

STUDIO VISIT

# Mimi Jung Finds Her Inner Balance

Through a new body of deeply personal fiber-based works that harness the emotive power of elliptical shapes, the Los Angeles artist poignantly meditates on an epiphanic period that redefined her approach to kinship. Each piece is at once infinite and intimate—much like the intense feelings and psychic landscapes they evoke.

BY RYAN WADDOUPS

November 18, 2020







**Each work in “The Subsuming Ellipse” has six digits in its title, referencing memories from a four-month period in 2017. What’s the significance behind this time frame?**

Personal significance is more acutely represented in these new works. The six digits signify dates—moments that have changed the trajectory of my life. With my work prior to this show, the dates are much farther apart. As you can imagine, not every day can hold such significance. The four months that the new series focuses on, however, continue to alter my views of myself and the definition of kinship. “The Subsuming Ellipse” centers around my time with my foster daughter. During those months, I could only react rather than respond.

Three years later, this body of work—along with my art program for foster youth—is my response.

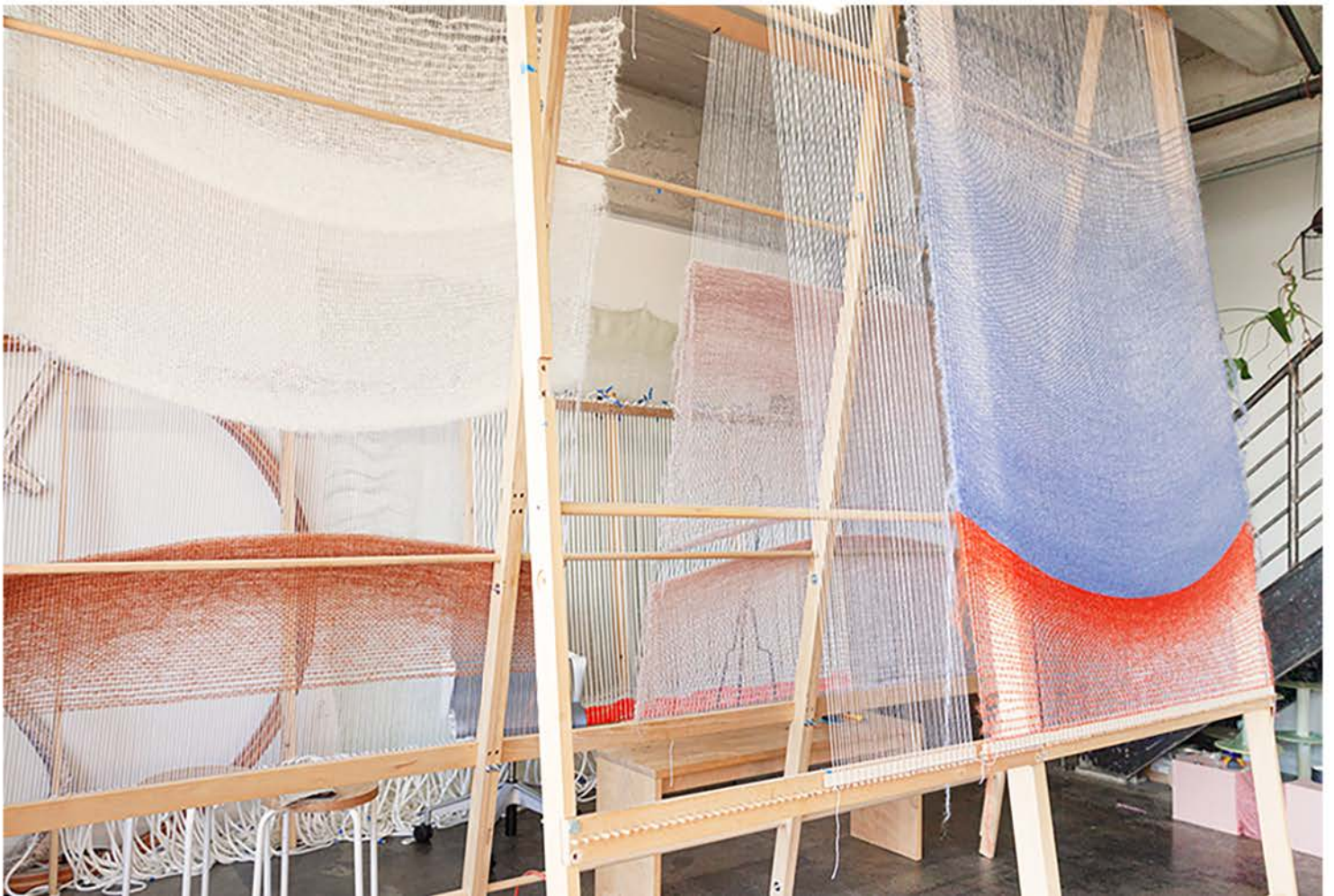


Mark Rothko explored the inherent tension of rectangles; Robert Motherwell did the same for ovals. What draws you to the ellipse?

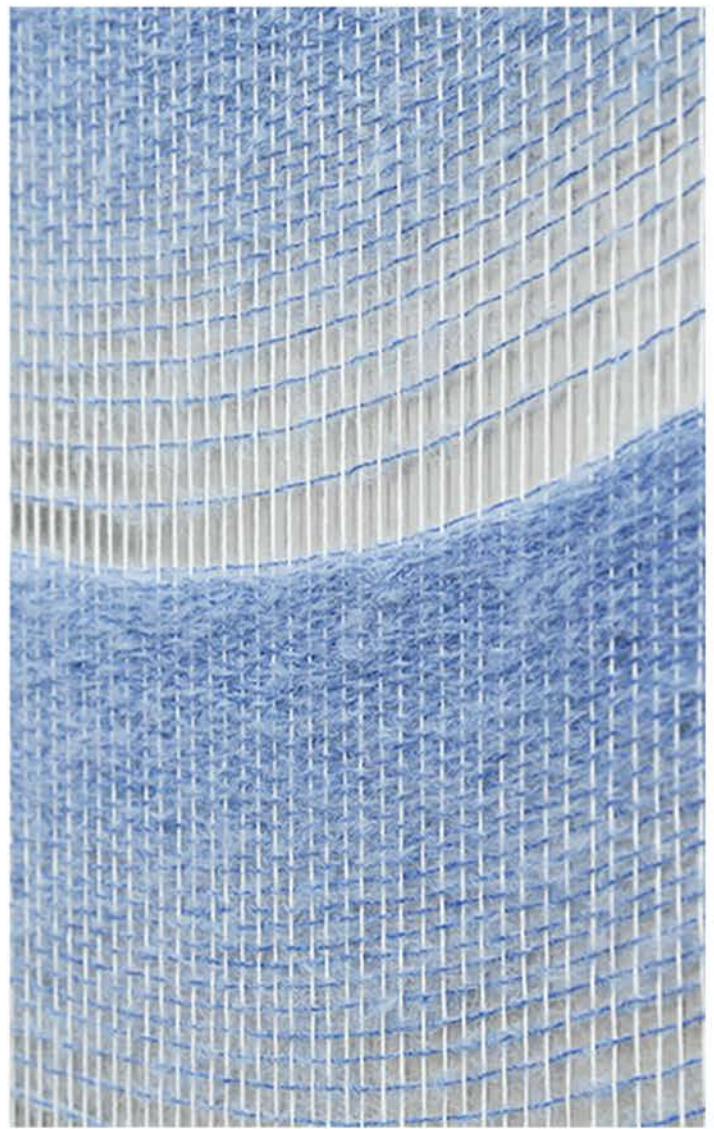
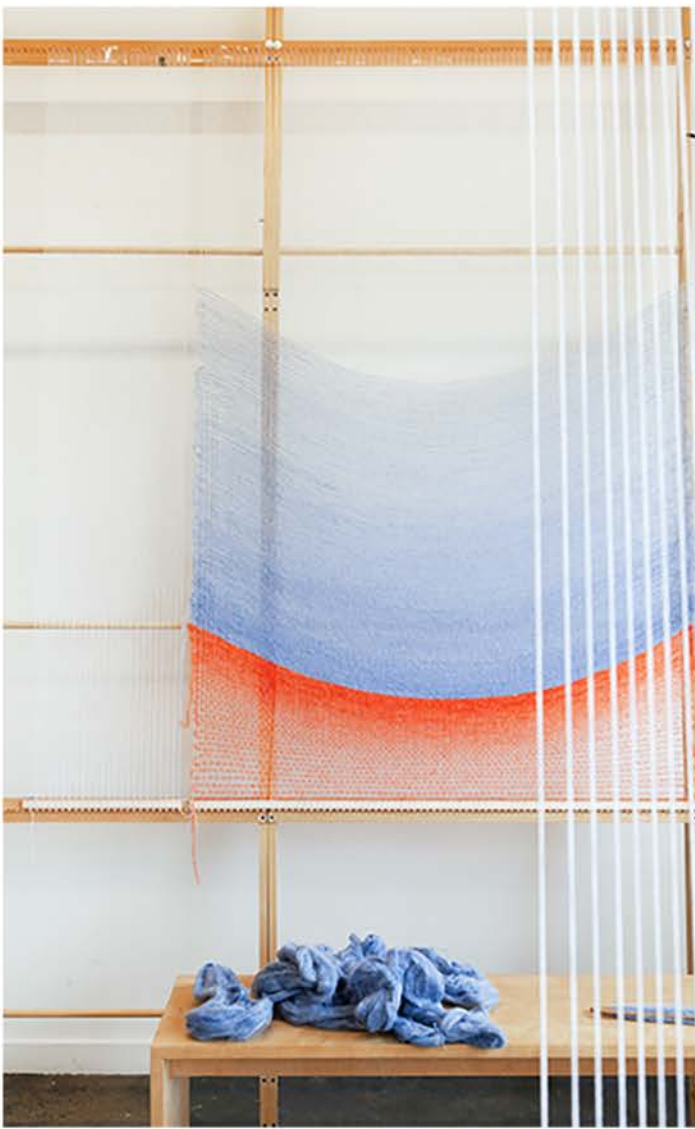
I would first need to explain the series that predates “The Subsuming Ellipse.” Each series required two to three years of examination to move onto the next.

