

Minneapolis Institute of Art

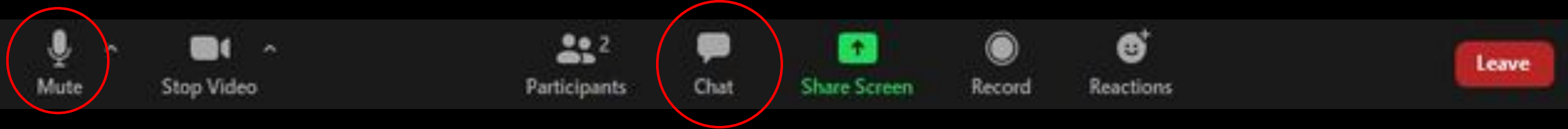
# The Island of Sea Women

Book Tour by Ginny Wheeler

# Mia

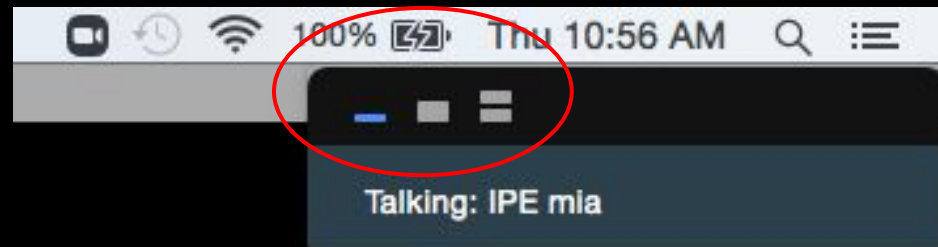
# Zoom controls

Please mute your audio at the start. To unmute, click on the microphone icon or simply press down and hold the spacebar to temporarily unmute.



If you wish to share via the Chat feature, just click on the Chat icon to open and type your comment or question.

To minimize the speaker window when the presentation begins, click on the line or middle square.



# Building Relationships

At the heart of the story is the friendship and estrangement between Mi-ja and Young-sook, a story that begins in 1938 on the Korean island of Jeju.

Storytelling becomes the key to bridging these relationships. Two stories unfold: Mi-ja's and Young-sook's.

The book opens in 2008 and then flashes back to 1938 when Mi-ja's and Young-sook's lives become entangled forever.

The power to understand and to forgive lies in storytelling.

# Building Relationships: A Creation Story



“As a goddess, [Grandmother Seolmundae] flew over the seas, looking for a new home. She carried dirt in the folds of her skirt. She found this spot where the Yellow Sea meets the East China Sea and began to build herself a home. Finding it too flat, she used more of the dirt in her gown, building the mountain until it was high enough to reach the Milky Way. ...

[wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com)

“Soon her skirt became worn and tiny holes formed in the cloth. Soil leaked from it, building small hills, which is why we have so many oreum. In each one of these volcanic cones, another female deity lives. They are our sisters in spirit, and you can always go to them for help.’

“‘Grandmother Seolmundae watches over us all,’ we chanted.” p. 29



Wikipedia.org



**Delita Martin, *The Soaring Hour (Self Portrait)*, 2018, American, Relief printing, charcoal, acrylic, colored pencil, decorative paper, and hand-stitching on paper, 2019.35.1**



Martin: “The duality of women in this...work projects the spirit and its connection to the physical world, which reinforces the bond among women.”





