

## PRESS KIT

### Spring Exhibitions at Asian Arts Initiative: *The Body You Want* and *The Erotic Project*



Image courtesy of Jongbum Kim

## Press Release

### *The Body You Want*

April 14–August 5, 2023

### *The Erotic Project*

April 14–July 8, 2023

### Asian Arts Initiative

1219 Vine Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
215-557-0455

### Hours:

Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, 2-6pm

*The Erotic Project* visitors must register in advance here:

<https://asianartsp Philly.ticketleap.com/eroticproject/>

<https://asianartsinitiative.org/>

[Facebook](#) / [Instagram](#) / [Twitter](#)

**Philadelphia, April 7, 2023**—Asian Arts Initiative is pleased to present two spring exhibitions. *The Body You Want* sheds light on how queer identity is shaped by and functions with the existence of sexual and gender diversity. Featuring six Asian and Asian American queer artists including Jaewon Kim, Jongbum Kim, Jason Vu, Eva Wu, Shawna Wu, and Yidan Zeng, *The Body You Want* explores the variable positions of Asian queer bodies through the lens of geopolitical gender norms. The exhibition investigates the ways in which each artist responds to specific cultural values in developing their own queer identity, while capturing shared experiences in the Asian Diaspora.

Joyce Chung, the curator of *The Body You Want*, notes, “The young and diverse practitioners in *The Body You Want* are interested in not only resisting oppressive social systems and sexist violence, but also taking the work beyond simply an expression of survival, moving to a state in which they fully thrive and exude joy and pleasure. The artists focus on exploring the present condition of queer bodies and how it activates different modes of living from interpersonal relationships to the wellness, ethnicity, citizenship status, and the way people retain culture and tradition.”

*The Erotic Project* is an ongoing collaborative multimedia art project created in Philadelphia in early 2020 during quarantine inside the bedroom of artist Aubrié Costello. The project explores inclusive, accessible eroticism as mutual care for our holistic healing, and has grown into a collective of 40+ artists from Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Portland, + Mexico City. The Project approaches eroticism through the exploration of a vast, varied, & nuanced spectrum of where it can be found & experienced— within art, food, travel, work, self care rituals, personal practice, passions, identity, sex, sexuality, and in any moment which inspires & offers peace, pleasure, catharsis, joy, rest, space, freedom, and a deeper understanding of self & of the human experience. The project collaborators engage in mitigating trauma, (re)building community, cultivating safe space(s) to express ourselves more fully and calm our nervous systems through thoughtful & thought-provoking collaborative art-making.

Note for *The Erotic Project*: The exhibition space is intended to be a viewing space for art. Audiences are asked to be respectful of the gallery and other patrons. Asian Arts Initiative staff are not responsible for personal belongings or the actions of other guests. We endeavor to create a space of care for our community and expect people to conduct themselves in a courteous manner and to be mindful of the community. *The Erotic Project* visitors must register in advance here: <https://asianartshilly.ticketleap.com/eroticproject/>

**Publication:**

The accompanying catalog includes artists’ writings and commissioned essays, along with each artist’s profile. It will be available for purchase in the gallery and online at <https://asianartsinitiative.bigcartel.com/>.

**Related Performance Series:**

AAI presents a series of live performances showcasing the works of artists exploring gender.

***OHYUNG***

Friday, April 14, 7-8pm

A Brooklyn-based producer and film composer, OHYUNG brings together anti-establishment punk ethos and the contemporary sound of experimental rap to create a hybrid performance that highlights identity in the margins.

***Jason Vu***

Friday, May 19, 7-8pm

Jason Vu's performance, with a mix of film, sound, and everyday objects, is a meditative retreat for Asian queer bodies who search for healing and self-acceptance.

***Tnmot Aztro***

Saturday, June 9, 7:30-8:30pm

Arien Wilkerson's multidisciplinary performance creates an immersive experience using dance, 3D body scanning, text, live sound, and lights. Their work celebrates the joy that is at the heart of Black queer life and love.

**Support:**

*The Body You Want* and *The Erotic Project* has been made possible through the following supporters: William Penn Foundation, The Culture and Community Power Fund; Pennsylvania Council for the Arts; Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; Ford Foundation; and the National Endowment for the Arts.

