



1995-2024

The Last Pavilion

The Archival Publication
of the Korean Pavilion
at the Venice Biennale



ARTS COUNCIL
KOREA









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Introduction

1. The official name of the Venice Biennale in Italian is “La Biennale di Venezia.” Its art exhibition is followed by the title “International Art Exhibition,” but this part of the name is omitted and the proper noun “Venice Biennale” is used in this publication to refer to the art event.
2. The Giardini and Castello are often used interchangeably to refer to the location at which the Korean Pavilion of the Venice Biennale is located. The accurate description of the location is, in fact, the Giardini within the district of Castello (Giardini della Biennale, Sestiere Castello 30122 Venice). In this publication, we call this place “the Giardini,” which means “park” in Italian.
3. In the Korean edition, proper nouns such as the names of people and places are only provided in Korean without their English or Romanized versions. For their names in English or their original languages, please refer to *The Last Pavilion*, the English edition of this publication.
4. The Romanization of proper nouns in Korean are based on their Korean pronunciations, with the exception of the names of some artists or writers, which were specifically provided.
5. ARKO Arts Archive under the Arts Council Korea (ARKO) currently archives “The Venice Biennale Collection” as a separate set of records. Most records referenced in this archival publication were drawn from and organized according to the ARKO Arts Archive collection data, and the sources of other references are provided in as much detail as possible. Nevertheless, there were still some materials for which their copyrights were unknown, and in such cases, information was identified and shared to the best of our knowledge. Should there be any material for which their source should be corrected or that requires discussion with regard to copyright, please contact the editorial team.
6. Chapter 2 consists of prefaces from the 1995 to 2024 exhibition catalogues, writings by commissioners/curators, and interviews. Republished texts are provided with accurate citations of their sources and minimal corrections and revisions were made, with changes made only to symbols, units, word spacing, and proper nouns. Each exhibition’s credits are based on the information published in the

exhibition catalogues and websites, but the order and method in which they are printed have been modified in some parts to maintain consistency throughout this publication.

7. The official website of the Venice Biennale was referenced for the abbreviated history of the Venice Biennale in Chapter 4, while the ARKO website and *Arts Council Korea, Its 40-Year History* (1973 – 2013) were referenced for the brief history of ARKO. *Seoul Mediacity Biennale 1900–2020* Report (Seoul Museum of Art, 2022), *Korean Art 1900–2020* (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2021), and *Kim Yong-Ik Solo Exhibition: Closer... Come Closer...* (Ilmin Museum of Art, 2016) were used for the chronology of major events in the Korean history of contemporary art. Other general history of Korea referenced in this publication is based on information found on the NAVER News Library and the “Chronology and Records: Archiving Changes of the Eras” page on the National Archives of Korea website.
8. Hyperlinks are embedded in the § symbols and footnotes found throughout the text, providing direct links to the relevant footnote reference and writer information.



▼ Photos from the opening ceremony of the Korean Pavilion, 1995. © Mancuso e Serena Architetti Associati. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

Foreword

Founded in 1895, the Venice Biennale stands as the world's oldest and most prestigious international art exhibition, comprising the main exhibition led by curators and national pavilion exhibitions representing individual participating countries. Since opening the Korean Pavilion as the last national pavilion in the Giardini, the main venue of the Venice Biennale centennial in 1995, Arts Council Korea (ARKO) has served as a bridgehead to introduce South Korean art to the global stage for the past 30 years. In celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Korean Pavilion, ARKO launches this archival publication, *The Last Pavilion*, in conjunction with the opening of the special exhibition *Every Island is a Mountain* in Venice, to reflect on its achievements and to redesign its future vision.

Since 1928, the Venice Biennale has operated the Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts (ASAC), a dedicated archival space, which has played a pivotal role in broadening the scope of academic research and discussion surrounding the biennale. ARKO has also built up a collection primarily consisting of documentary materials related to the previous editions of the Venice Biennale at ARKO Art Archive, founded in 1979 to collect, preserve, and provide access to important archival materials that trace the history of modern and contemporary Korean art. The collection includes 3,973 pieces of records related to the establishment and construction of the Korean Pavilion, donated by Professor Franco Mancuso, co-architect of the Korean Pavilion, as well as a wide range of documentary materials produced by the commissioners and curators involved in the previous exhibitions at the Korean Pavilion. Drawing on these archival sources, this publication presents the historical significance of the Korean Pavilion and its vision for the future, featuring a chronology of 15 art exhibitions held at the Korean Pavilion since its foundation, exhibition forewords by previous commissioners and curators, and newly written contributions by architect Franco Mancuso and former commissioners Kim Hong-hee, Young-chul Lee, former deputy commissioner Kyoung-yun Ho.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the authors who readily accepted the commission to contribute to this publication and the previous curators and artists who generously provided valuable materials and granted permission for their use in this archival publication, which captures the history of the Korean Pavilion at the biennale. My aspiration is for this publication to serve as a valuable resource for diverse academic studies and exhibition planning, encompassing not just the Korean Pavilion at the biennale but also the internationalization of South Korean art and South Korea's role and contributions to the international art scene.

Byoung Gug Choung
Chairperson
Arts Council Korea

Preface

This publication encapsulates the accomplishments of South Korean art achieved over the past 30 years through its interaction with the world and their significance, centered on the Korean Pavilion, which was built in 1995 as the last national pavilion in the Giardini, the main stage of the Venice Biennale. It brings together exhibition-related texts and materials produced by the architects who designed the Korean Pavilion and the commissioners and curators who organized the exhibitions, and includes a chronology outlining the history of the pavilion, alongside contributions that reevaluate the Korean Pavilion in the context of the shifting global cultural and artistic landscape since the end of the last century.

Chapter 1, on the background and process of building the Korean Pavilion, begins with recollections from Venice-based architect Franco Mancuso and Korean architect Seok Chul Kim, who co-designed the Korean Pavilion. They vividly recount how Nam June Paik, whom Kim could encounter a year after being invited to participate in the Venice Architecture Biennale in 1992, proposed the construction of the Korean Pavilion at a meeting with the South Korean president, making it a governmental project. The process of obtaining permission from the city of Venice and completing construction in seven months was genuinely remarkable. Mancuso's recollections also depict the passionate and friendly interactions among the individuals involved, who pooled their wisdom to meet the highly strict architectural requirements, from finding an empty spot between protected trees to build the last pavilion to ensuring that the building did not change the terrain or obstruct the surrounding scenery. The establishment of the Korean Pavilion, dubbed a "small miracle" by the mayor of Venice at the time, raises an important question of what the Korean Pavilion means to us 30 years later. In particular, Seok Chul Kim's assertion that "The Korean Pavilion is not just a national pavilion, but the first pavilion to start the next 100 years," which impressed the Venetian authorities, reveals a vision and symbolic significance of the Korean

Pavilion that hints at South Korea's contribution and role in the new, multifaceted landscape of global cultural politics, instead of simply being a source of pride for an emerging culturally advanced country.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide an overview of the 15 exhibitions at the Korean Pavilion that have served as a bridgehead for the internationalization of South Korean art since its establishment. Through the various texts written by the 15 commissioners/curators at the time of the exhibitions, one can trace the curatorial changes from the early exhibitions that explored Korean identity to the more recent exhibitions that resonate with the various themes presented by the main exhibition of the biennale. In Chapter 3, "The Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion and Curatorship," Kim Hong-hee reviews the past 30 years of exhibitions in the Korean Pavilion in relation to the main exhibition, highlighting that "South Korean curators who are active on the global stage harbor ambitions of achieving a global quality while also ensuring their own identity based on discourses of difference." Kim's perspective, which describes the biennale as "a process of endless dialectical collision between internationalism and nationalism," is echoed in Young-chul Lee's essay on Nam June Paik, who served a central role in establishing the Korean Pavilion. In "How the Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion Came to Be," he reinterprets the 1993 Venice Biennale's main exhibition and the German Pavilion's winning of the Golden Lion Award, in which Paik participated, as symbolic events marking the emergence of a new paradigm in cultural politics accompanying the collapse of communism and the massive changes brought about by globalization, explaining how the Korean Pavilion was founded within this context of profound change. That is, Paik's artistic insight into Eurasia as a continuum divided by Western-centrism and his artistic commitment to connecting the fragmented world through media technology is inherent in the Korean Pavilion, built two years later in 1995.