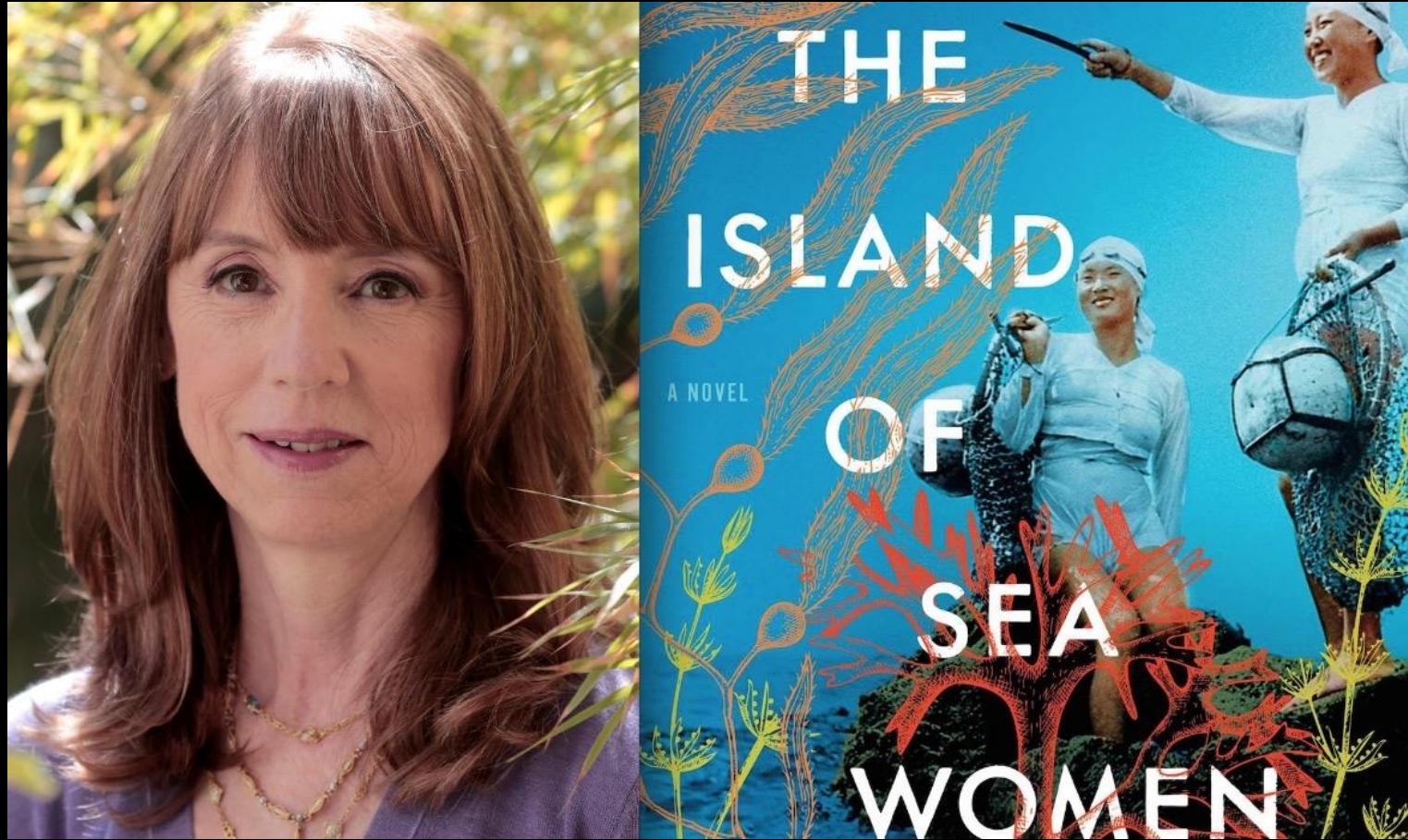




Sande mask, second quarter of  
20th Century, Mende, Wood, raffia,  
72.69.1



# Carol Poulson: Friends Book Discussion Leader presents Lisa See



Bookbub.com



# Lisa See goes to Jeju Island.



[JejuWeekly.com](http://JejuWeekly.com)



[LisaSee.com](http://LisaSee.com)

# Themes: A Novel about Forgiveness

We will break from the presentation at this point to discuss the book so that we can see each other. I encourage you to click on the grid view. Unmute yourself when you wish to make a contribution. You may also type a response in the chat.

1. What other themes come to mind?
2. Lisa See vividly describes emotion-packed moments in the book. Which moment stands out for you?



# Building Relationships: Tall Tales from the Sea

“I listen for the **sumbitori** of all women in our collective. Together our sumbitori create a song of the air and wind on Jeju. Our sumbitori is the innermost sound of the world. It connects us to the future and the past. Our sumbitori allows us first to serve our parents and then our children.” p. 12



Haenyeo were called “Sirens of the Deep” and “Mermaids of Asia” to make them appear exotic.

How does this depiction of Mami Wata, an ancient Nigerian water spirit, make her appear exotic?

Mami Wata figure,  
1950s, Igbo, Wood  
and pigment, 2011.29

# Bridging Relationships: Sacred Stories

**“We sleep on [Grandmother Seolmundae] every night,’ we recited. ‘We wake on her every morning.’**

**‘When you go into the sea, you dive among the underwater ripples of her skirt. She is the great volcano at the center of our island. Some people call it Mount Halla,...to us, she *is* our island. Anywhere we go, we can call to her and weep out our woes, and she will listen.’ p. 31**





Think of this image in human terms. It's not a volcano, it's a god or goddess. How would you describe this deity?

