



HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander: *How is Where You Are*

18 October 2025–17 January 2026



How Is Where You Are, Here Is Where You Be Come

by Fan Wu

Alvar Aalto holds court in his Helsinki studio's yard. A Finnish Border Obelisk™ churns in yellow distance. You're sleeping on the stone steps, your dreams screwed to the provenance of a simple library stool, affixed to the ceiling, bathing the wider world in its yolk light. Home, a.k.a. how the mind converts illusion into truth.

Calculability—time measured by the time ball drop and the New Year funfetti; the public standards of length in inches and yards (“yahhds”); the hissy insistence of the metronome’s tick in those mandatory Royal Conservatory music lessons—rules our world. It’s what’s bestowed reality and significance. It delegitimizes what media philosopher Yuk Hui calls the “intuitive-mystical strata of experience,” which is marginalized in our world because it fails to accord with the values of a scientific, calculable domain.

How can we reinscribe the Unknown into our immediate reality without either subordinating it to calculability, or abandoning calculability altogether?¹

For we have inherited a tendency to render everything calculable. Artist duo HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander write: “The seasons of the year are based on one orbiting cycle of the planet. The month is based on the Moon’s relationship to the planet, and the day is based on the movement of the Sun and the Moon. However, the unit of a week is arbitrary. There isn’t a physical movement it’s based on.” I didn’t realize the arbitrariness of the week as a measure of time: the difference between the Torontonion “I hate winter” and the Garfieldian “I hate Mondays” is that seasons roughly accord to natural cycles, whereas the week is an ideological construction of capital tied to the work week. Cultural constructs have become naturalized so efficiently they often can’t intuitively be told apart from natural processes. Kwon Kajander’s practice makes us question this “second” nature: the accumulated habits of culture. Their work invites us to exit a binary worldview and enter one where the calculable and the mystical coexist, the natural and the cultural are consubstantial, and contradictions flourish.

Kwon Kajander's work returns the mystical Unknown to the ordinary objects that scatter about our calculable and known reality. In the artists' hands, found objects like flea market decor, plastic buckets, and domestic appliances become estranged from their prior contexts. Much of the surface ordinariness of the artworks in the artists' exhibition at Mercer Union, *How Is Where You Are*, comes from the fact that they are made from objects that have become ubiquitous in our lives. While some artworks are tied to the locality of Finland, where Kwon Kajander have ancestral ties, the exhibition's exploration of homeland is also metaphysical and transcends a single geography. A "homeland" and its attendant mythic status pulsate with the Unknown; they anchor our quest to locate a beginning that would secure narrative coherence, even if such beginnings are provisional at best. In childhood, a time in our life before conscious logics take over, a time in our life when the Unknown composes us, objects fill out our imaginaries before we have a grasp of the world. As we grow up, patterns of semiotic association and displacement flood our affective spheres. Material histories and subjective histories tumble into each other.

In *How Is Where You Are*, artworks evoke lineages by challenging the straightforwardness of their transmission. In a projected image in the artists' four-channel video installation, the steady stream of the Tammerkoski rapids in Tampere, Finland cascades into a scanner bed containing a Samsung Galaxy Tab that displays a recording of a Nokia phone. Here, a natural force, a symbol of national industrialization, and flows of international communication are collapsed into a single looping origin myth. In a second display, a metronome sits delicately on the Public Standards of Length plaque at Greenwich, bisecting the "British Yard" and "Two Feet." Its mechanical ticking shifts into song form, as if the soul of the thing were expressing a freedom that struggles to break free of its laborious precision, revealing calculability's melodic interiority. Another sculpture turns a fridge door into an uncanny canvas where fridge magnets would be: a video shows an egg and a toilet paper roll making idiosyncratic paths down the Prime Meridian line, troubling that axis of standardization with their stochastic wobble. I'm reminded of the long shot of a spraycan kicked down a hill in Abbas Kiarostami's film *Close-Up*, an invitation to attend to the magic absurdity of ordinary objects. If you open your inner eye wide enough, you'll see that the knowable world is stained and striated with the Unknown, like a tea egg, or a toilet bowl rusted curbside.

“Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed... A negative judgement is the intellectual substitute for repression; its ‘no’ is the hallmark of repression, a certificate of origin, like, let us say, ‘Made in Germany.’”