In "30 Years of Adversities, Connecting Broken Trajectories," Kyoung-yun Ho summarizes the changes in the operation of

the Korean Pavilion, focusing on the role of commissioners, the selection of curators, and corporate sponsorship. Additionally, she presents the challenges ahead, including the aging of the building, budget increases, and full-scale archiving, while asking what new vision the Korean Pavilion can offer beyond serving as a platform to introduce South Korean artists. She reflects that the nature of national pavilions "can be characterized by its fluidity, which disrupts the lines between the center and the peripheral. Moreover, artistic imagination demonstrated across diverse territories gives rise to a new community." Such insight leads to the understanding that the role of national pavilions is not about selecting artists to represent the country and competing, but about seeking to change the cultural landscape through the formation of new relationships.

This publication is an archival accomplishment that compiles information from the past, but it is also an intermediate output created through processes to chart the course for the future. A series of initiatives, including the roundtable discussion "The Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: Issues and Possibilities for a New Future," the nationwide public hearing "Discussing the Sustainability of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale," and the symposium "Sustainability of Biennales and the Internationalization of South Korean Art," pursued since 2023 in the run-up to the 30th anniversary of the Korean Pavilion, as well as the exhibition *Every Island is a Mountain*, which will be held in Venice during the 2024 Venice Biennale, will open up new ways for the next generation to encounter the world through the Korean Pavilion. I hope this publication will serve as a guide in this endeavor.

Jade Keunhye Lim
General Director
ARKO Art Center



I. Prequel

The Last Pavilion

Kyoung-yun Ho

Behind the Scenes: Designing the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

Seok Chul Kim

On the 30th Anniversary of the Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion (EN)

IL PADIGLIONE DELLA COREA ALLA
BIENNALE DI VENEZIA (IT)

Franco Mancuso & Ernesta Serena

The Last Pavilion

§ Kyoung-yun Ho

This publication examines the development of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale over the 30 years since its inauguration in 1995 by focusing on the trajectory of the art exhibitions displayed there. Before proceeding, we will summarize the historical evolution of the Venice Biennale, the characteristics of the Korean Pavilion, and the circumstances in South Korea and Venice between 1993 and 1995 that brought forth the construction of the very last national pavilion in the Giardini.

National Pavilions Nestled in the Park

When the Venice Biennale was first planned in 1895, the founding principle was that the number of Italian artists would not exceed the number of foreign artists. It was intended to showcase 150 works by artists from 14 different countries, 150 works by Italian artists, and 50 additional works selected by a committee. The idea of national pavilions originated after the first iteration when the Italian artists criticized the “internationality” of the biennale. In response, the Secretary-General of the biennale, Antonio Fradeletto, proposed that a dedicated pavilion for each country be built in the Giardini della Biennale in the Castello district to showcase the works of the foreign artists. This proposal opened many possibilities for the Venice Biennale. The municipal authorities of Venice approved this project to showcase foreign artists and authorized the construction of national pavilions in the Giardini.

Countries who received approval from the city of Venice could immediately decide if they wished to build their own national pavilion. If an agreement to build one was reached between a country and the city of Venice, the pavilion became the property of the corresponding

state. The nation would assume the responsibility for all expenses and maintenance of the pavilion. As a result, the Venice Biennale was able to gain another source of revenue and secure additional space for Italian artists in the main exhibition hall while easing the burden of the costs of operating the event. The Belgian Pavilion became the first to open under this system in 1907. It was followed by the Hungarian Pavilion (1909), the German Pavilion (1909), the British Pavilion (1909), the French Pavilion (1912), the Dutch Pavilion (1912), and the Russian Pavilion (1914). Nine additional pavilions were built in the 1950s and 1960s, and the Australian Pavilion went up in 1988. South Korea constructed its national pavilion in 1995 and remains the last country to open a pavilion in the Giardini.

It is worth noting, however, that in the years since the Australian Pavilion opened in 1988, many countries have rented buildings outside of the Giardini to host their own national pavilion exhibitions. South Korea participated in the Venice Biennale four times between 1986 and 1993 before the Korean Pavilion was founded. The participating artists and commissioners were as follows: At the 42nd edition (1986), artists Ha Dong-chul and Ko Young-hoon, and commissioner Lee Yil; at the 43rd edition (1988), artists Park Seo-bo and Kim Kwan-soo, and commissioner Ha Chong-Hyun; at the 44th edition (1990), artists Hong Myung-seop and Cho Sung-mook, and commissioner Seung-taek Lee; and at the 45th edition (1993), artists Ha Chong-Hyun and commissioner Seo Seung-won. They carried out their exhibitions under very poor conditions in a booth-like space with walls approximately 20 meters in length at the Arsenale exhibition hall.

Representatives of the Korean Ministry of Culture and Sports and other South Korean art figures had repeatedly approached the city of Venice in attempts to secure a better space, but each time their requests were turned down. There was very little space left in the Giardini, and many countries were waiting in line to build pavilions there. Countries sought to build their pavilions within the Giardini not only for its historical significance, but also for its better accessibility to visitors—those who have visited the Venice Biennale in person

agree that there is a stark difference in accessibility between the spaces inside and outside of the Giardini. However, since the Giardini is designated as a Venetian cultural asset and not a single tree may be cut down without approval, the Venice Biennale was not even allowing expansions of existing buildings, let alone new construction within the park. However, as we all know, one more building would eventually be constructed in the park—the Korean Pavilion. Fast-forwarding to 1995, in a television interview clip showing the opening ceremony of the Korean Pavilion, Nam June Paik jokingly remarks to himself, “No one can build one after us. There were twenty countries waiting in front of us, and we built it.”¹



► Artist Ko Younghoon, the first Korean artist to participate in the Venice Biennale in 1986, photographed for commemoration at the award ceremony. Courtesy of Ko Younghoon.

The Midwife of the Korean Pavilion, Nam June Paik

Nam June Paik exhibited in the German Pavilion along with Hans Haacke at the Venice Biennale in 1993, and he took home the Golden Lion award. Paik used this momentum to lay the foundation for the realization of the Korean Pavilion. At a reception on the night of the Golden Lion award, Paik gathered with other figures from the Korean art world and some Korean entrepreneurs who were visiting Venice at the time and discussed the idea of establishing a Korean pavilion. The architect Seok Chul Kim, who had already exhibited and lectured in the city and at the University of Venice, was also present. Paik asked Kim to create a preliminary design and offered

to pay for the design fee. Paik met with city planners at Comune di Venezia, and he also formed public opinion in South Korea in favor of the construction of the pavilion.

“The government is barely interested in the international art scene. It is a great shame that we missed the opportunity to transform the former East German Pavilion that became available after German reunification or one of the museums near the Corderie where *Aperto 93* is being held. I hope that during the coming 100th anniversary of the Venice Biennale we will have the active support and interest of the Korean government.”²

Upon his return to South Korea, Paik met with the president Kim Young-sam in August 1993 and explained to him that building a Korean pavilion at the Venice Biennale would be a decisive step toward raising the global profile of Korean art. The president agreed, instructing Minister of Culture and Sports Lee Min-seop to pursue the idea. The minister hosted a luncheon at the Daejeon Expo, inviting Achille Bonito Oliva, president of the Venice Biennale’s executive committee, and Gino Di Maggio, the founder and president of Fondazione Mudima in Milan, to convey the government’s intentions and ask for cooperation. Kim Soon-gyu (then director of the Arts Promotion Bureau at the Ministry of Culture and Sports), Nam June Paik, Seok Chul Kim, and the art critic Yongwoo Lee also attended the luncheon.

