

# FRIEZE

## Anicka Yi's Web of Care

At Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul, the artist explores the convergence of biological and technological systems – and questions notions of technological transcendence

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What happens when an artist dies? In an age of artificial intelligence, the question invites a seductive follow-up: what if an artist's digital twin could continue their work indefinitely? Anicka Yi's first Asian museum solo exhibition, 'There Exists Another Evolution, But In This One' at the Leeum Museum of Art, approaches this question not through speculative fantasy, but meticulous investigation of biological and technological systems.

Yi's latest video work *Each Branch of Coral Holds Up the Light of the Moon* (2024) inaugurates her 'Emptiness' project (2024–ongoing) – an AI system trained on her work – with calculated precision and unexpected grace. The 16-minute piece reveals machine learning's current limitations in artistic production, its constraints yielding discoveries that challenge assumptions about the creative capacities of the algorithm. Rather than promising digital immortality, the work exposes the persistent gap between human consciousness and computational process, suggesting that true artistic continuation might lie elsewhere.

The exhibition begins by making visitors alert to their embodied presence, even as it systematically dismantles the boundaries between synthetic and organic matter. A scent – marine notes mingled with floral and industrial elements – infiltrates the senses immediately upon entry, becoming a persistent companion. Viewers navigate the dim galleries in an artificial ecosystem where technology and biology converge. Here, 30 works from the past decade emerge like bioluminescent creatures, each demonstrating Yi's systematic exploration of sensation and its cultural determinants with increasing complexity.

In the main gallery, four kinetic sculptures from the 'Radiolaria' series (2023–2024) hover at human height, suspended above pools that mirror their movements. Deploying fibre optics, LEDs and microcontrollers, they simulate marine microorganisms with uncanny precision. Their movements appear organic yet betray mechanical origins – each gesture programmed, each response calibrated to create an illusion of life. The whirring motors and calculated patterns raise pointed questions about what constitutes 'life' in an era of increasingly sophisticated biomimetic technologies.

Behind these luminous forms, the 'Kelp Pods' series (2019–2023) creates another layer of artificial marine life, extending the exhibition's exploration of synthetic biology. Though these vertical structures initially read as synthetic approximations of natural forms, they incorporate actual preserved kelp specimens, their organic matter slowly degrading – impermanence remains, even in our technologically mediated world. Within these deteriorating chambers, mechanical insects interact with their increasingly fragile environment, reflecting our ecological predicament.

Biology and technology achieve their most intimate convergence in *Another You* (2024). Viewed from above, a circular chamber uses mirrors to suggest infinite depth; it houses genetically modified *E. coli* expressing fluorescent proteins derived from marine organisms. These bacterial colonies generate endless reflections of blue-green bioluminescence, requiring constant maintenance. Their unpredictable growth patterns and environmental sensitivity pose challenges to exhibiting institutions, demanding new protocols for each site.

Instead of embracing or rejecting digital immortality's seductive promise, Yi's exhibition probes the ambiguous territory where biological and technological systems meet, raising more questions than it offers answers. Each work demonstrates how organic and synthetic processes interact, fail and adapt through invisible networks of care and maintenance. An unseen infrastructure of daily monitoring, environmental adjustments, bacterial feeding and mechanical repairs sustains the existence of these hybrid entities; hidden labour, the viewer may be reminded, makes such biological-technological convergence possible. When bacterial colonies require constant nourishment, when mechanical systems need regular calibration, when artificial intelligence reveals its limitations, we understand that the future lies not in technological transcendence, but in acknowledging the complex web of care that binds together each facet of our existence.