



MISE EN SCENE Lee Kit's 'You (you)' show.

Lee Kit

Age 35

Hong Kong

Amid all the focus on Chinese contemporary art, Hong Kong artists have struggled to gain traction. But that's starting to change, and the artist to watch is Lee Kit, the first Hong Kong-born artist to represent his region in the biennial. Mr. Kit earned his reputation at home—literally, he hand-painted picnic blankets and tablecloths which he used before repurposing them as art. He once scratched the same spot in a wooden table for two years, creating a wormhole and questions about the "intimate and melancholy" aspect of human nature, said Lars Nittve, executive director of Hong Kong's M+ Museum, which collects Mr. Kit's work.



New York's New Museum has exhibited Mr. Kit's early works, but the artist's show in Venice, "You (you)," reveals ways in which his ambitions are expanding. Outside the pavilion, Mr. Kit has set up a pair of ho-hum guard booths, ubiquitous in Hong Kong; inside, he's built a domestic mise en scene through which people can walk, if they notice certain clues.

The back stories on these new works are just as lonely, though. One untitled pair of works includes a painting bearing the scrawled words, "He stepped on his fingernail." Underneath the canvas, a row of speakers broadcasts the first measures of various ballads. Mr. Kit said the combination aims to conjure the gut-twisting pain that often hits when a song comes on about a lost love—the act of listening only wounds the listener, like stomping on one's own toes might.

His dealer Lea Freid said Mr. Kit's prices have climbed 20% over the past four years, with top paintings selling for about \$40,000.