The Italian critic Oliva, one of the founders of the Italian Transavantgarde, has deep ties with Korean art. He served on the jury of the Seoul Art Festival in 1990 at the suggestion of Lee O-young, then the first minister of the Ministry of Culture. The festival was organized by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art and curated by Yongwoo Lee. More than 60 leading artists from around the world were invited to create works using hanji (Korean traditional paper). At the time, Lee asked Oliva how Korea might be allowed to build a pavilion at the Venice Biennale, but his answer was that it would be impossible: the entire city of Venice is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, so there are strict development regulations. Furthermore, there were already too

many competing countries waiting to build their own pavilions in the Giardini. They included, China and Argentina, the latter of which was the original country of the largest immigrant group in Italy. Fortuitously, two years later, Oliva was appointed as the general director of the Venice Biennale.

“I invited Achille Bonito Oliva to join the jury of the Daejeon Expo’s Regenerative Sculpture Pavilion exhibition with Venice in mind. Nam June Paik was working on an exhibition project at the Daejeon Expo at the time, so he and I brought up the idea of a Korean pavilion at the Venice Biennale to Oliva once again. We suggested that if the Venice Biennale Foundation supports us, we can take care of the Venice municipal government, the Italian national government, the Cultural Heritage Administration, and others. Right after I said that, Paik jumped to the conversation with the trump card—a proposal for a shared usage of the pavilion between North and South Korea.”³

The South Korean side quickly drew up a proposal and began to contact the Venice authorities. They met with the Venice City Commissioner, the Director of the Cultural Heritage Administration, and the Director of the Architecture Bureau, and succeeded in receiving their promise that a formal proposal from the Korean government would be officially reviewed. On May 5, 1994, they submitted a formal application package for the construction of the pavilion. It contained a full application signed by the South Korean Ambassador to Italy, a letter from the Minister of Culture and Sports of South Korea to the Mayor of Venice, and a proposed design for the Korean Pavilion.

The atmosphere of this time, not long after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany in 1989, was still tinged with idealism. The slogan “Healing political tensions through art” and the manifest desire for the eventual reunification of North and South Korea played a major role in winning approval for the Korean Pavilion.⁴ However, around that time Kim Il Sung’s death created an unpredictable variable. In response, Vice Minister Kim Do-hyun, acting on behalf of the Minister of Culture and Sports,

Tourism, went to Venice to meet with the mayor. He presented the architectural conception of the pavilion and clarified the South Korean government's position on the Korean Pavilion as a symbolic project of a "New Korea" aiming at globalization. As a result, the project was approved in a little over a year.



► Left: *Korean Traditional Art*, The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, 1995. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea
Photo by CJYART STUDIO
Junyong Cho.



► Right, Bottom: *Korean Contemporary Art*, The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, 1995. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea
Photo by CJYART STUDIO
Junyong Cho.

The Korea Culture and Arts Foundation published books titled *Korean Traditional Art* and *Korean Contemporary Art* in Korean and English to provide an understanding of the art historical context of Korea ahead of the opening of the Korean Pavilion. Edited by Hwi Joon Ahn, the books include works by Kimsooja, Jheon Socheon, and others.

South Korea Brimming with International Aspirations in the 1990s

It is impressive that the Korea Pavilion was shepherded from the discussion stage to its opening within just two years. The mere seven months that passed from the groundbreaking ceremony⁵ on November 8, 1994 to the completion of the construction is especially remarkable. The Korean Pavilion was designed by Seok Chul Kim and Franco Mancuso. Samsung Construction Inc. was responsible for the framework, including the exterior glass, as well as the heating and cooling systems, while the Italian contractor ICCEM carried out the foundation, finishing, and facilities work. Samsung was responsible for the overall construction management,

and the South Korean governmental official who specializes in architecture and construction within the Ministry of Culture and Sports acted as an on-site supervisor. The original plan to complete the project in March 1995 had to be adjusted due to unforeseen circumstances, such as the need to modify plans to avoid damaging tree roots as mandated by the stringent local building code, or the halting of work for discussions over the demolition of existing sewer pipes with the Venice city authorities. To allow time for the installation of the exhibiting artists' works prior to the biennale's opening, the interior work was completed on May 15 and the building was inspected on May 30, 1995. After the exhibition opened, some finishing work was performed, and the pavilion was finally deemed completed on December 22.

The process leading to the opening of the Korean Pavilion at the 1995 Venice Biennale involved the efforts of various parties and a somewhat rushed progression. This reflected the economic and political situation in South Korea at the time and its political relations with the rest of the world. The successful opening of the Korean Pavilion despite the variables involved was due not only to the philosophy or ambitions of the individuals directly involved with the Pavilion, such as artists, curators, and architects, but also to the resolve of the government.

More importantly, the Korean Pavilion was made possible not only by South Korea's economic development but also the rapid increase in overseas activities and international exchanges taking place in South Korean art in the 1990s. The rapid industrialization and economic development of the 1970s had spurred many South Koreans' desires to take part in the international community, as exemplified by the international events hosted by South Korea, including the 1986 Asian Games, the 1988 Seoul Olympics, and the 1993 Daejeon Expo. In conjunction with these events, the South Korean art world began to more actively engage with its international counterparts. For example, works by established artists from other countries were brought in when creating the Olympic Sculpture Park and for special art exhibitions at the Daejeon Expo.

Especially since 1993, the Kim Young-sam administration, having moved away from the prior military regimes, strengthened its identity as a 'civilian government' and promoted decentralization and globalization as a motto. In 1994, the institute that was renamed the Korea Culture and Tourism Institute (initially established as the Korean Institute for Cultural Policy Development) aimed to develop systematic policies through research in the fields of culture and tourism. It also sought to nurture the culture industry. According to a report published in March 1995 that was designed to encourage the more active promotion of South Korean cultural centers overseas, the concept of international cultural exchange was defined as "Different cultures intersecting and joining the flow of a new world civilization." Accordingly, the report emphasized the role of the central government, local governments, public institutions, and public organizations as participants in international cultural exchanges. It also pointed out the inadequacies of South Korea's cultural exchanges in previous years and suggested a 'New Korea Cultural Development Five-Year Plan' that would be more appropriate for an era of globalization in line with the goals of the Kim Youngsam government.



► Logo of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 1995.

The symbolic logo type for the opening of the Korean Pavilion was designed by the design company HexaComm and was unveiled on May 18, 1995. At the time, the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation explained, "Adopting Korea's unique *Taeguk* mark as the basic shape, the logo expresses a sense of enterprising and active movement through the tail-like line that stretches out vigorously along a spiral trajectory, symbolizing the dynamic Korean art expanding to the world." It was used until the 1999 exhibition catalog.

A Forward Base for the Internationalization of South Korean Art

The year 1995 in which the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

was established had been named the “Year of Fine Arts” as the fifth part of South Korea’s ten-year cultural development plan called the “Year of Culture and Arts” that had been implemented since 1991. The plan was to build a foundation for the development of the arts and culture through focused support for respective sectors and specifically targeting improvement of the cultural and artistic sectors, supporting artists and arts organizations, and internationalizing the arts and culture. The General Director of the 1993 Venice Biennale Oliva, who actively interacted with the South Korean art scene before and after 1990 and helped establish the Korean Pavilion, said in a conversation with a South Korean art magazine:

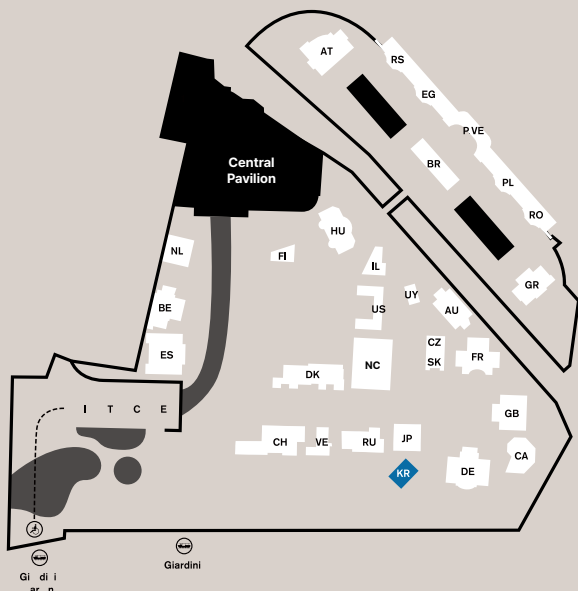
“Korea’s designation of this year as the ‘Year of Fine Arts’ is, in our opinion, an extraordinary event, and we believe it to be a very good opportunity. It would be considered impossible from a European mindset. I don’t know how many years ago this Year of Fine Arts was planned, but the issue is that in Europe, exhibition schedules are all set in advance, so the point would be to plan events that would occur in 1996 or 1997 for a Year of Fine Arts. I had an opportunity to make the first connection in realizing the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, but starting with the construction of the Pavilion, it would be desirable to try to establish a bridgehead in Europe. I think that events like the Gwangju Biennale, which is being planned this year, can help provide a foothold for Korean art to take part in international exchanges.”⁶