The “Full Gradient” series is an infinite color field. The composition only allows for a limited window into this field. The varied spacing between the weft allows for a subtle spatial shift, influencing the color fields. The work that follows is “Live Edge Forms.” What was previously an infinite field, now contained with its dense edge, allows for examining not only the space between the weft/color shift but the distinct forms themselves. “Live Edge” refers to a living organism, referencing primitive growth. The “Ellipse” series proceeds beyond the organic edges and focuses on concrete geometric shapes. The ellipse is seemingly simple yet requires control and discipline to create symmetrical curves.

“The Subsuming Ellipse” arrives at a more fully formed composition, focusing on the ellipses’ movements, considering all of the series before it. It’s the only series that could give visual form to my 2017 experiences that this work illuminates. I explore all the emotive possibilities of the ellipses’ geometry and the spatial relationships between forms. From one work to the next, there’s a reactivity—ellipses push, mirror, absorb, and dematerialize.







**What I love about your work is that it evokes movement yet emanates a calming stillness. It feels simultaneously infinite and intimate. How do you strike this balance?**

My work is often biographical. Therefore, my social and psychic landscape has a direct bearing on what settles on the loom.

**What do the tonal gradations signify? What has experimenting with subtle color variations taught you about using color?**

The gradation is about the study of space between the weft. It has more to do with space than the color. The color is secondary.

My references to all the colors in “The Subsuming Ellipse” hold personal significance. My first visceral nightmare as a child was a blast of color. I woke up soaked in sweat, screaming; my dream was an infinite field of glowing purple. Color is never taken for granted in my work.

