

LISSON

KELLY AKASHI  
Heirloom

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION DATES:  
13 MAY – 24 JULY 2026  
508 WEST 24TH STREET, NEW YORK

OPENING: 13 MAY, 6 – 8PM

For her first exhibition with Lisson Gallery in New York, Kelly Akashi presents *Heirloom*, a new body of work that builds on her pivotal 2025 presentation in Los Angeles. Where that earlier exhibition examined inheritance through formal and material tension, *Heirloom* turns toward the conditions of loss and grief, asking how absence is held, transmitted, and given form. The exhibition coincides with Akashi's participation in the 2026 Whitney Biennial and precedes the unveiling of her commission for John F. Kennedy International Airport's New Terminal One, in partnership with Lead Curator, Culture Corps.

Across bronze, Corten steel, flame-worked glass, and carved stone, Akashi approaches sculpture as a site where loss can be registered without resolution. These materials do not conceal rupture but sustain it, allowing traces of erosion, oxidation, and transformation to remain visible. Form is subject to ongoing processes of change through which matter records duration. In this sense, the works operate as accumulations of time, where loss is not an isolated event but a condition that unfolds, settles, and alters.

Over the last year, Akashi has tended to the land and cultivated a garden where her home and studio once stood. This act of care becomes central to the exhibition, not as restoration but as a practice of attending to what persists. In *Heirloom*, organic forms drawn from that site reappear as bronze roses, irises, and branches. Directly cast into metal, these elements become relics and resilient markers of domesticity and care. They recall gestures of preservation that attempt to memorialize, even as their original context has vanished. The works hold a tension between endurance and fragility, suggesting memory as something reconstituted in order to be claimed.

At the center of the exhibition stands an enlarged rendering of an inherited stone ring once worn by the artist. Expanded to a monumental scale and retaining the rough surface of the original, the object shifts between bodily intimacy and geological presence. Its altered proportion speaks to the way grief reshapes perception, enlarging what is absent until it exceeds the capacity to contain it. The sculpture does not function as a replacement. Instead, it stages a confrontation with weight, both literal and psychological, as something carried forward.

A pair of Corten steel panels, cut from doily patterns traced from scans of her grandmother's handmade lace tablecloth, extends this inquiry into the articulation of absence. Suspended with a gap between them, the panels demarcate a space of interruption that resists closure. The material itself is integral. Weathering steel records exposure over time, its surface continually oxidizing, increasing its structural integrity despite its distressed patina. Here, permanence and impermanence coexist, allowing absence to be understood as an active and ongoing presence rather than a void. Nearby, book-ash flocked paper works incorporate remnants of the artist's former library. The delicate lace pattern evokes domestic familiarity while also indexing systems of transmission through which knowledge, memory, and history are passed down. These works situate personal grief within broader temporal and cultural continuities.

Glass works complete the exhibition, introducing a language of fragility and exposure. A mallow plant, originally found while gardening, has been recreated in glass with its root system exposed. This particular species commonly emerges from disturbed soil and indicates emerging biodiversity after a disaster. Another glass and bronze sculpture takes a finely latticed botanical form that suggests both containment and permeability. Its intricate construction reflects a sustained engagement



with vulnerability, where delicacy is not a weakness but a mode of attention. In these works, loss is neither obscured nor resolved. It is articulated through forms that remain open, provisional, and responsive.

*Heirloom* proceeds from Akashi's understanding of sculpture as a medium uniquely capable of holding absence in materiality. Rather than treating heirlooms as static tokens of remembrance, the exhibition proposes them as dynamic carriers of history, shaped as much by what is no longer present as by what endures.

#### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Executed with deft manual skill and astute material knowledge, Kelly Akashi's visual language emphasizes the impermanence of the natural world, recording and indexing fragmented moments in time. Her singular practice is characterized by a rigorous conceptual approach, yet the work is distinguished by a deep reverence for process. Always a student, Akashi is perpetually studying new practices and physical techniques such as glass-blowing, casting, candle-making and stone carving. The repeated use of the hand as motif serves as a symbol for Akashi's ongoing investigation into the temporality of the human experience. Often cast in bronze or crystal, her hands bear the mark of time on her body, her growing fingernails, and aging flesh. Towering sculpted weeds, delicately glass-blown flowers, a to-scale depiction of her body in polished travertine, enlarged casts of extinct species of shells; Akashi poetically and objectively encapsulates the notion of mortality in a ritualistic gathering of objects. However, her take on her own practice is not a morbid one. Akashi references the phrase *mono no aware*. "It refers to a wistful awareness of impermanence—the 'pathos of things'. It's central to *hanami*, the Japanese custom of venturing out to enjoy the brief season of cherry blossoms."

Kelly Akashi was born in 1983 in Los Angeles. She received a BFA from Otis College of Art & Design in 2006 and an MFA from the University of Southern California in 2014. She also studied at the prestigious Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste (Städelschule) in Frankfurt am Main, Germany in 2010. Akashi has been chosen as the Artist in Residence at Pilchuck Glass School for 2025. Recent solo exhibitions include 'Kelly Akashi – Converging Figures' Fondazione Furla Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan, Italy (13 September – December 8 2024) and 'Kelly Akashi: Encounters' at the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, USA (September 30, 2023 – June 15, 2024) and her 10-year survey, 'Formations', which began at the San José Museum of Art in 2022, travelled to the Frye Art Museum in Seattle and then to the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, through 2024. Recent group exhibitions include 'A Garden of Promise and Dissent', Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield,

CT, USA (17 November 2024 – November 2025); 'Spirit House', Cantor Arts Center, Stanford, CA, USA (September 4 2024 – 26 January 2025); 'Ecstatic: Selections from the Hammer Contemporary Collection', Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2023); 'Ground/work' at Clark Institute, Williamston, MA, USA (2020); 'Possessed', MO.CO Panacée, Montpellier, France; 'Take Me (I'm Yours)', The Jewish Museum, New York, NY, USA (2016); and 'Made in LA: a, the, though, only', Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2016).

#### **ABOUT LISSON**

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.