Hagiwara Hideo, *Dawn over Lake Kawaguchi*, 1981-1986,  
Woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 2019.138.5

## Mount Halla today



Wikipedia.org

“It used to be said that the sea’s gifts were like a mother’s love, unending, but parts of the sea are turning white, where coral, algae, seaweed, and sea creatures have perished. Some of this has been caused by the change in climate, some by overfishing, and some by human disregard. ...



## The top of Mount Halla today

...Therefore, the haenyeo will dive for a harvest of styrofoam, cigarette filters, candy wrappers, and bits of plastic. The man from the cooperative ends his orders with ‘Young-sook and the Kang sisters will gather litter on the shore today.’” p. 174



Wikipedia.org



# Building Relationships: The Rubbings

**“[Mi-ja] ripped a page from the book and held it over the written character name for the boat. Even tied up, it bobbed in the waves, making it nearly impossible for Mi-ja to keep the paper steady and for me to rub it with charcoal. Once I was done, we took a moment to examine the result: a shadowy image of a character we couldn’t read but knew meant ‘Sunrise.’ We’d been commemorating our favorite moments and places this way for years. It wasn’t our best rubbing, but with it we’d remember today forever.” p. 21**

# Let's meet the creator of Lamb Chops



NewYorkTimes.com

Ethel Stein in her New York studio. She died in 2018 at 100.