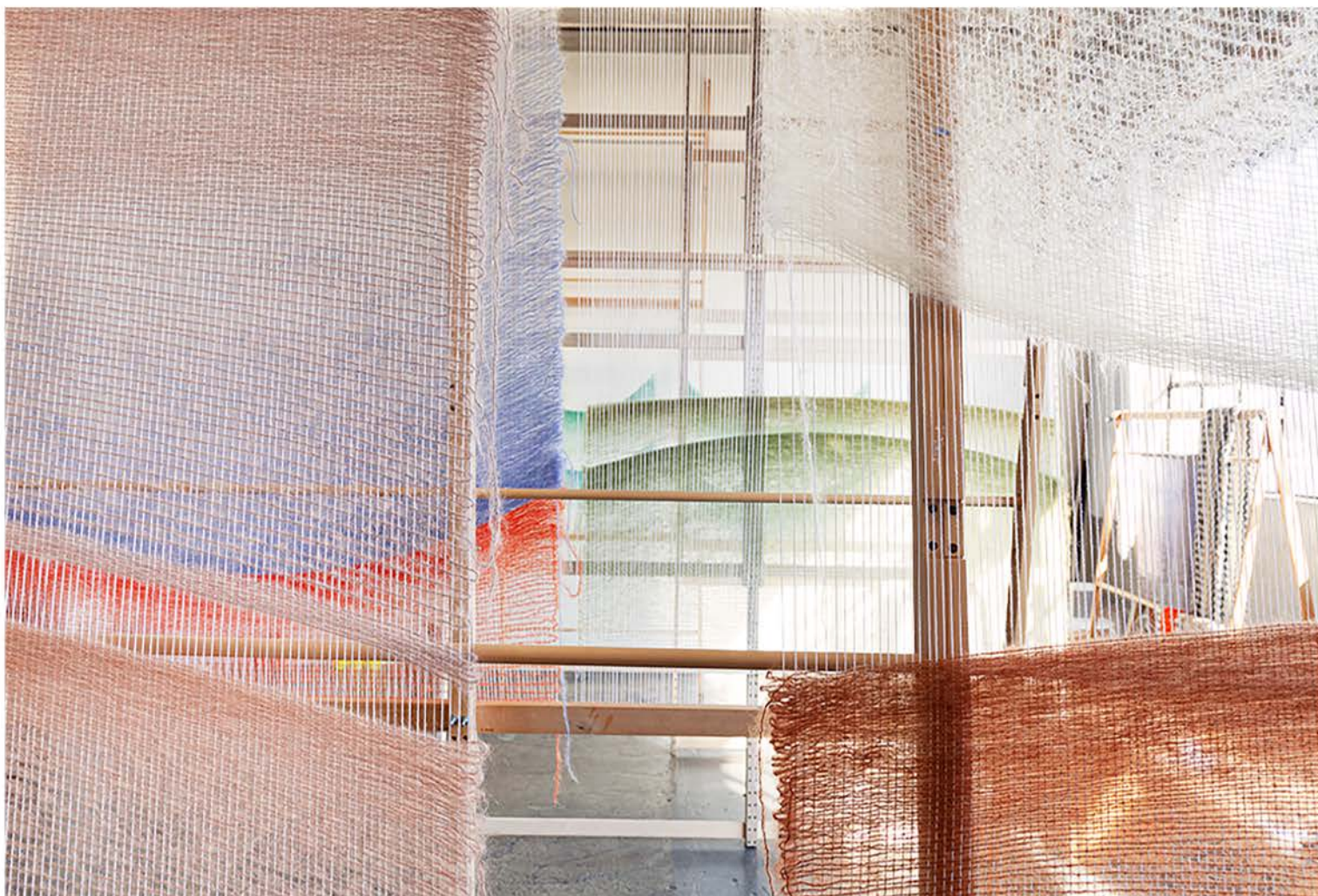


## Has this body of work shifted how you approach your practice?

I usually like to create work with ample time in-between to allow more time for consideration. I sometimes even jump back into a previous series to hone in on a specific aspect.