The year 1995 when the Korean Pavilion opened at the Venice Biennale was also the inaugural year for the Gwangju Biennale. From this year onward, a new system known as biennales began to take hold in the South Korean art world. In addition, the Busan Biennale (formerly PICAF Busan International Art Festival) in 1998 and the Seoul Mediacity Biennale (formerly the International Seoul Media Art Biennale) in 2000 were launched in succession. Thus, the framework of the three major South Korean Biennales was established. Biennales have become more than passing events and in some ways have become more influential than permanent exhibitions. They have been refined into a new system that shapes the environment and systems of the South Korean art world.

Around 30 members of the Seoul Performance Arts Company held a traditional Korean percussion parade from St. Mark's Square to the Korean Pavilion in the Giardini to commemorate the opening of the Korean Pavilion, which was completed almost simultaneously with the exhibition opening after numerous twists and turns. South Korea's Minister of Culture and Sports, Joo Don-sik, gave a brief speech, stating, "The Korean Pavilion will serve as a historic monument commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Venice Biennale and symbolizing a new encounter between East and West." After speaking, he announced that he would sing a song, and proceeded to sing "Torna a Surriento (Come Back to Sorrento)". In addition to the exhibition at the Korean Pavilion, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art organized a group exhibition titled *Tiger's Tail* and featuring works from 15 mid-career South Korean artists. It served as a catalyst to imprint South Korean art in the minds of the international art world. MBC TV broadcast live from the site of the Venice Biennale for 90 minutes,⁷ and *Wolgan Misul* (Monthly Art Magazine) created a special reporting team that produced an extensive feature article spanning 84 pages. Due to the related media impact, the domestic interest and response were tremendous, and over a thousand South Koreans came to the biennale in June alone.

30 years have passed since the establishment of the Korean Pavilion in 1995. There are many pressing related issues, such as the aging of the structure and the need for expansion or renovation. The size of the Korean Pavilion has been criticized ever since its construction. Its site in the back between the German and Japanese pavilions and its relatively small exhibition space have inspired complaints such as it "looking like a restroom for the Japanese pavilion" or "not an appropriate structure for an exhibition hall." However, we should remember the brilliant sparks of South Korean art that were ignited amidst this intersection of the efforts of many individuals, including Nam June Paik, to establish the Korean Pavilion and the interest of audiences from around the world who have visited the pavilion. As the last national pavilion within the Giardini, we have every reason to be proud.

Foundation of the National Pavilions in the Giardini



1895 [IT] Italy

1907 [BE] Belgium

1909 [HU] Hungary, [GB] Great Britain, [DE] Germany (rebuilt in 1938)

1912 [FR] France, [NL] Netherlands (rebuilt in 1954)

1914 [RU] Russia

1922 [ES] Spain

1926 [CZ, SK] Czech and Slovakia Federative Republic

1930 [US] United States of America

1932 [DK] Denmark (expanded in 1958), [P.VE] Venice (expanded

in 1958, [RS] Serbia, [EG] Egypt, [PL] Poland, [RO] Romania)

1934 [AT] Austria, [GR] Greece

1952 [IL] Israel, [CH] Switzerland

1956 [JP] Japan, [FI] Finland, [VE] Venezuela

1958 [CA] Canada

1962 [UY] Uruguay

1962 [NC] Nordic Countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland)

1964 [BR] Brazil

1988 [AU] Australia (rebuilt in 2015)

1995 [KR] Korea

Behind the Scenes: Designing the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

§ Seok Chul Kim

This will be a long story. When Richard Rogers, architect of Centre Pompidou, invited us to Venice in June 1992, I knew little of the Venice Biennale. All hotels in Venice were fully booked. With the help of Rogers, I was able to stay at Hotel Cipriani, a hotel mentioned in Sidney Sheldon's novel. It was also then that I learned about the international exhibition—that the first edition of the Venice Biennale took place in 1895 as an art exhibition, and cinema, theater, and architecture festivals were born later, with the four exhibitions and festivals taking place biannually at the Giardini for art and architecture exhibitions, the entire city of Venice for theater, and Lido for cinema. The Giardini, which was home to 25 national pavilions then, was crowded with architects from around the world. World-class architects like James Stirling, Norman Foster, Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman, Arata Isozaki, and Rem Koolhaas were spotted around the park. There, I met Professor Kim Kyong Soo, and he introduced me to Professor Franco Mancuso from Università Iuav di Venezia (IUAV). Mancuso asked me to give a lecture and explained his plans to hold an exhibition on a contemporary South Korean architect at the Palazzo Ca' Tron. He added that he wishes to stop by Seoul after delivering a lecture in Tokyo that was scheduled for two months later. He made it to Seoul and saw my work, and after discussion at a faculty meeting, it was decided that *Seoul, Architecture and Cities* will be held. After a year of preparations, the exhibition co-hosted by the City of Venice and the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Sports took place from February 25 to April 5, 1993. This was my fourth exhibition since my third one in 1975. Devoted assistance of Mancuso, Rinio Bruttomesso, and Kim Kyong Soo were critical in preparing and holding the exhibition.

Right around then, an art museum in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia,

offered me a joint exhibition with Nam June Paik. I assumed the offer was made as a result of Paik keeping his word from when he visited the Seoul Arts Center, where he told me that I should make my debut on the international stage and that he would be happy to arrange something for me. The exhibition in Venice was scheduled from February to April, and the Mimara Museum in Zagreb suggested June for the invitational exhibition, so timing was perfect too. Given that the exhibition in Zagreb was a joint exhibition, I decided to show experimental works as well as *Sky Village—Seoul Design Center*, which I had been focused on. Back then, the Venice Biennale took place every year in June, so early summer was a time when all eyes of the European art scene were on the event. Thanks to Nam June Paik who won the Golden Lion Award as an invited artist at the German Pavilion that year, our exhibition at the Mimara Museum also came under the spotlight. After the exhibition opened, Yeongseon Jin, Professor Yongwoo Lee, and sculptor Cho Sung-mook also flew in from Seoul.

After the exhibition opened in Zagreb, Paik and I headed back to Venice. It was during this eight-hour trip when our story of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale began. There were only 25 national pavilions in the Giardini, and other countries were exhibiting their works in the Italian Pavilion and vacant wings at the Arsenale.



► Seok Chul Kim's *Seoul, Architecture and Cities* Exhibition Poster, 1993. ©Seok Chul Kim, Mancuso e Serena Architetti Associati. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

20 countries had submitted requests for national pavilions, but none had been granted approval. South Korea was among them, having submitted a request already years earlier, but the only answer received was that there is no room for another pavilion in the Giardini. On the evening Paik was announced the winner of the Golden Lion Award, the wives of distinguished conglomerate business owners in South Korea and members of the South Korean art circle proposed in one accord in Venice that the Korean Pavilion be constructed. Paik suggested that we work together to make our national pavilion a reality, since I am already familiar with the City of Venice, thanks to holding exhibitions and lectures by invitation from the City of Venice and IUAV, and also have connections with many architects.