**About Asian Arts Initiative:**

Located in Philadelphia's Chinatown North, Asian Arts Initiative is a multidisciplinary arts center offering exhibitions, performances, artist residencies, youth workshops, and a community gathering space. Here, all of us can view and create art that reflects our lives, and think critically, creatively about the future we want to build for our communities.

**Press Contacts:**

Jino Lee, [jino@asianartsinitiative.org](mailto:jino@asianartsinitiative.org)

## Wall Text & Work Descriptions

### **Introduction**

*The Body You Want* brings together six Asian and Asian American artists including Jaewon Kim, Jongbum Kim, Jason Vu, Eva Wu, Shawna Wu, and Yidan Zeng. Using different media such as textile, fabric, embroidery, text, video, and movement, the artists explore various positions of Asian queer bodies through the lens of geopolitical gender norms.

*The Body You Want* foregrounds the limitations of conventional gender identities and advocates for a broader range of gender expression. The artists in the LGBTQ community face staggering rates of violence and abuse, and, due to the lack of systemic protections and institutional oppressions, often end up becoming the subject matter of their work as a means of survival. At times, these struggles overshadow the experience of queer bodies. The young and diverse practitioners in *The Body You Want* are interested in not only resisting oppressive social systems and sexist violence, but also taking the work beyond simply an expression of survival, moving to a state in which they fully thrive and exude joy and pleasure. The artists focus on exploring the present condition of queer bodies and how it activates different modes of living from interpersonal relationships to the wellness, ethnicity, citizenship status, and the way people retain culture and tradition. The exhibition reveals that various aspects of lives have become major preoccupations of the artistic practices of queer artists, demonstrating how the perception of the body and the perception of the world are intertwined.

Gender is no longer a limit to the artists' choices but is one of the components that helps them develop their personal interests. The interconnected nature of their work, underscored by different sociopolitical backgrounds and interests, enables the viewers to avoid the pitfalls of labeling an artwork merely with its maker's gender identity, a reductive framework of the artist's motivations and their artistic endeavors. *The Body You Want* invites viewers to better understand the nuanced perspectives of Asian and Asian American queer artists who strive for more diversity and acceptance.

### **The Exhibition**

Yidan Zeng

*Reflections* is an excerpt from a series of short dance films directed by June Cheung. Here, Zeng uses her hair as a medium to examine the stereotypes of gender roles and expectations in Chinese culture. For centuries in China, long hair elaborately arranged in strands or braids has signified certain social orders and gender norms, serving as a tool to enforce conventional ideologies of femininity. In the video, Zeng unravels and reforms their hair, intensely stretching and pulling it in different directions. This video performance is the artist's attempt to resist gender-based stereotypes and find new pathways into their own body. The work also invites the viewers to ponder traditions and how they affect the way people perceive themselves and others.

#### Jaewon Kim

*Nuance* explores how society associates the stigma of HIV/AIDS with the gay community. Based on the thoughts and feelings exchanged between the artist, who is living with HIV, and his HIV-negative partner, the video features 42 photographs of Kim and an unnamed narrator who speaks from the artist's perspective. The narrator poses questions about the gap between himself and his partner, providing an intimate look into their relationship, which is often affected by societal prejudices toward the disease. The absence of body imagery highlights the emotional nuances in romantic relationships that are so subtle and complex. In the end, the narrator finally reaches a conclusion, saying that he "no longer needs to be confused with positive and negative, and the boundary between safety and danger is becoming blurred." Together with the sound, images, and narration, the video uncovers the nuanced relationship between people who deal with HIV both directly and indirectly as well as the societal stigma attached to the disease, which often changes the patterns of personal relationships on the level of commitment, trust, love, and satisfaction.

#### Eva Wu

Eva Wu's work featured in the Pearl Street Gallery thematically frames sex and sexuality. The room showcases eight of Wu's video works, often overlaid with hypnotic music, in which the artist features different groups of queer communities and sex workers, challenging the established definitions of pornography, obscenity, and art. Combining an uncanny confrontation of the gaze with aesthetic embodiments of eroticism, their depiction of nudity overturns mainstream norms and censorship directed at the human body, particularly women, queer, and trans bodies.

