



H a r d w a r e **AT ISLAND HARDWARE**

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Jisoo MISS

KIM

Chung LILAC

JULY 1 – AUGUST 31, 2026

Narrated from the point of view of a plant, Jisoo Chung’s experimental documentary traces the story of a lilac tree. Officially called ‘Miss Kim’ this lilac was brought to the United States from its native South Korea by an American botanist in the 1940s. Questioning the relationship between name and object—a reoccurring theme across Chung’s work—the artist travels to New England in search of the original lilac specimen, and in the end finds much more.

Jisoo Chung is a multimedia artist using video, installation, drawings, and performance. As a Korean artist who relocated to the United States, she traces failures in language, such as mistranslations, auto-corrections, and omissions, to track the sociocultural power constructed in language and names. A search for the loss of identity evoked by linguistic failures is where her works begin. Chung is a nominee for a United States Artist Fellowship, a fellow of MacDowell Residency, and a grant recipient of the LACE Lightning Fund (Andy Warhol Foundation), Puffin Foundation New Jersey, and Seoul Arts and Cultural Council. Her recent film *Miss Kim Lilac* (2023–24) won the Jungwoon Prize from the Seoul International Experimental Film and Video

Festival. Her works were presented internationally, including Ji.Hlava International Film Festival, Czech Republic; BOAN1942, Seoul; Matsutake Gallery, Paris; Studio For Artistic Research, Düsseldorf; Fellows of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, among others. Chung holds an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a BFA from Seoul National University. She is a co-founder of an artist-run art educational studio, Drawing Cabinet, an advisory board member of a nonprofit organization, Prospect Art, and is currently an adjunct faculty member at Bakersfield College.

Jisoo Chung, Miss Kim Lilac, 2023–24, 18 minute 50 second 4K single-channel video with sound played on loop. Directed, written, filmed, edited, and translated by Jisoo Chung. Music composer is Dylan Marx. Sound Mix by Myung Soo Kay. Colorist is The Collective Studio. Supported by Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture, The Puffin Foundation, and International Lilac Society. Curated by Lighthouse Works Curator-at-Large Laurel Ptak.

the cold winter wind. The plant was Susu Kkot Dari, a native Korean Lilac. That day, Meader collected twelve seeds from the plant. In 1948, he brought them back to the New Hampshire Argicultural Experiment Station at the University of New Hampshire, where he was a professor. He planted all twelve.

In 1945, Meader applied for a patent and officially released this new cultivar, naming it *Syringa pubescens* subsp. *patula* ‘Miss Kim’. In his diary, he wrote: “I named it ‘Miss Kim,’ since ‘Kim’ is a most common family name in Korea. There are thousands of Misses Kim; many could easily win a beauty contest if such were ever held in that country.” I wanted to understand his phrase, “thousands of Misses Kim.”

Unlike other lilacs, which can grow over ten feet tall, the Miss Kim Lilac has been cultivated to reach a smaller, more manageable size—approximately three feet. When young, its flowers are a pinkish white, later turning crimson in fall, and finally bluish-light lavender as they wilt. Its leaves are uniquely wavy-edged and deep green, shifting to a burgundy-red in the autumn. Once in bloom, Miss Kim emits a significantly stronger scent than its parent varieties. Because of its compact size, fragrance, and durability, Miss Kim is one of the most desirable lilacs in the horticultural market. According to Bentley, it occupies 30% of the U.S. lilac market, making it one of the two most widely distributed lilac varieties in the country.

In Korea, the term “Miss Kim” associates to female irregular-contract workers assigned to perform menial tasks, whether as assistants, receptionists, janitors, factory workers, or cashiers. The term originated during Korea’s industrialization period in the 1960s and 1970s, when corporations were singularly focused on economic growth and faced a limited labor force. Women were brought into the workforce primarily to perform repetitive, minor tasks, while the more significant roles were typically reserved for men. Men in the workplace were called by their names, but women were collectively referred to as “Miss Kim.” By the

company, and their roles were often disparaged as mere chores.

According to his diary, Meader chose the name Miss Kim in honor of the many beautiful Korean women he met during his time there. However, in Korea, a different theory is widely believed: that Meader named the lilac after a Korean female typist whose surname was Kim, who helped him organize plant data during his stay. Considering the florographic meaning of lilacs—“first love”—an urban legend even claims that Meader had an affair with this typist and named the flower after her. There is, however, no official record to support this story.

Regardless of its naming origin, the Miss Kim Lilac drew global attention in the horticultural world and was widely exported to Europe and Russia during the early 1970s. Its compact size, resilience, and ability to thrive in relocation made it especially desirable for international distribution. While Miss Kim Lilac gained immense popularity in the global horticulture market, South Korea did not begin to pay attention to the plant until 1974, when it was reimported into the country. Upon its reintroduction, the name Miss Kim was translated into Korean as Miss Gim Lilac since the Korean pronunciation of “Kim” more closely resembles “Gim.”