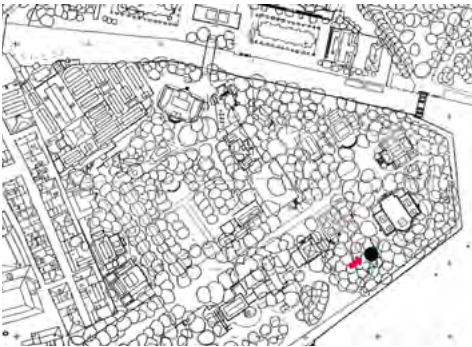
We spent every night meeting with journalists and art museum representatives who had been waiting for Paik, and during the day, we looked around the pavilion site with Professor Mancuso and Professor Bruttomesso. Thanks to Bruttomesso, who was the director of the International Centre Cities on Water (Centro Internazionale Città d'Acqua), Venice, we were able to meet with a number of urban planning representatives from the Venice City Hall. I thought the Korean Pavilion may not be an entirely impossible project. I told Paik that we may have a chance, though not easy, and then returned to Seoul. Later, Paik had the opportunity to visit Seoul and meet with the then South Korean president Kim Young-sam. He brought up the idea of constructing the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in his conversation with the president, explaining that it will play a critical role in elevating the status of South Korean art globally. The president agreed with Paik and ordered the Minister of Culture and Sports to push ahead with it. Professor Yongwoo Lee provided a lot of information then. The project that had been discussed and propelled at the individual level had transformed into a government-level project. Director of the Venice Biennale Achille Bonito Oliva and Director of the Mudima Foundation Gino Di Maggio were invited to Seoul on the occasion of the opening of Expo 1993 Daejeon, and the South Korean government expressed its determination to build a national pavilion and requested their cooperation. Minister Lee Min-seop also hosted a luncheon at the Korea House, with Paik, Oliva, Di Maggio, Yongwoo

Lee, Director General of Arts Kim Soon-gyu, and me in attendance.

Through the Italian interpreter who joined us, Oliva said, "It will probably be impossible. We are planning to set up a second exhibition space outside the Giardini, so let's discuss the matter then." Having expected this answer, we brought to the table a proposal we had prepared in advance. We proposed the construction of our national pavilion between the Japanese Pavilion, the German Pavilion, and the old administrative office, but at the underground level so as not to disrupt the existing buildings and vegetation. Upon hearing our idea, Oliva, who had been rather stubborn and had refused our drink offers, changed his attitude and said, "Cheers, let's give it a shot. No such proposal has been made so far. I will do what I can. There are many countries in competition, so we must be careful not to disclose your idea." We all had plenty of drinks that day.

We spent almost a month finalizing the proposal. First, we agreed to prepare some sketches and get in touch with the authorities of the City of Venice. We met with the Chairwoman of the City of Venice, Director General of Cultural Heritage Management, and Director General of Architecture and explained our idea. All were reluctant to hear our presentation at first, but after two to three days of persuasion, we were able to at least receive some positive feedback to have the project started, with them saying, "Let's take it a step further. Come back to us with a model." We also received confirmation that they would formally review our idea if an official proposal is submitted by the South Korean government. Upon returning to Seoul, I reported to the Minister of Culture and Sports that it is now time to begin inter-governmental discussions on the matter and also time for the South Korean government to make an official proposal. It was two winters ago (1993) that Director General of Arts Kim Soon-gyu delivered our Minister's handwritten letter to the mayor of Venice and the director generals of all relevant departments and made the official proposal.

Continued reviews in Venice revealed that the idea of an underground pavilion will not be viable, as tree roots extended in all directions. The



► Blueprint indicating the planned site for the Korean Pavilion, 1993.
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Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

alternative we proposed then was a transparent pavilion. During a conversation with the Director General of Urban Planning who was pessimistic about our endeavors, I mentioned that I had prepared in Seoul another proposal for a transparent pavilion as a fallback and that I will present and explain the idea the following day. After turning that corner, I spent all night sketching the proposal for a transparent pavilion. It was decided that a mockup will be made, and then the official proposal will be submitted, and I asked Professor Mancuso to conduct an accurate analysis of the terrain at the proposed site. I got in touch with the Venetian authorities again after working on the proposal in Seoul for a month. Just when we had shifted from the idea of an underground pavilion to a transparent pavilion and began to see some progress in the discussions with the city authorities, everything seemed to go back to square one with Venice having to elect a new mayor. The election was extended because no candidate came out with a majority vote in the first round. By that point, I had almost given up. Everyone we had been in touch with also said it is time to wait. But I thought differently—we had to push on all the more when things seemed slow and impossible. I developed the proposal furthermore and expanded the logic of persuasion.

I received a call from Nam June Paik in New York almost every day. “Don’t give up and go on. I will do whatever I can to help. Massimo Cacciari, who is likely to be elected, is with the Communist Party,

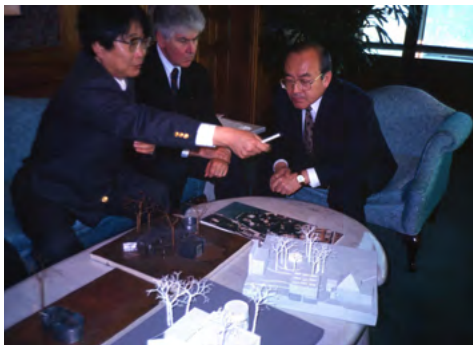
which is concerning, but I have a plan. You have to keep working," he said. After two months of the Venice mayor's office being vacant, Cacciari was elected. Fortunately, Cacciari was a close friend with Bruttomesso. Paik sent a letter with a drawing to Cacciari. In the letter, he wrote something along the lines of "It's an opportunity for you to be a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. The Giardini will celebrate its centenary next year, and if the only divided country in the world (South Korea and North Korea) with different ideologies participates to address the nuclear issue culturally, how significant and historical would it be?" Another letter with a drawing was sent to the rather critical Director General of Urban Planning. He happened to be a huge fan of Paik, so the letter played a significant role in turning the tide. But then, the head office of the Venice Biennale put the brakes on our project. People were saying that it would make more sense for the last national pavilion in the Giardini to be the Chinese Pavilion. China happened to be preparing a major exhibition on the Mausoleum of Qin Shi Huang (the first Qin emperor) in Venice then, so we also thought they had a point, that China may be prioritized in being granted the last pavilion in the Giardini.

That is when we made our final proposal. The first was "to go underground," next was "to be transparent," then the last was "to be visionary." For this last proposal, I took a new look at the history of the Venice Biennale and the history of the city itself. The Giardini was a park with many issues to address. It was commissioned by Napoleon, and since becoming home to the international art exhibition, the park only opened for three months every two years. That meant that it remained abandoned most of the time, so the park itself entailed a great challenge for the city authorities. Before explaining our proposal for the construction of the Korean Pavilion, we planned to present a reform plan for the entire Giardini and wanted to show that the construction and opening of the Korean Pavilion would mark a new beginning for the park itself.

"This historic site of international contemporary art that will celebrate its 100th anniversary is walking the path of its fall. It needs to be born again on the occasion of its centenary. The first step for that is

to open the Giardini year-round as an outdoor exhibition space and build a last pavilion that will serve as a permanent exhibition space to manage the entire park. Step two is to convert the Italian Pavilion into a permanent exhibition space and lead the transformation of each national pavilion into permanent exhibition spaces. If these two steps are carried out successfully, the Giardini will become a top art museum complex in the world, and the expansion of central Venice that spans the areas of Rialto, San Marco, and Giardini will be finally realized after centuries of stagnation. If built, the Korean Pavilion will be the 'last pavilion' in the Giardini in its centenary year, and it will also be the first pavilion that marks the beginning of the park's new century." We gave our everything to communicate our plan. I noticed a sign of agreement from the mayor who was once a professor of the philosophy of history at IUAV. He responded, "I will review the proposal in depth. Many countries have applied for national pavilions, so the matter must be handled fairly. It has not been long since I was elected, so I must speak with the relevant officers. Your proposal is very appealing, so I am deeply interested. Let's meet again with a thorough plan." You have a feeling for these things—conversations and connections between people. I said I would return in a month and headed back to Seoul.

It was now time to put together a detailed blueprint and a mockup. If the introduction stage drags on too long, progress takes longer, so we must push aggressively. I decided to drive the project at our pace instead of their tempo. I also added a touch of uniqueness to the mockup this time. I constructed it with lead and purposely did not use glass to emphasize transparency. I met again with the mayor of Venice, this time with a mockup and a blueprint. I could tell that he was fond of us. Paik's letter with a hand-drawn image and our proposal to revive the Giardini seemed to have moved him. He agreed in principle to turn the Italian Pavilion into a permanent exhibition space and make our building the first national pavilion with the transformation of the Giardini into an open-air museum. I met again with the Director General of Urban Planning, Director General of Architecture, and Director General of Cultural Heritage Management and explained the results of my discussion with the mayor.