#### Jongbum Kim

Jongbum Kim experiments with textiles both in their formal aesthetic and material approach. The *Egg* series is a newly commissioned work by the Asian Arts Initiative for *The Body You Want* exhibition. The artist's personal experiences as a nonbinary person form the cornerstone of their work. Ornamented excessively with recycled beads and threads, hot fix, faux fur, and necklaces, each Egg represents different forms of queer intimacy. By drawing the viewer's attention to the intricate patterns and a rapturous fusion of colors, Kim paradoxically emphasizes the nuances of queer relationships that are often subtle or invisible. In particular, Kim asks how the bodily experiences of queer people are inevitably translated into a socially political act. Kim's intention to highlight the political aspects of queer intimacy through the shape of eggshells is a playful attempt to capture the vulnerability of queerness.

#### Shawna Wu







Shawna Wu's work made with traditional Chinese knotting and handweaving techniques is a mixture of tradition and innovation, blurring the line between art and craft. Her lingerie collection featured in *The Body You Want* brings garments directly to a topic of inquiry. The wearable pieces such as handknot panel bra, garter belt, and panty accommodate a diverse range of body shapes and gender expression that have often been unseen or alienated in the textile







industry. Furthermore, Wu's *Butterfly Knot Harness* series is inspired by the Butterfly Lovers, a classic Chinese love story about queer tensions and cross-dressing performance that ends as a tragic romance. Wu's investigation of material and culture mediated through knotting elevates the body into a statement of self-fulfillment and free of objectification.


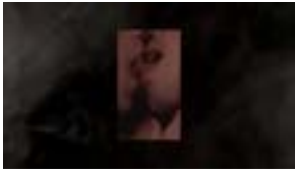
## Check List

### JONGBUM KIM





	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>Diversity</i>, 2022 Hand illustration digitally printed on silk, jersey, recycled chiffon, tyvek 33"x35"x20"</p>
	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>Abyss</i>, 2021 Hand illustrations digitally printed on satin jersey, knit, crochet, ruching 18.5 x 36 x 12.5 inches</p>
	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>Hallucination</i>, 2022 Hand illustration, digitally printed on silk, jersey and quilted, mesh, pom pom, recycled vinyl cut embroidery 35 x 23 x 20 inches</p>
	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>The unknown (Alien)</i>, 2022 Needle felting with recycled garments, fabrics and yarns, recycled faux fur, crochet 75 x 32 x 32 inches</p>
	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>Nirvana</i>, 2022 Hand drawn illustration digitally printed on cotton and canvas 120 x 162 inches</p>
	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>Grumpy</i>, 2021 Knitted with recycled yarn and embellished with balloon 37 x 16 x 21 inches</p>

	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>Forest Spirit (Just the chair)</i>, 2022 Needle punch felting with recycled garment and recycled chair. 62 x 54 x 29 inches</p> <p><i>Forest spirit rug</i>, 2022 Needle punch felting with recycled garment. 53 x 43 inches</p>
	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>Monster</i>, 2022 Recycled jersey, pom pom, button. 43 x 40 x 12 inches</p>
	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>Blob(knit)</i>, 2021 Knitted with recycled yarn. 61 x 9 x 10 inches</p>
	<p>Jongbum Kim <i>The EGG</i>, 2023 Hand-drawn illustrations digitally printed on satin jersey and silk, embroidered with recycled beads and threads, hot fix, faux fur, painted with acrylic, knitted with recycled yarns, necklaces, recycled fabric. 24 x 21 x 20 inches each</p>



#### JAEWON KIM

	<p>Jaewon Kim <i>Nuance</i>, 2022 Single-channel video, FHD, color, sound, 6:13 min Commissioned by Visual AIDS</p>
	<p>Jaewon Kim <i>Spit and Swallow</i>, 2021 Single-channel video, FHD, color, sound, 7:58 min</p>