—Sigmund Freud²

One of Freud’s most stunning contributions to psychoanalysis is his negation of negation. Negation is the unconscious mind’s backdoor to affirmation. If you insist that “my dream last night was definitely not about excrement,” you smuggle the content of the repressed thought within the cloak of supposed negation. A parallel Buddhist logic exists about attachment: the rages of hatred or disdain do not negate the hated thing’s influence in our life, but bring us tighter into its orbit through the intense charge of the negative.

If negation is no longer the opposite but a subspecies of affirmation, how do we come to enact transformation, the agency toward change? How do we escape the traps and legacies of Empire that absorb its negations back into itself and turn subversion into a brand or a product? Kwon Kajander’s method finds a third way, beyond simple affirmation and/or reactive negation: a *dérivée*, a *détournement*, a magician’s trick prompting us to look from another vantage point. In the third display of their four-channel installation, we pass through Freud’s infamous study through fisheye lenticulars, rendering its legendary psychoanalytic couch into bulbous patches of distorted domesticity. A pink hand, pulled from a “Stop Now!” sign at the border between Finland and Russia, becomes in the artists’ hands a wool rug equal parts flesh coral, a command to halt, and an outstretched palm inviting us to take a seat. Rather than affirming or negating the heritages of influential designers or the iconographies of nation-states, Kwon Kajander take these inheritances as symbolic material to be flipped over, reconstituted, and unwound. The only way to work it out is to work *through* it.

There’s a political tactic other than repudiation or contestation at work—or, rather, at play. Objects are remade, renewed, and recontextualized; and each intervention produces a new way of seeing something whose meaning had once been “fixed.” If the world is composed of an infinite proliferation of perspectives, none of which holds transcendental claim to Truth over any other, then playfulness—and its techniques of subtraction, expansion, and intermixing—has its own politic that can slip past the ensnarement of negation. Another work by Kwon Kajander is a Korean

squat toilet mounted on a wall to resemble a urinal, pulling subtly at East-West cultural difference; while you stand before this mutant object, an LED image of planet Earth, ringed by cash money, makes a halo as if over your head. *How Is Where You Are* constructs a living room with all of life's contradictions on display, and invites us to inhabit the possibility—indeed, the necessity—of the politics of playfulness in our burning world.

So it's in that spirit I compose, in closing, a poem for one of the lamp forms in *How Is Where You Are*:

Two weeks ago I remembered eggs as a source
of protein at Bloor Fruit Market, that standard for
affordable produce prices frozen in 2008 Toronto.
At age 33, from a rascal at Home Hardware, I learned
the differences between LED and incandescent
lightbulbs and the phrase "Not for use
in totally enclosed luminaires." Changing my
bathroom shower bulb I'm gripped by a vision of my
house burning down, my already dead pine bonsai dying twice.
Is the world of immanence in which we live a "totally
enclosed luminaire"? May I change my fate, set since I were a boy?
Is 'Freedom' having
nothing but a compass
drowned in a latrine
to tell me: where now?

1. Yuk Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics* (e-flux Architecture, 2021), 254.

2. Freud et al., "Negation," in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19: *The Ego and the Id and Other Works* (Random House, 2001), 233–240.

Fan Wu works in the fields of poetry, performance, and pedagogy. He is currently researching Daoism as a counter-colonial cosmology. You can read his writing in *C Magazine*, *The Flaherty Seminar*, *The Vermin*, and *Feel'd Magazine*. Send him an inquiry or a love letter at fanwu4u@gmail.com.

Cover image: HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander, production still from *How is Where You Are*, 2025. Courtesy the artists and Franz Kaka, Toronto.

In their sculptural installation practice, artist duo **HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander** reconfigure, repurpose, and reorient that which is readily available into nuanced assemblages and arrangements. Working collaboratively, Kwon Kajander complicate the notion of individual authorship and bring the dynamics of relational interdependence—interaction, negotiation, and interference—into play with a wide variety of artistic media.