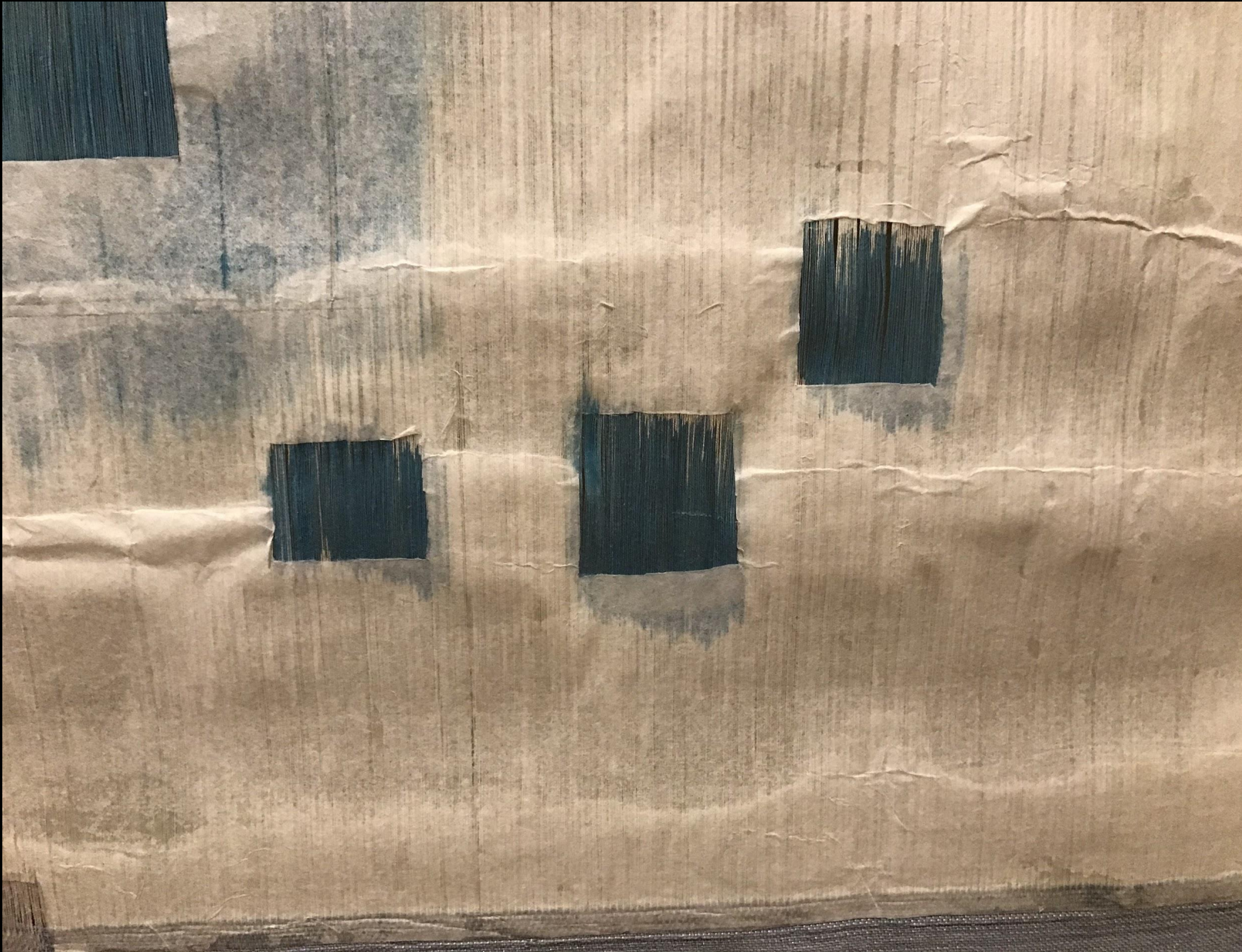


Ethel Stein, *Spring,  
Rain, Wind,  
Sun*, 2011, Cotton  
fibers, Japanese  
paper, 2015.28

How does Ethel Stein capture  
the idea of each of the  
elements in her title: *Spring,  
Rain, Wind, Sun?*







Ethel Stein, *Spring,*  
*Rain, Wind,*  
*Sun,* 2011, Cotton  
fibers, Japanese  
paper, 2015.28

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# Bridging Relationships: A Story of Grief

Breath is life-giving, but on the day of the 4.3 Incident, Young-sook held her breath:

“I stopped breathing, holding in air longer than could be possible, as if I were in the deepest part of the sea. When I couldn’t hold it any longer, I sucked in not the quick death of seawater but instead unforgiving, unrelenting, life-giving air.

“And then the shooting began.” p. 231



Look at the the way the chrysanthemum is depicted. Why do you think the Koreans may have chosen it to honor the dead?



Maebyeong with  
Chrysanthemums,  
11th-12th century,  
Korean,  
2015.79.482a,b



Covered Box with  
Chrysanthemums, 13th century,  
Korean, 2015.79.489a,b

# Bridging Relationships: Choosing Life

“For a tree that has many branches, even a small breeze will shake some loose.” p. 282

Dol Hareubang, sculpted from the island's volcanic rock, is a grandfather figure, a protector. He is seen here protecting Jeju Island.



[mysalaam.com](http://mysalaam.com)





Tomb Guardian  
Figures, 16th-18th century,  
Korean, Granite,  
2015.79.533.1-2

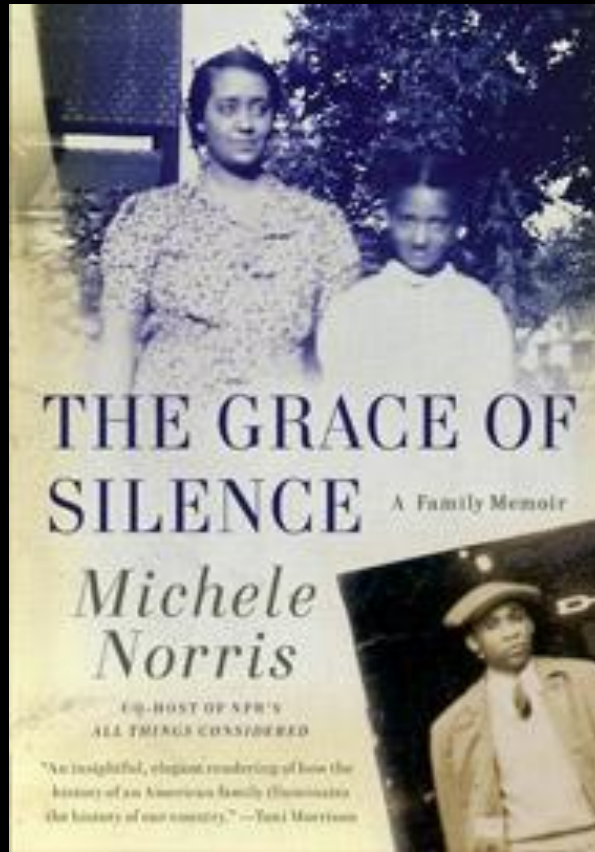
“For years, people have pestered Young-sook to tell her story. Always she’s said no. But now . . . the people asking carry within them the blood of Mi-ja and Young-sook. Yes, she’ll finally tell her story. She’ll tell them about the pain she endured but also about her closed heart that could not forgive. ...

“How can she not be transported back to the relationship she had with her closest friend, right on this beach, as they’d learned to swim, play, and love together? ...

A breath,  
a breath,  
a breath . . . ” p. 365

# October Selection:

## *The Grace of Silence* by Michele Norris



[Michele-Norris.com](http://Michele-Norris.com)