► Seok Chul Kim and Franco Mancuso presenting the model of the Korean Pavilion, 1994
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Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

The mayor also asked us to submit a detailed plan on the operation of the pavilion. It looked like we were going to make some meaningful progress. Upon returning to Seoul, I reported back to the minister, advised that an official proposal from the government is needed given that we will see some substantial progress, and proposed that we work with Professor Mancuso who can partake in the project as the local architect. I anticipated him to be a great partner, as he was a professor of urban planning. In the basic plan for the Korean Pavilion, we included hopes for the building's harmonious integration with the grounds for the urban planning of Venice and the city's architectural cultural heritage. Minister Lee Min-seop Lee invited Professor Mancuso to Seoul to request his cooperation as the local architect and explain the South Korean government's position. We asked him to work on adjusting our proposal, so it works with the land conditions of the intended site for the pavilion. Mancuso came to my office and worked with my team for three days. Mancuso is also the author of books about the city of Venice, so his comments were extremely helpful. According to our plan, the entrance to the Korean Pavilion would be placed in the same direction as the Japanese Pavilion, so we decided to straighten out the end of the curved wall, adjust the curved wall so that it veers around the existing trees, and expand the cylindrical space that would sit between the former management building and the German Pavilion. The decision to place the double cylinder structure next to the existing building gave

satisfactory results. We had to work with the condition of leaving the trees untouched, which meant that our original proposal had to be modified, but the modification added better developments too. It was a process of what Mayor Cacciari called "a spaceship" designed in Seoul, culturally setting its base among the trees and existing pavilions in the Giardini.

In April 1994, an official request for approval was submitted by the South Korean government to the City of Venice. The submission came after five visits to Venice over the course of ten months since the inception of the Korean Pavilion after a conversation with Nam June Paik. I expected everything to sail smoothly now. But that was far from the case. There were hurdles everywhere. That was the second time I wanted to give up. I got in touch with everyone I could around me. China came up again, Japan voiced its desire to enlarge their national pavilion, and we began to hear that the plan for the Korean Pavilion cannot be approved because the master plan for the Giardini and other public parks in the vicinity was incomplete. Letting go meant no achievement. Everyone was going to say a word, and saying something that would halt or upend the project is always easy. I was reminded of Louis Kahn's project for the Venice Congress Centre at the public park next to the Giardini that fell through even with a complete sketch as well as the Venice Hospital project, the last project by Le Corbusier, that was not approved. If the request for approval had not been submitted, I could say it was an unsuccessful personal endeavor and back out, but the reality was that I was in a cave with no retreat, meaning that I had to dig my way out.

I met with the mayor again. "Nothing can be done if we take everything into consideration. The Korean Pavilion is not just a single national pavilion, but the first pavilion to mark the centenary of the Venice Biennale. It will not be an ordinary pavilion that remains open for just two months in a year, but one that will stay open all year and awaken the Giardini. We embarked on this project with hopes that the pavilion will serve as the bridgehead of South Korea and Italy's historical cultural exchange. The Giardini is in a district with an undecided urban plan, so if the condition is that we have to agree

to move the pavilion along with other national pavilions according to a new urban plan once one is developed, so be it. What we are trying to do is to be a part of the 100-year-old historical entity. We need you to make the call.” The mayor chuckled and said, “I’ll step in and do what I can.” Thinking that I had to seal the deal, I asked, “Our minister wishes to come in person and confirm the approval. Could this work?” The mayor’s answer was positive. I had to settle the deal, so I immediately flew back to Seoul and spoke to the minister. The minister also agreed, so we arranged a meeting with the mayor of Venice. I had pushed aside all the work I had to do at the Korea National University of Arts and became deeply involved in the Venice project. At this point, my ambition to erect a building of my design among the works of world-class architects and artists was no longer the drive: Rather, all that was left was the sense of responsibility as a professional, that I have to receive the approval for the Korean Pavilion. As we were preparing to leave, news broke that North Korean leader Kim Il Sung passed, so it was decided that Vice Minister Kim Do-hyeon would travel to Venice in lieu of the minister. The day before departure, I gave a briefing on the progress of the project. Most of the preparations were done, but I was still concerned. Director General of Arts Kim Soon-gyu had left for the United States, so Director General Jeong Mun-kyu took his place. Director Lee Don-jong accompanied the vice minister, and the South Korean Ambassador to Italy, and a public information officer joined us in Venice. The ambassador spoke pessimistically about the project: “It takes months to get approval to cut down a single tree in the grounds of the embassy. Building a national pavilion is something many countries have been trying to get done for years, so pushing ahead like this does not mean that we will get what we want.” He was saying we were too hasty. But in my mind, I thought that work will be done if one is willing, and it will not be done if one is not. Arrangements that had to be made before the meeting between the vice minister and Mayor Cacciari had been handled in advance with the help of Professor Bruttomesso, but I was still worried.

The vice minister started by expressing gratitude. He shared that Mayor Cacciari sent letters to all relevant authorities requesting

their positive reviews and cooperation on the matter of the Korean Pavilion. He also communicated that the South Korean government considers the Korean Pavilion as a symbolic project that will secure Korea's cultural bridgehead in Europe and also a representative project of New Korea that supports internationalization. When Cacciari first began by saying that our proposed site is a place where granting approval is impossible, especially because there is competition between many countries for a national pavilion, we were greatly disconcerted. However, he went on to add, "Yet, the unflagging enthusiasm and constant flux of alternative proposals made by the South Korean authorities made what was impossible possible. It is a small miracle. We anticipate that this will mark the start of substantial exchange between Italy and South Korea and also hope to see a new beginning of the Giardini for the first time in one hundred years. We highly praise all the ideas put forth for the Korean Pavilion." The vice minister looked for confirmation again: "Everyone is waiting for the final verdict on this proposal. Many great challenges remain ahead of us, such as reaching agreements with multiple entities, but would it be safe for us to put out a press release that the approval for the Korean Pavilion is expected?" To this, the mayor answered, "Yes. It will take some time, but half the members of all committees are affiliated with the city government. I will take care of it." The South Korean ambassador was still concerned. In any case, a year's work had finally made a step forward. We celebrated, drinking 60% alcohol by volume *baijiu* late into the night. It was a night when the canal and land seemed to tremble together.

The following day, everyone returned to Seoul, and I headed to New York again. I had planned to visit the Glass House designed by Philip Johnson, and given the timing, I thought it would be a great learning opportunity. Visiting the Glass House was seeing a classic model of a transparent house, but I was at a point where I should not be swayed by someone else's work. There was no need for me to compare my work to another's. One who truly has what he needs should be able to learn far more from another's work than be swayed. Standing before the magnificent architectural work, I felt slightly helpless. But my building is essentially different from Johnson's, and I thought

that my architecture had its unique form of expression that is deeply rooted in Korean culture as well as the cities and architecture of South Korea. As an architect of a civilized nation with a long history, I must try and let the understanding of a new civilization expand its expression. I had to go back to South Korea and get my hands on producing working drawings. What existed merely in sketch had to be embodied through steel frames, timber, and glass. The new building that would be born from the combination of the old existing building, corresponding cylindrical abstract space, and the transparent space between the trees must be expressed in dramatic architectural language.

When the news was published by some South Korean newspapers, many people I had never met or known started to approach me from all places. I was very cautious as the final seal had not been set on paper. Many faxes were exchanged between Seoul and Venice. It was hard for both parties, as the easygoing and leisurely manner of Italians and the diligent yet hasty character of South Koreans had to come together in unison for the project. We still had ahead of us the final review by the Deliberation Committee, which consisted of seven representatives from the city government, regional government, and other various sectors. In spite of the mayor's letter requesting cooperation, two of the seven members of the committee wanted to defer the case, while another was in support of China. Now it was a matter of who gives more thought to the work, even at night. We did all we could, so if the project fell through, that would be all. I pulled all the strings I could, from Milan and Rome to New York. It was like I had turned on the shower of connections. Then one day, the final presentation meeting was held and a positive conclusion was drawn. Still, nothing had been signed.

