

Find the RAIL in print
 Subscribe now
 A message from Phong Bui
 Publisher and Artistic Director

- ART**
- Allison Janae Hamilton with Yasi Alipour
 - Paul McCarthy with Dan Cameron
 - Robert Polidori with Jean Dykstra
 - Rachel Eulena Williams with Louis Block
 - Edra Soto with Robert R. Shane

- ARTSEEN**
- Chloe Wise: Thank You For The Nice Fire
By Susan Harris
 - Robert Grosvenor and David Novros
By Amanda Gluibizzi
 - Chitra Ganesh: A City Will Share Her Secrets If You Know How to Ask
By Amber Jamilla Musser
 - Lee Krasner: Collage Paintings 1938–1981
By Mary Ann Caws
 - Otis Houston Jr.
By Zoë Hopkins
 - William Corwin: Green Ladder
By Charlotte Kent
 - Tad Beck: Eyes Of
By Yxta Maya Murray
 - Cordy Ryman: Constellations
By David Rhodes

Advertisement

STUDIO INSTITUTE
 Visual arts programs and career development opportunities for learners of every age.

ArtSeen

Kyoung eun Kang: *TRACES: 28 Days in Elizabeth Murray's Studio*

By [Robert R. Shane](#)



Installation view: *Kyoung eun Kang: TRACES: 28 Days in Elizabeth Murray's Studio*, A.I.R. Gallery, New York. Courtesy A.I.R. Gallery.

ON VIEW
 A.I.R. Gallery
TRACES: 28 Days in Elizabeth Murray's Studio
 March 19 – April 18, 2021
 Brooklyn

Each morning for 28 days, performance artist Kyoung eun Kang inhabited the late Elizabeth Murray’s upstate New York studio: walking, eating, surveying the space from atop Murray’s paint-splattered ladder, shaping her body around paint marks on the wall, and reciting underlined passages found in books from Murray’s library. Kang created new rituals and let her body become a surrogate for Murray’s, through both pedestrian movement and interpretative gestures resembling Trisha Brown’s choreography—executing light-weight, direct movements, then quickly returning to a relaxed state. These sessions, recorded with a stationary camera, have been edited into a two-hour single-channel wall-sized video projection that makes Murray’s studio seem like a continuation of the physical space of A.I.R.’s darkened Gallery II, allowing the viewer to enter the space with Kang and see her at life-size. We empathize with Kang’s movement, and in turn with Murray, who, although absent, is poignantly felt throughout the piece. This is the second iteration of *TRACES*, which premiered in October at Collar Works in Troy, NY, the institution that administers the Elizabeth Murray Artist Residency Program, where Kang created this meditation on time, loss, and empathy.

The video shows select sessions from five days—ambient sounds of chirping sparrows and cooing mourning doves one day alternates with rain the next—in an endless loop. Kang’s rituals never cease. One of these involves setting up the studio in accordance with an archival photograph from 2006, at which time Murray was working on one of her last paintings, *Ai Yi Yi*. A rickety, wheeled ladder, a door laid across two sawhorses forming a makeshift table, bottles of varnish on a wooden taboret, and various other objects are carefully placed, often with a sense of solemnity. A similar gravity is felt when Kang pauses with a canister of rabbit skin glue resting on her upturned palms and pressed against her navel, like a Zen meditation hand gesture. Other times, Kang’s rituals are playful—how could they not be and still pay homage to the artist David Hickey called “the absolute mistress of high physical comedy”? In a recurring door dance, Kang moves through space with that makeshift tabletop, rotating and pivoting it, hiding behind it, balancing it with one hand, and weight-sharing as she and the door lean away in opposite directions to create a V shape. Finally, Kang props the door up against the far studio wall and exits. It stands like a monument that we viewers witness alone.



Installation view: *Kyoung eun Kang: TRACES: 28 Days in Elizabeth Murray's Studio*, A.I.R. Gallery, New York. Courtesy A.I.R. Gallery.

Kang responds not only to the objects in the studio but to the paint stains left by Murray. Dancers on stage often project outward to their audience or turn their intention inward, but Kang maintains her visual focus on paint splotches on the wall and floor as they inspire her movement. She observes each mark like a painter closely scrutinizing a still life they are painting. (Indeed, on one day Kang even recreates in watercolor about 30 individual paint marks on separate sheets of paper.) Kang’s deep looking and simultaneous shaping of her body suggests her radical empathy with these abstract forms, as when she crouches down to the level of one horizontal magenta line on the wall and holds out her arm parallel to it. In doing so, Kang internalizes Murray’s presence, manifest in the action splatters, incorporating (lit. “to embody” or “turn into flesh”) them through a kind of transubstantiation.

These corporeal movements, repeated every day, eventually separate themselves from their referents. For example, several times Kang rolls out Murray’s paint-splattered ladder and mimics its right-triangle shape with her body: standing vertically on one leg, raising her other at an angle, “becoming a ladder,” in the artist’s words. In other scenes the ladder is absent, but Kang’s body still remembers and recreates the shape. When these movements exist apart from their origins, they become rituals to help us remember the objects, furniture, paint splatters—all relics of sorts—and most crucially, the artist to whom they belonged: Murray.



Installation view: *Kyoung eun Kang: TRACES: 28 Days in Elizabeth Murray's Studio*, A.I.R. Gallery, New York. Courtesy A.I.R. Gallery.

Relic and ritual are the two intertwined yet distinct instruments of mourning and remembrance at the heart of Kang’s *TRACES*, and they have been emphasized to different degrees in the two iterations of the work to date. In the first version at Collar Works, viewers encountered the actual paint-stained objects from Murray’s studio, displayed as relics, as they navigated the expansive, industrial space and witnessed at its ends a five-hour cut of Kang’s video divided into three channels. Here at A.I.R., our bodies are stilled as we sit on a bench, and in the darkened room we are singly focused on Kang’s intimate, ritualistic performance. Witnessing the large-scale projection, we connect not only to Murray but to Kang; her model of remembrance honors the subjectivity of both the mourned and the mourner. The relic and its physical connection to the beloved at a specific, past moment are the origin of Kang’s ritual, but her ritual is constituted by an afterlife of iterations happening now and, hopefully, in times to come.

Contributor

Robert R. Shane

Robert R. Shane received his PhD in Art History and Criticism at Stony Brook University and is a frequent contributor to the *Brooklyn Rail*.

[Subscribe to our newsletter](#)