



For immediate release

Sophia Chai – *Mother Photography*

at

HAIR + NAILS NYC

39 Henry St. New York, NY 10002

OPENING RECEPTION: Saturday, October 25, 2025. 6:00-9:00pm

OPEN GALLERY HOURS: walk-ins welcome: Fridays/Saturdays/Sundays 1:00-6:00 starting October 26 through December 14. Also, appointments can be scheduled 7 days/week via hairandnailsart@gmail.com.

HAIR+NAILS is thrilled to announce the second show of their second season in New York with *Mother Photography*, a solo show by gallery artist Sophia Chai, opening Saturday, October 25 at 39 Henry St. in New York City's Chinatown/Two Bridges neighborhood. This will be the third HAIR+NAILS solo show with Chai, the first two (*Interpolation*, 2020 and *Mouth-Space*, 2023) at the gallery's mothership location in Minneapolis.

The seven vibrantly hued yellow, blue, and red compositions of "Mother Photography" appear at first as minimalist paintings in kinship with Piet Mondrian or Barnett Newman. On closer look, subtle shadows appear as the expressive geometric lines and color blocks cross walls and floors revealing the works to be photographs of the artist's studio. They are recordings of the artist's many back-and-forths between studio corner and analog view camera, of bending of line through a lens, of the elemental experience of light through the lens like morning sun through into the opening of a cave.



In the artist's words:

"I drive photography on toward its origin as a phenomenon of light and space while pushing it toward elusive, hard-to-read forms. Working within the rectangular room of my studio, I use modest materials (masking tape, graphite, and paint) alongside an analog view camera to build compositions that mimic minimalist drawings or paintings. Upon closer inspection, the shadows of three-dimensional space emerge: a phenomenological mirage born of simple means.

My recent work draws from a childhood memory of learning Hangul, the Korean alphabet. Since Mouth-Space (exhibited at Hair + Nails Gallery in Minneapolis in 2023), I returned to the three foundational elements of Korean vowel characters: the horizontal line (—), vertical line (/), and a small dot (·), each symbolizing the earth, a standing person, and the sky, or an opening. I began drawing new compositions of horizontal and vertical lines, treating the camera's aperture as that symbolic opening to the sky.

I began with yellow. Then I followed with blue and red.

In Mother Photography the viewer repeatedly encounters the same studio corner across seven photographs presented here in the gallery. Lines are scribbled in graphite, dry brushstrokes highlight the texture of the wall, and painterly gestures unfold sequentially. In this subtle dialogue between flatness and form, surface and space, I build layers with a tactile sense of play.

The photographs are printed on hanji, Korean mulberry paper, a new material I began working with this year. They are held in place by magnets on walnut wood apparatuses. I wanted to free the paper from rigid mounting substrates and let the air move through its surface, unfiltered by the invisible shield of glass.

In the three yellow photographs, the process unfolds in two possible sequences: marks either accumulate or dissolve, until only two lines remain against a yellow background. In the two photographs, both titled | | —, what differentiates the two photographs is the slight change of the camera's position, echoing the panning movement of the viewer across the gallery space.

At the far end of the gallery, the work titled ㅏ, directly references an early piece from Mouth-Space. The viewer's back-and-forth movement now spans across two bodies of work. A visual form returns, once again translating the sound of a Korean vowel into space.

In my studio practice, I am trying to take photography back to its mother origins. I like to imagine what it might have felt like to sense the beginning of a new day: sunlight permeating through the mouth of a cave. The phenomenon of light traveling through an aperture is, at its core, what a camera is. Each time I make a photograph in my studio, I feel as though I am returning to that cave — a camera obscura, a darkened room, a womb.

But rather than projecting the outside world into the space, my windowless studio turns inward - where lines and shapes, drawn and painted in a corner, begin to take on a different plane. Through the optics of the camera, these forms flatten, foreshorten, and elongate. What they project emerges from an intuitive impulse — an internal gestation."

— Sophia Chai, fall 2025

ARTIST BIO:

Sophia Chai (1973, Busan, South Korea) is a Rochester, MN based artist. Her work has been widely exhibited at venues including Luhring Augustine, Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, A.I.R. Gallery, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Knockdown Center, and Bethel University (St. Paul, MN), among many others. Chai's solo exhibitions include 106 Green Gallery (Brooklyn, NY, 2016), Rochester Art Center (MN, 2020), Hair+Nails Gallery (Minneapolis, 2020 & 2023), and Light Work (Syracuse, NY, 2024). This fall, she will present her third solo exhibition with Hair+Nails Gallery, this time in NYC. She is the recipient of the 2024/25 McKnight Visual Artist Fellowship. Her work has been supported by the Jerome Foundation (2019-2020), Minnesota State Arts Board (2020, 2022, 2023, 2025), Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council (2019), and The First Ten (2024-25). Recent press includes *Artforum*, *MUSEÉ Magazine*, and *Document Journal*. In 2024, she completed her first permanent outdoor public project, commissioned by the City of Rochester and Destination Medical Center. As an adjunct faculty member at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Chai is teaching the Graduate Critique Seminar this fall. She holds a BA in chemistry from the University of Chicago and an MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Chai is represented by Hair+Nails Gallery (Minneapolis, NYC).

www.sophiachai.com

Instagram: [@sophiachainyc](https://www.instagram.com/sophiachainyc)



HAIR and NAILS is a contemporary art gallery owned and operated by RYAN FONTAINE & KRISTIN VAN LOON since 2016. We are dedicated to exhibiting compelling and thought-provoking visual art and performance across all media. With two brick and mortar locations, in Minneapolis and New York City's Chinatown, H+N provides space and support for new work and new ideas. In the ongoing and evolving project that is HAIR and NAILS we seek to provide fertile ground where visionary work and generative collaborations can germinate and flourish from an artist-first perspective.

GALLERY CONTACT:

HAIR+NAILS

Kristin Van Loon & Ryan Fontaine

hairandnailsart@gmail.com

415-987-3037 (Ryan)

612-229-0585 (Kristin)

2222 E. 35th St. Minneapolis, MN 55407

&

39 Henry St. New York, NY 10002

www.hairandnailsart.com

[@hairandnailsmpls](#)

[@hairandnails_nyc](#)

HAIR+NAILS

HAIR+NAILS NYC