However, I was only working on “The Subsuming Ellipse” uninterrupted for an extended period. The subject matter, this period of four months, was also challenging on the psyche. I would work on the loom all day, then have long conversations with Jennifer Carvalho, the gallerist at Carvalho Park, about my memories paired with each work. When the memories imprint on the loom, there’s a natural flow. Forming those moments into words to share with another person, for me, was more emotionally taxing. I’m not sure how I can change this in the future as these conversations are critical, and I couldn’t ask for a more supportive gallery partner to share these thoughts. (The outcome of the long talks can be read [here](#).)

It’s too early to know how this experience will change my approach. This will take more mulling over.









**Your work often takes hundreds of hours to complete. How do you know when one piece is finished?**

I don't clock in the days, weeks, or months it takes to complete a piece, but I will say the accumulative hours spent on the loom building each composition strand by strand can either be unyielding dedication or sheer madness. I'm not sure anymore.



**Your studio also hosts Happy Trails Art Start, a program where children in the foster care system are given space for creative expression. How did this idea come about?**

Around 2016, I had an epiphany about the trajectory of my life. I had lived most of my life in extreme survival mode. At age 35, I realized I had endured my childhood and, along the way, found balance in my life. I now had space to help a younger version of myself. After my short stint as a foster parent to an extraordinary child, I started to research other ways to help kids in foster care. During this time, a collector introduced me to Happy Trails for Kids, a nonprofit specializing in recreational programming for foster youth.

In partnership with Happy Trails for Kids, I created a free art program for teens impacted by foster care. Pre-pandemic, I hosted the monthly classes in my Los Angeles studio. Since then, all of our sessions are now virtual.

My pre-college program experience with the Outreach Program at Cooper Union profoundly impacted my education and career. My goal was to create a similar opportunity for teens in foster care, where kids are encouraged to express themselves through visual art among peers experiencing similar challenges with foster care.

Pre-pandemic, I saw my students once a month for six hours at a time, and communication between our physical classes was relatively sparse. By going online, we were able to add more sessions with smaller groups, which allowed for more individualized attention. More time dedicated to each student resulted in more customized programming, frequent check-ins, and, best of all, time to create stronger bonds. By introducing my students to a wide range of creative speakers, sending monthly professional-grade art supplies, hosting structured live art classes, and portfolio reviews, they're making leaps and bounds.

This partnership program will come to an end in December. In early 2021, however, I'll be launching a new virtual national art program for teens in foster care, allowing for a broader demographic of kids to participate in a competitive curriculum. Please follow along—there'll be many different kinds of opportunities to get involved!





## What are the most challenging and rewarding parts of this program?

The bonds I've created with the kids are by far the most rewarding part. Witnessing the growth in their time management skills to giant leaps in their artwork and their self-confidence has been remarkable. Being their champion and support system as they navigate through the excruciating challenges of being in foster care has been a privilege.



