

Ke-Sook Lee's art is represented in galleries in New York, Los Angeles, and throughout the Midwest. She also exhibits abroad. From the beginning of her artistic career, Lee's genius has been in making sublimely poetic art that is highly personal yet global in its concerns.

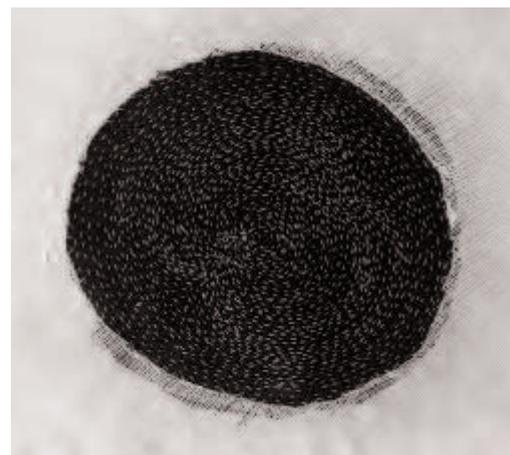
"Many women have passed away without receiving their full recognition, or having the chance to develop their potential," Lee states. "Ordinary women aren't acknowledged, but people couldn't survive without their support. I want to show this in my art. Through my work I want to honor their hard work."¹

Lee acknowledges that her art begins by being autobiographical, informed by her early life in Korea and her days as a homemaker before studying at the Kansas City Art Institute. When Lee was growing up in Korea, all the clothes were made by women, without benefit of sewing machines. In homage, instead of canvas as the backdrop for her art, Lee uses cloth in various domesticated forms—doilies, handkerchiefs, pillowcases, dishtowels, and cheesecloth. She stitches a variety of organic shapes onto the different fabrics.

"Ever since people have [had] clothes, there are stitches. I think it is one of the earliest artistic techniques developed in our civilization. So now I 'draw' with stitches. I like to use that technique for my art. A stitch is a dot that makes line that makes form. Stitches give me perfect medicine. They are time consuming, and they require patience. Stitches are me when I had no eyes, mouth, or legs, and was working only for family." Yet each tiny stitch represents a seed that "offers hope of personal growth."

Of the many shapes stitched by Lee onto fabric, there is one form—a spidery creature—that appears most often. It is a positive symbol for her. "Contemporary women have so many things to take care of; not only homemaking but also their careers. All the arms and legs represent strength and the ability to do more—it's energy. It represents me as I've gotten stronger, too."

KE-SOOK LEE



Seeds 1 (detail), 2005
tarlatan, fabric, thread
12 inches diameter
Courtesy of George Billis Gallery, New York

Lee's preference for humble materials is also connected to age-old artistic traditions of Korea. "In Korea," Lee explains, "we value the minimal and the humble. I like using modest and cheap materials to create the maximum amount of impact." Besides her stitches, Lee uses brown washes made from the clay in her garden—"it's what has to normally be thrown away, and it represents where I came from: a seed grown out from the earth." She also creates a brilliant blue wash from paint that represents the sky and light. She dedicates it to all the women in Korea who were forced to inhabit small rooms in their houses and had to work all day and night. Lee loves the blue because "it is like looking at the sky; they're [the women] outdoors getting fresh air."

—Elisabeth Kirsch

1. This and all subsequent quotations are from Ke-Sook Lee, interview with the author, September 1, 2006.

Seed Pods (installation view), 2005
tarlatan, thread, earth pigment
165 x 104 x 96 inches.
Courtesy of George Billis Gallery, Los Angeles