Names mediate the socio-cultural and economic constructions of the objects and people they signify. They obscure power dynamics, mark erasure, and render certain individuals and histories invisible. The mutation of the plant’s name—from *Susu-Khot-Dari* to Miss Kim lilac, and then returned as Miss Gim lilac—leaves a visible imprint of the lilac’s geographical and historical migration. Within this botanical journey intersect the coloniality of America, the commodification of nature under capitalism, the objectification of women, and the transmutative identity of Korean female migrants. Returning to the paradox of the Ship of Theseus, which I posed at the beginning, I ask again: If the name of an object changes over time, does the identity of the object remain the same? How much of *Susu Khot Dari* remains in *Miss Kim Lilac*? And how closely does *Miss Kim Lilac* resemble *Miss Gim Lilac*?

—JISOO CHUNG

This ext is excerpted and edited by Laurel Ptak from the longer essay by the artist, “In Search of Miss Kim,” originally published in the exhibition catalogue Miss Kim Lilac in 2025.

As linguistic beings, we are vulnerable to the imperfections inherent in language. As a Korean woman living between the United States and Korea, I often experience my Korean name being mispronounced or miscalled in the U.S. Through these misarticulated names, I have come to re-recognize myself as newly resurrected personas. This experience prompts me to retrace the dense and entangled relationship between language and selfhood, in which identity is embodied and internalized through the loose framework of a name. The self, shaped within language that slips away from the dominant tongue, is constantly unsettled, misaligned, and loosened.

According to *Lilacs: A New Hampshire Perspective* by John Bentley, lilacs are not native to North America. “There are 21 recognized species of lilacs, and all but two originate in Asia, mostly in China.” Most lilacs found in North America were brought from the East by European colonists between the 17th and 18th centuries. The word *lilac* originates from the Arabic *lilak*, meaning blue, which points to the flower’s longstanding presence in the Middle East before it arrived in the West.

Syringa pubescens subsp. *patula* ‘Miss Kim’, commonly known as *Miss Kim Lilac*, is a cultivated lilac tree developed from the Korean-originated *Syringa* seed known as *Susu Khot Dari*. In Korean, *susu* means ‘millet,’ *kkot* means ‘flower,’ and *dari* means ‘leg.’ The pure Korean name *Susu Khot Dari* likely derives from the plant’s appearance—its flowers resemble a pile of millet attached to a leg.

From 1945 until the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, the U.S. military took administrative authority over the South Korean government. This period is known as the United States Army Military Government in Korea (1945–48). Although the U.S. military government was technically an allied force working with South Korean politicians, the balance of power was unequal. This period was marked by a series of discordant policies, confusing land reforms, inconsistent monetary policies, and a lack of local autonomy—

which created extreme social and political chaos. Despite being a relatively short chapter in history, it left a lasting cultural and political imprint on the foundation of the Republic of Korea.

During this time, more than two hundred American scholars and researchers were sent to South Korea to conduct studies and extract natural resources. Among them was Elwin Marshall



Meader, a botanical genealogy scientist who served as a horticulture consultant in the U.S. military camp between 1947 and 1948. On Veterans Day in 1947, Meader went hiking on Pouk Han Mountain in Seoul. Upon reaching the peak, he spotted a small bush nested between rocks, its branches frozen by

1980s and 1990s, the term “Miss Kim” had seeped into office culture. Female employees were hired primarily as secretaries or receptionists for trivial duties such as serving coffee, sweeping, photocopying, and faxing. They were excluded from planning or decision-making processes within the

Image captions: FRONT & LEFT Stills from Erin Johnson, *Lake*, 2020, 4 minute 26 second video. FRONT & RIGHT Stills from Jisoo Chung: *Miss Kim Lilac*, 2023–24, 18 minute 50 second 4K single-channel video. All images courtesy of the artists.





HARDWARE is a year-round exhibition space for film and video by contemporary artists located in the loose screw section of Island Hardware on Fishers Island.

Every two months a new moving-image work appears, inviting unexpected encounters with contemporary art where the everyday rhythms, textures, and temporalities of a hardware shop frame the work.

Inside Island Hardware at 741 The Gloaming on Fishers Island, **HARDWARE** is programmed by Lighthouse Works and open to the public during business hours, Monday–Friday 8am–4pm and Sunday 8am–noon, or by appointment.

HARDWARE is curated by Laurel Ptak with support from Claudia DeSimone and Eliza Schmidt. Exhibition guide designed by Eric Nylund. Special thanks to Dave Beckwith and the entire team at Island Hardware for their ongoing support.

For further information about these exhibitions contact Nate Malinowski: nate@lighthouseworks.us or (631) 788-7713.

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