Finally, I headed to Venice for one last time. I was accompanied by Director General of Arts Lee Ung-ho, Professor Kim Kyong Soo who had been helpful all along, and Director of Overseas Projects Lee Sang-yong of the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, the organization that would own the pavilion. We headed to Venice with all the materials needed to be granted the final approval. I

was determined to receive the approval this time. We met with the Director General of Cultural Affairs, Secretary General of the Venice Biennale Raffaello Martelli, and other stakeholders to explain our plans about the operation of the Korean Pavilion. But they were talking about what would happen once the building is complete. We were taking the most difficult path to have construction approval in Europe. Professor Kim was under the weather with body aches. We got together every night for meetings, and during the day, we visited multiple departments of the city government scattered around Venice. To meet with Martelli, we went all the way to Lido, where the film festival was taking place.



▼ Left, Right: Photograph of Seok Chul Kim visiting the construction site of the Korean Pavilion, 1995 (presumably). Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

During the final deliberation, we ran into multiple obstacles. Regarding the opinion that international affairs be considered and make the building a national pavilion of the country in discussion, we were able to present material that we had prepared and worked on for a year and counter the argument. Those in Venice were aware that the biennale had issues, and we had offered a blueprint for reform as well as a proposal that the first permanent exhibition space in the Giardini would be the last national pavilion, built as a transparent building. Our proposal had gained the support of Venetian intellectuals and influential figures. During the deliberation, there was also discussion on the future building's harmony with the Giardini's historical environment. Our building was promoted as "the addition of Asian spirit," which meant that we would be able to finally realize

our long-standing theme of "the architectural fulfillment of traditional interpretation": This was an unexpected gain from the deliberation. This final deliberation inspired me to contemplate on many things, especially given that deliberations in South Korea often leave bitter and hurtful feelings as a result of the deliberators' bias and stubbornness. The approval-granting official said that the document of approval will be sent to South Korea, but Director General Lee Ung-ho and Director Lee Sang-yong went to see the officer every day, saying "We cannot return to Seoul without the document of approval in our hands. We are willing to wait months, if that is how long you need." The Venetian authorities were exhausted, and so were we. Then finally, on a rainy day, we received our approval.

14 long months devoted to the preparations for erecting a building that would serve as the leading space of South Korean art in the park commissioned by Napoleon was finally over. The day we received the approval letter, I felt a sense of void and could not fall asleep. In Venice, being granted approval for construction meant the architect signs the approved drawings and specifications. I placed my signature on them as the main architect, and Mancuso also signed them as the local architect. Signing felt a bit awkward, as it was done with a borrowed pen. The signing happened unexpectedly. With the signatures on paper, we finally had approval to build the Korean Pavilion in the Giardini, a place that has been leading contemporary art. It was a monumental moment for South Korean contemporary art, and it was all the more meaningful because it meant that the fruit of our passion and determination was going to be realized and occupy a place among the buildings designed by the greatest architects of the past century. It was an overwhelming moment of realizing that we will build a "scale model" of contemporary South Korean architecture just steps away from Gerrit Rietveld, Josef Hoffmann, Alvar Alto, Carlo Scarpa, and James Stirling's buildings.

Following the approval, a few additional actions had to be taken. They were actions related to the requirements regarding people with disabilities, connection to the city's underground structures, and fire extinguishing systems. These three were not preconditions of the

approval, but obligations of those who were granted approval. After all, a construction permission is an approval for becoming a member of the city community. That is why there were discussions with considerations from various points of view on the Korean Pavilion's role as a part of the time and space community of Venice. In particular, the review on where we would stand in the predictable future following the expected development of the city was challenging, yet I believe it was an important step of the project. Once approval is granted, construction itself is strictly left as the architect's work. Yes, there are lots of deliberations and regulations concerning buildings as a part of Venice's "hieroglyph" and the function they must serve, but once through that tunnel, their constructions are entirely up to the architect in charge. The architect has to handle everything, with the exception of factors related to people with disabilities, connection to the city's underground structures, and protection against fire and disasters. Greater creative liberty is protected and veiled by numerous regulations and restrictions. Documents and specifications for approval were simpler than those for deliberations in South Korea. Yet, Venice required far more plans and reasoning for one's role as a member of the city community. Much of the work was related to the location plan. Other than a basic architectural floor plan, no other plan—such as those concerning electrical design, mechanical design, facilities, and disaster prevention—is required at the time of approval. Such are left as work to be discussed between the owner of the building, the constructor, and the architect. Unnecessary interventions by the government were eliminated, but when intervention is necessary, the process is strict and demanding to the degree where two to three years is considered standard for the time required to obtain approval. The basic step of approval is an extensive review of the fundamentals. Even if the time for approval can take as long as two to three years with only a design development in consideration, constructive alternatives for far better results can be considered as no plan is developed hastily, and many processes of the construction document stage are extensively discussed prior to the work itself. These make approval not the end of construction design but its new beginning. Such is where we witness the roots and history of a civilized nation.



► Banner hung on the brick building (now Historical Hall) built in the 1930s to commemorate the groundbreaking, 1994.
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 Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

We became busier after the approval. The approval process mostly required work on my end, with me going from the mayor to the relevant directors in the city council and other authorities to explain our case, but once approval was granted, a lot of work landed on my team. We had to produce drawings and documents on not only structure, electricity, and facilities, but also interior design. Our eight-year experience in working with the stage system at the Opera House of the Seoul Arts Center came in very useful. Our studies on steel-frame buildings while working with Richard Rogers on prefabricated houses was another helpful asset. Director Jinyeong Choe on our team, who had great knowledge on steel structures, had successfully completed constructing a ship-like building, and Seokwu Kim, who had worked with us in both Venice and Seoul from the early stages of the project made significant contributions. Construction document is not merely an advanced version of design development but a plan that shows undisclosed motivations and stories that have accumulated until design development in the form of a final architectural plan. This means that those who were part of design development must devote their attention to details in the construction document stage. As for steel frames, structural planning and design must precede structural calculation: Changnam Lee with 25 years of experience decided to take this responsibility. We were pressed for

time, so the Seoul Arts Center and SBS (Seoul Broadcasting System) teams postponed their work for some time and went all in on the “100-*pyeong* house” project (*Pyeong* is a traditional Korean unit of measuring lands, and a *pyeong* is 3.3058 square meters, of which the writer refers to the Korean Pavilion here.).

Early architects would break ground and start building with just a concept map and a sketch, but the time from the beginning of construction to completion all fell within the design phase. I had until May to finish ours. We had 37 A0 sheets of drawings and plans for the 100-*pyeong* house, but there were so much more we had to produce. At last, we began to finalize and present the products of our work at the Olivetti Showroom at Piazza San Marco on November 8, where the exhibition on the Korean Pavilion opened. We were just taking our first real step, and I was dumbfounded by people who were boasting their “contributions,” when they had been nowhere to be found until then. That is how the world runs. It always has been. I finish my story with hopes to put all these behind and start fresh.

This writing was discovered around 2012, in a document file belonging to the Arts Council Korea. The title and author of the document are clearly stated, but why it was written, where it was published, and other information related to its source are missing. Based on its content, Kim is presumed to have written the text around late 1994 or early 1995. Major architecture journals and newspapers from that period were reviewed to check for related text, but none was found.

The person who was in charge of the Korean Pavilion at ARKO at the time and Seok Chul Kim’s colleagues could not provide an answer either. In case of source citations that need to be corrected or works that require further discussion in regards to copyright, please contact the editorial team.

