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KELLY AKASHI

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BY FRANKLIN MELENDEZ

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On one of our first visits, I can't help but note the extravagant fingernail on Kelly Akashi's right pinky. It extends in truncated arabesque piercing a nebula of space just beyond the reach of her body. The effect is weirdly transfixing. At once poetic and banal, it has accrued into an involuntary structure, a mini-monument to organic matter becoming inanimate form. We giggle at the requisite jokes before she remarks matter-of-factly: "I like it as a marker of time." Time, duration, entropy—those are the modalities of Akashi's sculptural alchemy. Far from arcane, hers is an intimate working-through, defined by materials carefully chosen for their ability to conjure multiple states of matter: liquids become semi-solids, semi-solids slip into the crystalline or evaporate, leaving behind hardened husks that seem tenuous in their permanence. These transmutations are tethered to the diligence of craft—for instance, in her recurring use of homemade candles (2012–ongoing). At once corporeal and ephemeral, these come into being using an ancient process that when transposed to Southern California takes on a slightly mystic tinge. A single wick is dipped in wax, left to air dry, then re-dipped ritual-like until an imperfect cylinder slowly emerges, the accumulation of so many repeated gestures. While still pliable, some are pressed across body parts, wrapped around limbs, or simply manipulated to become unpredictable tendrils that measure out units of effort, the meeting of membranes, bodies brushing against bodies. The resulting impressions beg to be used, though sometimes they accumulate, needing containment or a system of display to present themselves to the world. This can take the shape


Kelly Akashi (American, b. 1983) is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. She is represented by Ghebaly, Los Angeles, and Michael Jon & Alan, Miami/Detroit.

An upcoming solo exhibition of Akashi's work will open at Ghebaly in November. This fall, she will also be part of "Streams of Warm Impermanence," a group exhibition at David Roberts Art Foundation, London.

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Image: *Figure oO*, 2015  
Courtesy of the artist and Ghebaly, Los Angeles

of blown glass vessels or copper and bronze wire chandeliers, such as those that punctuate her 2014 solo exhibition "Mirror Image" or balance out her collaboration with Sean Raspet (2015). Voluptuously present, the fixtures are equal parts interior décor and active participants, waiting to be lit and consumed by a fire that catalyzes a new permutation. The only testament to their previous incarnation: gestural drippings left on the floor or gathered by attendant cushions, trace records of a moment transpired.

It might be tempting to label these phenomenal slippages as "fragile," but the term is somewhat misleading—perhaps a symptom of how transient gestures confound the usual jargon. Much more accurately, Akashi's objects function as counterweights to discourse, molding the space around them without giving it a name, outlining pathways for bodies or facilitating encounters between blind physicalities. Such is the case with 2015's *Ring*, a bronze wheel-like object suspended from the ceiling and held in place by an intricate knot on the other side of a perforated gallery wall; or perhaps more explicitly in a suite of sculptures collectively titled *Eat Me* (2016), recently on view at Los Angeles' Hammer Museum. Slung over the museum's courtyard, they offer an assortment of protean forms: biomorphic rubber folds, bronze hands frozen in hoisting gestures, rope shredded into threadbare shavings. Piecemeal, they exert their strange presence in the void, coaxing a poetics from the seam of interior and exterior. View them long enough and your body will begin to register their residual gravity—mute but active, like a rest in a musical score. 

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HIGHLIGHTS