YIDAN ZENG







	<p>Yidan Zeng <i>Reflections</i> (excerpt), 2018 Single-channel video, color, sound, 3:27 min directed by June Cheung</p>
	<p>Yidan Zeng <i>roving</i>, 2020 onion skin dyed handwoven silk, found Japanese quince branch, gold thread 57" x 25"</p>
	<p>Yidan Zeng <i>sky skin</i>, 2022 onion &amp; avocado skin dyed scrap linen, found Japanese quince branch, gold thread 52" x 35"</p>
	<p>Yidan Zeng <i>Heartland</i>, 2023 torn pillowcase, typewritten ink 7.5" x 9" (varies)</p>

JASON VU

	<p>Jason Vu and B Gosse <i>Princess</i>, 2021 Single-channel video, FHD, color, sound, 8:13 min Cinematography by B Gosse Original Score by Amanda Yamate</p>
	<p>Jason Vu and Nico Shears <i>Sometimes, Let Go</i>, 2023 Single-channel video, FHD, color, 4:41 min Cinematography by Nico Shears</p>



EVA WU

	<p>Eva Wu <i>Donut Deity in a Strange Paradise (featuring Sonalee Rashatwar with costuming by Wit López), 2018</i> Mixed media, collage printed on Duraview in Lightbox 16 x 22 x 3.5 inches</p>
	<p>Eva Wu <i>Loaded Fries, 2018</i> Mixed media, collage printed on Duraview in Lightbox 16 x 22 x 3.5 inches</p>
	<p>Eva Wu <i>My Private Garden #2 (Top), 2023</i> Mixed media 8 x 17 x 2 inches</p>
	<p>Eva Wu <i>My Private Garden #2 (Bottom), 2023</i> Mixed media 3.5 x 6 x 2 inches</p>
	<p>Eva Wu <i>I Came From Heaven Just Trying to Fuck (Top), 2023</i> Mixed media 16 x 16 x 2 inches</p>
	<p>Eva Wu <i>I Came From Heaven Just Trying to Fuck (Bottom), 2023</i> Mixed media 11 3/8 x 8 3/4 x 3 inches</p>
	<p>Eva Wu with Reclaiming Our Image <i>Kitchen Talk, 2018</i> 5:20 min</p>

	<p>Eva Wu with with Green Snake, Mia Secreto &amp; Plastic Candy <i>All My Hoes</i>, 2016 2:14 min</p>
	<p>Eva Wu with Rai Hsu <i>Abduction of Evalina</i>, 2020 8:00 min</p>
	<p>Eva Wu with Shoog McDaniel &amp; Ian Clontz <i>BunnyXGator</i>, 2023 5:00 min</p>
	<p>Eva Wu <i>Breakfast, Bathtime &amp; Butts (BB&amp;B)</i>, 2020 4:37 min</p>
	<p>Eva Wu with Luzifer Priest <i>Eros</i>, 2017 2:04 min</p>
	<p>Eva Wu with Manon Praline <i>Baby</i>, 2018 7:53 min</p>
	<p>Eva Wu with Mahx Capacity, Shay Knox &amp; more <i>(W/whole)</i> [Ep. 8 Feast], 2019 13:41 min</p>

SHAWNA WU



From left to right: Butterfly Knot Harness White; Double Butterfly Knot Belt; Handknot Fringe Skirt Black and Jade; Handknot Panty Black and Jade; Handknot Garter Belt Black and Jade; Handknot Panel Bra Black and Jade.

## Artist Bios

### *The Body You Want*

#### **Yidan Zeng**

Yidan Zeng 曾一丹 is a queer, Chinese American artist stitching together text, textiles, performance, and food towards an embodied practice of attention and care. Her works are continually woven webs with no center, seeking to make tangible the invisible threads in our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the natural world. Yidan is an upcoming Crosstown Artist-in-Residence as part of the MengCheng 梦城团 Collective, where they will use potlucks as sites of collaborative research and intergenerational healing. She's been a Barnes West Everyday Places Artist, Textile Arts Center Artist-in-Residence, Create Change Fellow with The Laundromat Project, and Visiting Glass Artist at The University of Hawai'i in Mānoa.

