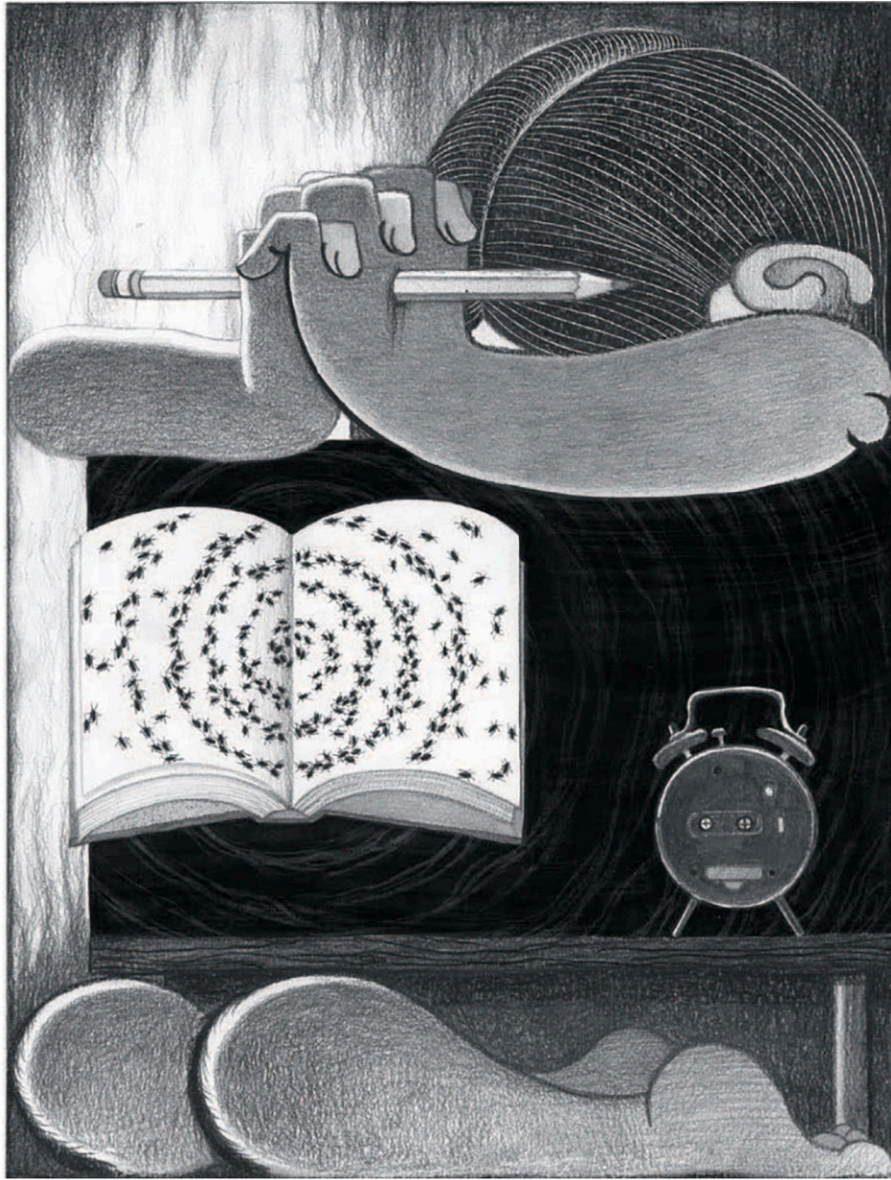


# ARTFORUM



Cindy Ji Hye Kim, *Creativity*, 2019, mixed media, 12 × 9".

**Cindy Ji Hye Kim**  
FOXY PRODUCTION

HELENA ANRATHER

As a writer, I know what twisting myself into knots over a word is like, though I rarely do this over a letter of the alphabet. But for an artist who might consider script a kind of drawing, the act of forming a single character might, for all I know, become more fraught. Cindy Ji Hye Kim is a drafts person of implicit elegance and concision, with a style that falls somewhere between Max Fleischer and Christina Ramberg. To imagine Kim manipulating a pen with anything but ease is difficult, yet her paintings and drawings express anxieties about writing. These works feature stylized female figures, clad in short black skirts and often nothing more—like a pedophile’s fantasy of schoolgirls—with their faces always hidden. Her subjects are

perched on scaffoldings of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal poles and hold poses that seem, even in such unnaturalistic renderings, cramped and uncomfortable.

As I had to learn from the press release, some of the ways Kim warps her subjects' anatomies here—via drawings, a mural, and paintings on canvas (several were hung to reveal their elaborately carved stretchers)—are based on Hangul, the Korean alphabet. The artist was born in South Korea, grew up in Toronto, studied illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design before taking her MFA in painting from Yale University, and now lives in the Bronx. Kim uses what she learned at RISD to make what is unequivocally painting, with rich surfaces rendered in graphite, charcoal, pastel, ink, acrylic, and oil on canvas.

She renders the bodies of her weirdly supple gymnasts as a series of rhythmically graphic, cartoonlike abbreviations. See, for instance, *Character #15* (all works 2019), which was part of her show at Foxy Production: *The arabesque of the heel and instep of the girl's left foot, like a question mark without the dot*—are echoed by the subtler curve of the line articulating her calf, as though the foot's springier tension were being relaxed and elongated in the leg. To view the body as material for recomposition, as a representational device, is essential to the aesthetic appreciation of figurative art, but here it also becomes redolent of fetishism or s/m. Although there was no rope depicted in any of these paintings, I couldn't help think, at times, of Nobuyoshi Araki's *shibari* photographs, with their tightly bound and contorted female models.

If the upshot of Kim's "Letter" paintings and drawings is to portray the art of writing—and thereby communication or expression as a libidinally charged disciplinary apparatus—the drawings at Helena Anrather went beyond the letter to reveal—or revel in—the vexations associated with the whole culture of reading and writing. Take *Poetry*, in which a young woman at a desk has her head buried in a book while an anguished hand crumples page after page; or *Creativity*, which features a writer's hands, clasped as if in prayer, and pierced, Saint Sebastian-like, by a pencil as troops of cockroaches run in circles around the pages; and *Interpretation*, a work that depicts a prone nude with the flapping pages of a book over her crotch, with a couple of shadowy Peeping Toms taking in the view, à la Susanna and the licentious elders. Also, that Arakiesque rope I'd been half expecting finally turned up in *Workings of Pathos*, even morphing into a woman's braided hair.

The Anrather drawings were shown as part of an installation that was backed by a layer of paper made of human hair and framed in Plexiglas. The works were hung from cables that stretched across the gallery at a height that forced the viewer to repeatedly bow or crouch in order to get close—as if Kim wanted us to begin feeling some of the sensations of unease they evoke. But it was in the drawings themselves, and in her paintings, that the contortions paid off in pleasure.

— *Barry Schwabsky*

Schwabsky, Barry. "Cindy Ji Hye Kim." *Artforum*. 2019. <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201909/cindy-ji-hye-kim-81134>