

Translated [Interview] Contemporary Art in Seoul: The World of Azin Lim

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By Honorary Reporter **Claudia Garcia Bueno** from **Spain**

Photo by = **Maron** (Seoyoung Lee), Azin Lim and Evi Neva

Exactly one year ago, a visit to Dokseogwan, a unique bookstore in Seoul's Mapo District, led to an encounter with the work of Korean artist Azin Lim. That day, the space seemed suspended in a dreamlike atmosphere: fragments of sky floated across its walls alongside vividly colored drawings and sculptures that told the story of a magical being.

At the center of the space stood Na-bi—a butterfly with large yellow wings, blue hair, and red boots, embodied by Lim herself. Visitors had unknowingly stepped into *Na-bi Wants Love! (+ Other Things)*, a participatory performance centered on the search for a safe place after the loss of paradise. Through gestures, writing, and shared presence, the work raised questions about love, belonging, and the desire to create a place to call one's own, blurring the boundaries between art and reality.



Korean artist Azin Lim performs *Na-bi Wants Love! (+ Other Things)* in front of Dokseogwan bookstore in Seoul's Mapo District in 2025. The participatory performance explores themes of love, belonging, and the search for a safe place after the loss of paradise. | Photo: Maron (Seoyoung Lee)

Projects like this demonstrate how contemporary Korean artists such as Azin Lim are expanding the possibilities of participatory art while exploring new ways of engaging with audiences. Based in Seoul and a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Lim's multidisciplinary practice spans painting, sculpture, installation, performance, artist books, workshops, and community events.

The quality and originality of Lim's work inspired this interview, conducted via Google Meet in July 2026, in which she reflects on her multidisciplinary practice, her alter ego Na-bi, and the ideas that shape her art.

★ How did the character Na-bi come to life, and where is it in its journey today?

Azin Lim: Na-bi, which means “butterfly” in Korean, is born in paradise, where everything is beautiful and eternal. But because it doesn't conform to society's expectations, it is cast out and ends up in a foreign city, wandering in search of answers, connection, and a safe place to belong.

Through it, I explore displacement and community building. I think of Na-bi as a being from another reality—a being who is never completely defined. During my performances, I don't act as Na-bi. Instead, I create an artistic space where it is invited to appear. In the credits, it is listed as the main artist, while I am simply the person who invites it.

★ Your work is remarkably multidisciplinary and often involves direct interaction with audiences. How does that shape your creative process?

A.L.: My practice includes drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, artist books and zines, as well as performances, workshops, parties, and community events. Whenever I feel creatively stuck in one medium, I move to another to renew my inspiration. Rather than creating isolated objects, I'm interested in building environments that people can inhabit—my own versions of worlds. Interaction is a driving force throughout the process, and art becomes a bridge for creating connection.

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The handmade aspect of my work is equally important. For *Na-bi Tale*, an exhibition presented at Garage Under Construction in Seoul, I spent months creating paper elements to transform the

space. Repetitive manual processes help clear my mind while allowing me to develop a physical relationship with the work.



Installation view of *Heart Room*, part of Korean artist Azin Lim's exhibition *Na-bi Tale* at Garage Under Construction in Seoul in 2025. The work forms part of Lim's immersive exploration of Na-bi's story and her search for a place of safety and belonging. | Photo: Azin Lim

★ You spent part of your childhood in Canada, studied fine arts in the United States, and now also work as a translator and interpreter. How have these international experiences influenced your artistic practice?

A.L.: Living between different cultures made me aware of the many ways people communicate. That experience connects closely with my work as a translator and interpreter for artists, museums, and cultural organizations, where translation is ultimately about making a sincere effort to understand others a kind of boundary. These experiences have also sparked my interest in accessibility and communication, leading me to collaborate on projects in disability arts.

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In July, I traveled to Berlin and Amsterdam to expand *Faces*, a drawing project I began in Seoul. I c
minute portraits of individual participants, an exercise in careful attention that naturally fosters intimacy. Developed at Pride events, this project has become an archive of faces documenting communities and

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solidarity. In urban environments where privacy is especially important, the experience offers participants respectful, anonymous recognition. This September, I'll present a selection from the archive at &K Atelier in Amsterdam, giving me the opportunity to observe how visibility and inclusion shift across different cultural contexts.



Korean artist Azin Lim poses alongside portraits from *Faces*, a drawing project she began in Seoul in which participants are portrayed during 10-minute drawing sessions. The project has developed into an archive documenting communities, visibility, and solidarity. Seoul, 2024. | Photo: Evi Neva

★ You recently participated in the Pride exhibition at Dongdaemun Design Plaza. What did that experience mean to you?

A.L.: It was my fifth time taking part in this event in Seoul, a vibrant gathering featuring exhibitions, workshops, and performances. I presented live figure drawings as part of a colorful installation. The human body has been central to my work. Through anatomical drawing and self-portraiture, I explore bodily experience through posture, stillness, and tension. Self-portraiture also serves as a tool for self-reflection and a way of examining one's identity through the gaze of others.

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The drawing workshops I organize are also intended to encourage open conversations about the body and the many ways it can be represented through art.

★ Where is your work headed next?

A.L.: My next project marks a significant shift. It's research-based and moves away from Na-bi's narrative universe. It will take the form of an exhibition at Faction, an art space in Seoul, centered on Sappho, the ancient Greek poet. I'm comparing different translations of her surviving fragments in order to develop new Korean translations, an area that remains largely unexplored in Korea's contemporary literary landscape. I'm fascinated by the fragmentary nature of her work, shaped by loss and the gaps left by time. Those absences resonate with the limits of communication and memory. To me, Sappho remains a figure whose voice still speaks powerfully to contemporary sensibilities.

To learn more about Azin Lim:

★ Website: <https://azinlim.com/>

★ Instagram: [@azin_lim](#)

The original version of this article was written in *[Spanish](#)*.

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