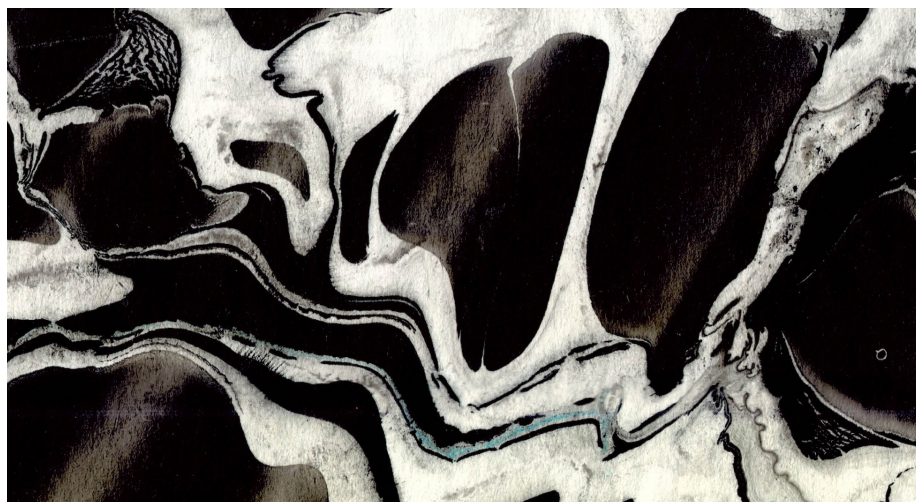
In early 2024, Mercer Union invited Kwon Kajander to develop a new project for their first institutional solo exhibition. The resulting body of work, *How Is Where You Are*, engages with the inherited technologies that quietly organize our lives. Sculptures span a diverse array of media like ceramics, porcelain, resin, and textiles; notably, the artists also introduce video and sound into their material repertoire, mediating and manipulating images and embedding them within sculptural bodies. Through a series of familiar yet incongruous elements, Kwon Kajander build a latent narrative that traces the idea of lineage: what are the forces that got us to where we are now?

Mercer Union's collaboration with HaeAhn and Paul emerges from our long-held commitment to commissioning new work, and creating milestone opportunities for artists to bring their visions to fruition in Toronto. Through our commissioning platform Artist First, we invest in the lifecycle of a project from conception to realization, cultivating discovery, risk-taking, and artistic development through long-term support and dialogue. To learn more, visit mercunion.org/support



HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander is a collaborative duo working primarily with natural lacquer and sculptural installation. Through the threading together of given and family names, their practice complicates the notion of individual authorship and addresses the constructedness of identity. They have presented work with Franz Kaka, Toronto (2024); Daniel Faria, Toronto (2024); The Real DMZ Project, Paju/Ottawa (2023); Galerie Nicolas Robert, Toronto (2022); Trilobite et le Pneu, Montréal (2020); Jack Barrett Gallery, New York (2019); The Small Arms Inspection Building, Mississauga (2019); Julius Caesar, Chicago (2019); NERI | Barranco, Mexico City (2019). HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts

Image: HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander, *in it*, 2024. Installation view, Franz Kaka, Toronto.
Photo: LFdocumentation.



SPACE: Alize Zorlutuna | *Surface Tension: Cloudstone [Battal]*

17 October 2025–17 January 2026

Mercer Union invites artist Alize Zorlutuna to develop a yearlong series of works titled *Surface Tension* for the SPACE Billboard Commission in 2025-26. Building on a practice in the traditional hydrographic printing technique of Ebru, *Surface Tension* offers a sculptural study of its distinct marbled patterns and their intricacies. Over the course of the year, the artist presents three banner works using cuts and folds that trace and transform each image, releasing the movements humming within. Read more about the first edition, *Cloudstone [Battal]* (2025), along with an accompanying text at mercerunion.org

Alize Zorlutuna is an interdisciplinary queer artist whose work explores relationships to land, culture and the more-than-human, while thinking through history, ancestral wisdom and healing. Moving between Tkarón:to and Anatolia (present-day Turkey) throughout their life has informed Alize's practice—making them attentive to spaces of encounter. Bringing together material practices rooted in Anatolian textiles, ceramics, and marbling, with contemporary mediums, they forge new directions for considering diasporic relationships to place and belonging. Alize enlists poetics and a sensitivity to materials in works that span video, installation, printed matter, performance and sculpture. Conjuring earth, air, water, and spirit, Alize collages mediums, methods, and geographies. The body and its sensorial capacities are central to their work.

SPACE invites one artist to produce a yearlong series of public-facing works on the east façade of Mercer Union's building.

Image: Alize Zorlutuna, production still from *Surface Tension: Cloudstone [Battal]*, 2025. Courtesy the artist.

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How is Where You Are is the first institutional solo exhibition by HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander.

How is Where You Are is made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group, and Partners in Art.



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1286 Bloor Street West, Toronto ON M6H 1N9
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