



# Artist Jae Ko: This is how she rolls

By Molly Glentzer | July 1, 2016

Photo: Paul Hester, Photographer

## IMAGE 1 OF 6

A detail of Jae Ko's site-specific installation "Flow," which is on view at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston through Sept. 18.

Just as summer temperatures begin to feel unbearable, glaciers appear to have slid down the walls into the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's Zilkha Gallery.

They could be melting or rising.

"Flow," a poetic, site-specific installation by artist Jae Ko, is composed from about 2 tons of recycled, bleached Kraft paper in large rolls that the artist has transformed, through a laborious process, into a malleable material that she fastens to walls and spills onto the floor.

The way the rolls flow around each other is reminiscent of dense embroidery, full of turbulent "stitches."

Ko also thinks of her work as a kind of three-dimensional drawing. She often pulls the center of

a roll outward or shoves it inward, creating a ripple effect of countless "lines" that also suggest layers of topography.

"When the light hits it ... every time you move, the lines follow you. I always enjoy watching this," she said.

Ko, a native of Korea who lives near Washington, D.C., has always been fascinated by America's vast landscapes. She and her husband, sculptor James Sanborn (whose monumental installation "A Comma, A" stands outside the University of Houston's library) have sought out grand vistas since 1998.

They drove from Washington state through Alaska to the Arctic Circle, as far as they could go, in 2002 and also explored Canada's northeast, looking for icebergs.

"Years of traveling - all these geological shapes, organic shapes of ideas - are put into this," Ko said.

She doesn't mind if viewers see something completely different.

"They have a right to," she said.

The first work of Ko's to be shown at the museum, "Flow" belongs to a series she calls "Force of Nature."

She spent 10 days reconfiguring it in Houston, but the elements are recycled from a larger installation, "Shiro," that evoked snowy scenery earlier this year at a place with much higher ceilings, the Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton, N.J.

The installation gets added depth from the slight variations of color in the paper. That wasn't planned, Ko said.




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## MORE INFORMATION

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### 'Flow'

**When:** 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursdays; 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays; noon-6 p.m. Sundays, through Sept. 18

**Where:** Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 5216 Montrose

**Tickets:** Free; 713-284-8250, [camh.org](http://camh.org)

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She had ordered one color of paper and was angry when it arrived on four pallets - each a different color - at the New Jersey site, where she and 11 assistants spent five weeks unrolling it, re-rolling it more loosely without the spools, and installing it. They didn't have time to wait for another order, so Ko went with the, um, flow.

"I thought, maybe it could be interesting. Just work with it instead of getting (ticked off)," she said. "Accidents are always good."

Ko studied graphic and commercial design in Japan before moving to the U.S. to earn her MFA. Inspired early on by calligraphy and traditional Asian hairstyles, she has experimented with all kinds of paper as a sculptural medium.

She buried Kraft paper in beach sand for one of her early projects but happened upon her signature - the roll-based sculptures - after she discovered boxes of machine paper at an office-supply store in 1996.

"I didn't know what I was looking for. I saw these tiny rolls being sold in boxes, cheap. So I grabbed a box," she said.

She tried soaking the rolls in water, cutting them, burning them; and as she began to master the material, she also began to dye it with pigment and manipulate it with glue to make wall reliefs and spiraling, free-standing sculptures.

Ko's work for site-specific installations started out with rolls of Kraft paper that were factory-size, 48 inches wide. She's worked her way down to a 5-inch width now - so she can manipulate the paper by hand and doesn't need a crane to hang it.

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## ARTS & THEATER

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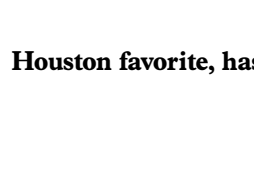
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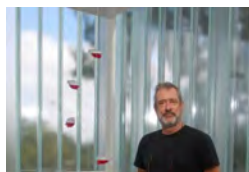
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The rolls of "Flow" are made from 90-pound stock, a bit thicker than a book jacket.

With Ko's touches, the museum's dark and cavelike basement feels like a different place. She wanted daylight - and lo and behold, the space has room-length rows of high windows that have long been covered.

"I wanted to make it as bright as possible, to have a cold, snowy, arctic feeling during this steamy Houston weather," she said. "Lowering the temperature might help, too."

**Molly Glentzer**

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