformity, an untiring creative endurance, and a rigorous, almost visceral immersion in the act of painting itself.

Ahn Chang-Hong has presented solo exhibitions at major museums and institutions, including the Gyeongnam Art Museum, Busan Museum of Art, SAVINA Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Oswaldo Guayasamín Museum. His works are included in the collections of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum.

Ahn Chang-Hong: noon-mool (tears)

When the Forgotten Return Our Gaze

September 5 – December 6, 2026

American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington, DC

Curated by BG Muhn and Jack Rasmussen

Shin Jeung Jang, Exhibition Project Manager

American University Museum:

Beth Bright, Registrar

Sarah Ernst, Assistant Registrar

Deborah Hanselman, Associate Director

Kristin E. Howard, Marketing and Publications Specialist

Brittany Lester, Manager of Museum Operations and Visitor Services

Kevin Runyon, Preparator

Jack Rasmussen, C. Nicholas Keating and Carleen B. Keating Director

Book Design by Soyoung Bak

Production Management by Vida Russell

© American University Museum

ISBN: 979-8-9998619-7-9

This exhibition catalog was made possible through a grant provided by the Korea Arts Management Service and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea.

Korean Partner Institution: Savina Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul.



4400 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20016
www.american.edu/cas/museum