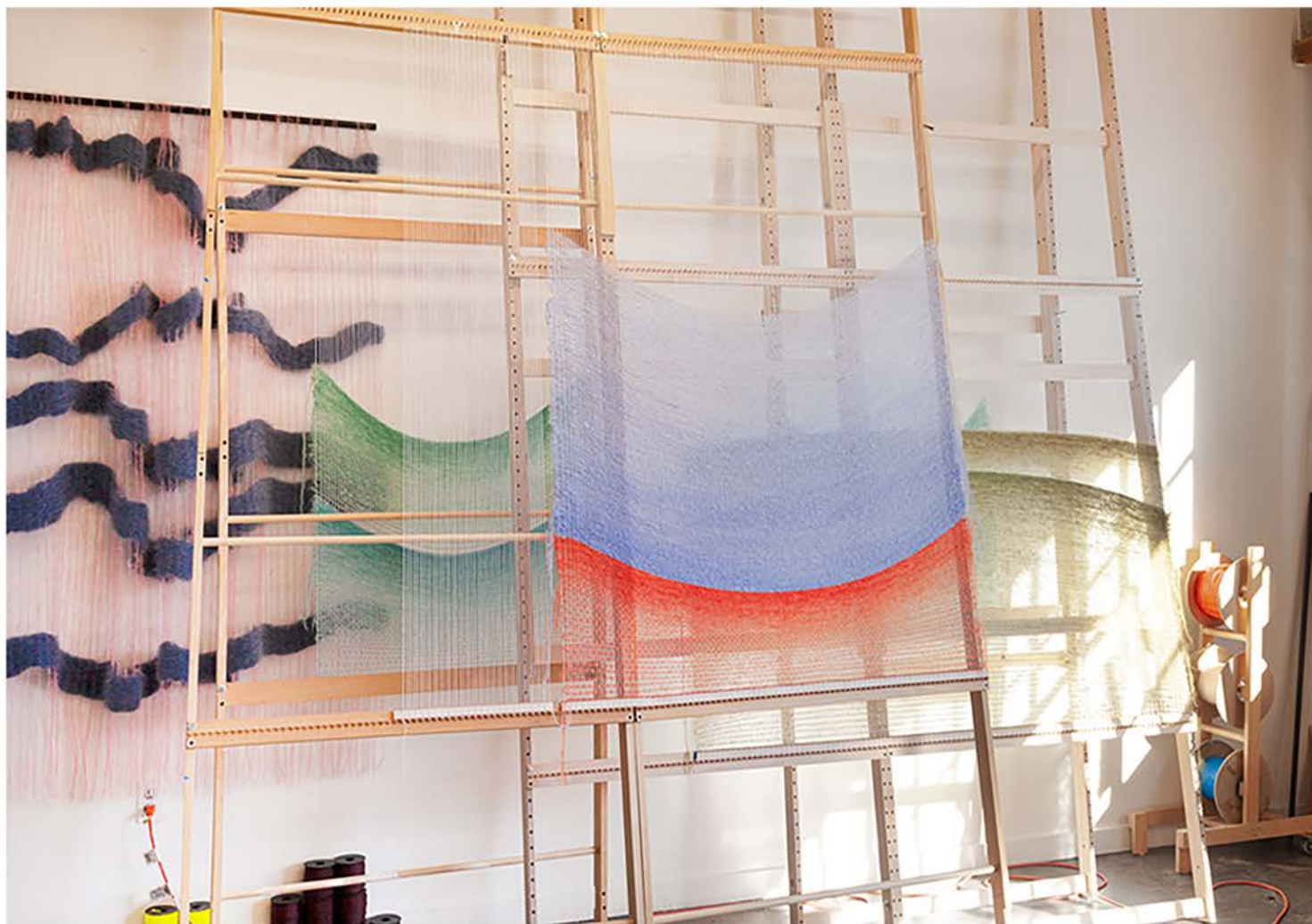
**What's next for you? I hear you're starting a residency with the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation next year.**

Like for most people, the pandemic threw a massive wrench in 2021 and beyond. I do have my upcoming residency at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation next year. Luckily, this residency is centered around solitude. You're given a beautiful standalone studio/home to focus on your art, so social distancing isn't an issue. I'm very much looking forward to starting the work I've reserved for this time.



My residency at John Michael Kohler Arts Center was cut short due to the lockdown earlier this year, so I didn't get a chance to complete my sculptures. They were generous enough to extend a period to complete my work in early 2021, but with the recent Covid-19 spikes, the logistics seem even more challenging.

I have a few major commissions set to complete in 2021 and 2022 that have been in the works for years. One large installation is slated for a public space in Korea, which has been on top of my career bucket list. Other than that, I'm looking forward to launching my new art program and spending time with my students.



*“Mimi Jung: The Subsuming Ellipse” will display at Carvalho Park (112 Waterbury Street, Brooklyn) until December 19.*