

A.I.R.

More-than-Self-Defense **Mimi Biyao Bai**

May 25–June 23, 2024

Opening reception: Saturday, May 25, from 6–8pm

GALLERY III

A.I.R. Gallery is pleased to announce *More-than-Self-Defense*, an exhibition of drawing, sculpture, and installation by 2023–2024 Fellow Mimi Biyao Bai. This is Bai's first solo exhibition in New York City.

In *More-than-Self-Defense*, Bai interrogates how the cultural fantasies we have inherited about violence, safety, and survival collide with our lived realities. Incorporating research into Westerns and action films, fungi, and doomsday preppers, Bai asks: what does it mean to be prepared? How are representations of safety and survival centered around the individual rather than the collective or the structural? What are alternative modes of survival, adaptation, and creation?

The first element of this body of work is a series of carefully-rendered ink drawings of objects from Bai's studio—a rubber mallet, a ruler, a c-clamp—that the artist recasts as potential weapons. The next component in the exhibition is a handmade harness with custom holsters for each tool/weapon that Bai modeled after military firearms holsters and combat belts. With *Tools/Weapons* and *Harness*, Bai examines her urge to “protect herself” in response to increased Sinophobia during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as her awareness that these tools/weapons represent a desire for control or agency but are not actual solutions to political and material conditions at the root of violence. *Harness* also toys with the fantasy of the individual, atomized artist-genius, working in isolation in the studio and armed with the tools to give form to her singular vision.

The final work in the exhibition is a mixed media installation primarily made from clay and string. Unlike the framed *Tool/Weapons* or the self-contained *Harness*, *Net (clay)* stretches outward, and appears to still be in the process of becoming. For *Net (clay)*, Bai draws inspiration from fungal forms as well as the camouflage netting used in early twentieth-century warfare to disguise tanks, people, and positions, adopting the poetic and utilitarian qualities of netting as a form that can conceal, capture, and carry. Expanding outward, its borders largely unfixed, *Net (clay)* reflects a view on survival and creation rooted in entanglement, adaptation, and interdependence rather than individual will.



Mimi Biyao Bai, *Harness*, 2024, Nylon webbing, rip-stop cotton, thread, elastic, plastic hardware, metal snaps, rubber mallet, ruler, net needle, c-clamps, flashlight, u-lock, seam ripper, utility knife, calligraphy pen, and thread snips, dimensions variable.

Mimi Biyao Bai was born in Xi'an, China, and is based in Brooklyn, NY. Her practice encompasses sculpture, drawing, installation, and film. Bai has presented work at institutions including Artists Space, the Boston Center for the Arts, BRIC, Cuchifritos Gallery, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Her films have screened at Rooftop Films, the Rockaway Film Festival, and the Maryland Film Festival. Bai was a SIP Fellow at the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, a NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellow for Interdisciplinary Work, and a recipient of two Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grants. She has been an Artist-in-Residence at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Pioneer Works, and the Santa Fe Art Institute, among others. Bai attended the Whitney Independent Study Program and is a graduate of Alfred University (MFA, Sculpture) and Wesleyan University (BA, Sociology).

mimibiyaobai.com

A.I.R. Gallery is wheelchair accessible via ramp. There are accessible toilets in the venue. There is comfortable seating with backs. Free tap water is available. The venue is nearest to the F train at York St (0.2 miles) and the A train at High St (0.5 miles). The nearest wheelchair accessible trains is the B, Q, R at Dekalb Av (1.1 miles) and the 2, 3 at Borough Hall (0.8 miles). The roads immediately surrounding the gallery are cobblestone. The nearest accessible parking garage (for an hourly fee) is two blocks away at 100 Jay St. No ID necessary for entry. Please contact info@airgallery.org for more information.



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