#### **Shawna Wu**

Shawna Wu (b. Singapore) is a Taiwanese artist based in New York City. Her work intertwines the traditional and radical by recontextualizing ritualistic practice and craft-making techniques to create new wearable forms. Invoking ancient textiles like quipus and Chinese knots, Wu uses knotting, weaving, and dyeing as epistemic methods to encode a new language for queer

diasporic realities. Her work has been featured in *Vogue* and *Playboy*, and her signature butterfly knot harness is collected by the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore.

### **Eva Wu**

Eva Wu, born in 1992 in New Mexico, has lived in Philadelphia for a decade as a queer Chinese American sex-working self-taught artist. Currently they are pursuing a graduate certificate in 3D Animation from the University of Pennsylvania's Stuart Weitzman School of Design. They have been awarded fellowships from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage (2021–23), Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art (2020), Leeway Foundation (Art and Change Grant, 2019; Transformation Award, 2017), Center For Emerging Visual Artists (2019), and Elsewhere Museum (2019).

### **Jason Vu**

Jason Vu is a dance and performance artist whose research in movement, sound, sensory attention, queer possibility, and Vietnamese diaspora creates emerging strategies for intra- and interpersonal connection. Jason is currently an MFA candidate and adjunct assistant professor at the University of the Arts School of Dance, where he facilitates creative and educational containers for students to engage the study of deep listening, ecological integration, and movements toward radical and equitable possibilities. Jason has toured 48 cities throughout the United States and Europe as a principal dancer for Dana Foglia Dance and Melanie Martinez's K–12 World Tour, choreographed by Brian Friedman.

### **Tnmot Aztro/Arien Wilkerson**

Tnmot Aztro/Arien Wilkerson considers that the complexities within art derive from the alienation of objects, identities, the body, sounds, and humans, and their practice is rooted in repurposing and redefining meanings of "fine art" and its attachment to colonialism, white supremacy, and institutionalized racism. Their practice articulates epistemology and ontology by the production of large-scale performance installations in which audiences, public mass, or viewers are submerged within an immersive experience that propagates multiple meanings, multiple engines. Arien Wilkerson/Tnmot Aztro has performed and lectured at University of Pennsylvania, Yale School of Art, University of Connecticut, Judson Memorial Church (New York City), Rhode Island School of Design, Trinity College, Real Art Ways, and Vox Populi.

### **OHYUNG**

OHYUNG is a Brooklyn-based Asian American experimental producer and film composer. They have released several records: *Untitled (Chinese Man with Flame)* (2018 Deathbomb Arc), *PROTECTOR* (2020 Chinabot), *GODLESS* (2021 Deathbomb Arc), and most recently *imagine naked!* (2022 NNA Tapes). OHYUNG's music has been featured in NPR, Them, *PAPER*, *NOWNESS*, and *The Wire*.

**Jongbum Kim**

Jongbum Kim is a New York–based designer / artist / illustrator who explores the ideas of gender and multicultural communities through the medium of cloth. With a strong belief in seeing the world and experiencing it firsthand, Jongbum creates designs that are filled with color and symbolism, both literal and figurative, engaging the viewer and provoking them to respond. He strives to create paintings and fiber artwork that are an expression of his personal voice and life’s journey.

**Jaewon Kim**

Jaewon Kim is a visual artist living and working in Seoul, South Korea. Kim primarily works with video, photography, and installation to discuss the lives of queer people and people living with HIV/AIDS. Working from his personal experiences, Kim devises narratives that trace moments from the past and to the future. Much of his work considers how the force of disease affects personal relationships. Kim has held solo exhibitions at SPACE Four One Three (Seoul, 2021) and ROOM 806-2 (Seoul, 2020). His work has been shown at Buk-Seoul Museum of Art (2023), Whitney Museum of American Art (2022), and Philadelphia Museum of Art (2022).

***The Erotic Project*****Aubrié Costello**

Aubrié Costello is a visual artist, creative director, and curator based in Philadelphia. Their collaborative projects amalgamate photography, film, music, and performance art, depicting intimate narratives and portrayals in each vignette. These works chronicle the often unseen, intimate moments and nuanced emotions experienced within our personal relationships with self and others.