On the 30th Anniversary of the Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion

§ Franco Mancuso & Ernesta Serena

1. The Korean Pavilion of the Venice Biennale is celebrating its 30th anniversary. Construction of the pavilion was launched in November 1994 and completed a little over six months later in May 1995. The opening ceremony was a beautiful event that included formal addresses and speeches by officials, presented on the lawn before the pavilion's entrance. The lavish festival that followed the ceremony was a special spectacle as dancers, inspired by Korean music performed on traditional instruments, gave an impassioned display of skillful (and beautiful) movements in traditional outfits to the cheers of the audience. The ceremony had been meticulously prepared as an expression of gratitude to all the people who had contributed to the pavilion's establishment—the designers, the builders, and the officials with the city of Venice and the biennale. It was also South Korea's dedication to Venice as a city that had provided it with an unexpected place at the heart of its most beautiful park, the Giardini, overcoming quite a number of hurdles in a short time to do so.

This was the reason for the festival, which was open to all. Yet even after the official opening event, there was another, unexpected festivity. As soon as the ceremony ended, and without any prior notice, the beautiful and colorful troupe of dancers continued the music and dance performance that had begun in the Giardini, holding out a banner with Italian words proclaiming the Korean Pavilion's opening as they paraded toward the Piazza San Marco at the city center. The Piazza, which is a central space and symbol of Venice, is home to the Negozio Olivetti, which was designed by the great Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa. Over the preceding years, it had hosted exhibitions and other cultural events. Indeed, it was here where 15 illustrations drafted (in Italian) by architect Seok Chul Kim's studio in Seoul had been presented the year before (in November

1994) for the pavilion's architectural project, along with a wood model of the structure created by our office in Venice.

The celebratory performance on the Piazza San Marco was an expression of gratitude to the city of Venice as a whole, including its administrative and cultural departments, especially the city authorities and the cultural heritage bureau. These were the ones who had coordinated to grant permission for the Korean Pavilion's swift construction, opening a cultural window to a country as important as South Korea. It was also a gesture of thanks to Università Iuav di Venezia (IUAV) and the Centro Internazionale Città d'Acqua (International Centre Cities on Water), which had encouraged and organized exhibitions and cultural events on the theme of South Korea's capital city of Seoul, presenting the country's rich architectural and urban culture to the city of Venice.

2. IUAV is where the origins of these strong cultural connections with South Korea can be found, and it is here where the journey to the pavilion's construction began. In December 1990, a young researcher and Professor Kim Kyong Soo, who majored in architecture in Seoul, visited the palace of Ca' Tron at our university. He had received research support from the South Korean government to conduct



► Scene of around 30 performers from the Seoul Performance Arts Company performing *Pungmulnori* (Korean traditional percussion instruments performance) marching from the Korean Pavilion to St. Mark's Square as part of the opening ceremony, 1995. © Mancuso e Serena Architeti Associati. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

in-depth studies of Italian architecture and Venice in the city, and specifically at IUAV. As with other international students who had come to Venice to study Italian cities—particularly from Japan—IUAV welcomed him warmly, and I was entrusted with the task of assisting with his research. (As a young lecturer who was then living on Venice's main island, I was well suited to this role, and I had already helped other researchers and students visiting from East Asian countries.)

In my frequent encounters with Dr. Kim (for whom I had made a space in my office at Ca' Tron), we discussed his city and South Korea's modern architecture, which was then almost unknown to us (in contrast with Japan, which was well known at the time for its eminent architects). His consistent presence at IUAV's places and events, his encounters with numerous professors at our institution and with young researchers from different countries, and his interactions with Italian students through seminars and lectures contributed to a deeper interest in the little-known history and reality of South Korea's architecture and urban culture. As a visiting professor, Dr. Kim maintained cultural contact with South Korea while taking part in IUAV's educational program. One day, he told me that an outstanding Seoul architect named Seok Chul Kim was visiting with colleagues to see the Venice Biennale. He suggested that we should meet each other, and in September 1991 I met him for the first time at Ca' Tron. We subsequently paid several visits to the biennale's exhibition area. At the time, there were 25 national pavilions, most of them for European countries. The only East Asian country represented was Japan, for which the pavilion had been inaugurated in 1956. That was when I began asking: Why not one for South Korea?

My relationship with South Korea deepened. In October of the following year, I had the opportunity to visit an international seminar in Japan, one of many such seminars that IUAV professors attended. Seok Chul Kim suggested that I should spend a few days in Seoul. Over a three-day stay in the city from October 5 to 7, I discovered the extraordinary and immense city that I had only heard about: the Han River flowing through its center, the heavily wooded surrounding

mountains, the parks and palaces, the streets in the city center (and their energy), and the new towns along the city's periphery. My encounter with Kim happened at his studio (Archiban) after I had been given a tour of the city by a young associate. Kim took me to see the site where the Seoul Arts Center was being constructed according to his design. The center was to be an extraordinary cultural complex built on Seoul's southeastern periphery, right up against a space of verdant hills. At the time, construction had been completed on its main auditorium, one concert hall, and a library.

After my return to Venice, I spoke often with Kim Kyong Soo: about Seok Chul Kim and his work, and about the other modern architecture that I had seen in Seoul. I also spoke with Giancarlo De Carlo, who was a professor at IUAV and had created an academic publication entitled *Spazio e Società*. I suggested that his journal should publish a special issue focusing on Seoul. I was more than happy to undertake the issue, having already examined other countries and cities in the pages of *Spazio e Società*. The journal's 61st issue in 1993 included a section on South Korean architecture that included a wealth of never-before-seen images, an introduction written by me, Kim Kyong Soo's text on the introduction of modern architecture to South Korea (entitled "1945–1990, an Exhausting Modernization"), and Seok Chul Kim's description of the Seoul Arts Center project.

Spazio e Società provided something like a first window into the characteristics of South Korea's architectural and urban culture—perhaps not only for Italy. Three years later, the 76th issue would examine the Korean Pavilion that had been constructed at the biennale, with a rich collection of illustrations and photographs.

The same year, there was a special issue on "Seoul's waterside cities" in *Aquapolis*, the official journal of the Centro Internazionale Città d'Acqua, which was founded by IUAV Professor Rinio Bruttomesso. It included an introduction by South Korea's then Minister of Culture and Sports Joo Don-sik, along with contributions by authors including Seok Chul Kim and this text's co-author Franco Mancuso. *Spazio e Società* was not the only window into South Korea. IUAV organized

an exhibition of Seok Chul Kim's work as it had done not long earlier for Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki. After a little over a month of preparations, Kim's exhibition took place at Ca' Tron in March 1993. The architect's opening seminar, which took place alongside an exhibition of models and illustrations by Archiban, was attended by a large number of IUAV faculty. Kim had returned to Venice, this time with his own work. He had previously visited a year earlier in March and July 1992 and met with IUAV Professor Bruttomesso and Centro Città d'Acqua founder Rinio Bruttomesso. That center had been established in Venice in 1989 as a research institution with participants from Italy, the Netherlands, the United States, South Africa, Japan, China, Australia, and Canada. The president was Mayor of Venice Massimo Cacciari, who had a background in philosophy.

On these occasions, we discussed the possibility of establishing the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Seok Chul Kim would have been working to explore the South Korean government's willingness to provide support, as well as the diplomatic and financial aids. His Italian colleagues contacted the city of Venice (and biennale officials) to examine the possibility of creating a new national pavilion in the Giardini. We continued working together. Kim's efforts appeared to bear fruit, as the South Korean government agreed to pay the design and construction costs for the pavilion. (It was a moving moment for me to rediscover in my personal archive the letter he sent me to share the news.) We decided to carry out the



► Seok Chul Kim, Franco Mancuso and Ernesta Serena, 1993.
©Mancuso e Serena Architetti Associati.
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

project jointly, and I ultimately became involved in the construction process alongside staff whom he had sent in from Seoul. Dr. Bruttomesso was tasked with coordinating with city authorities on the pavilion's construction, in addition to the responsibilities of the Centro Città d'Acqua. All of this had to be accomplished within two years for presentation at the biennale that would be taking place in 1995.

3. In early 1993, the early examination conducted with the city's technicians and biennale officials turned up a number of hurdles to the new pavilion's construction in the Giardini. The obstacles were not procedural or administrative in nature: At this point, everyone had accepted the idea of the Korean Pavilion. The problem was finding a place where the new pavilion could be built. For several years, no new pavilions had been created, despite requests from many countries. (At the time, the last pavilion built was the one for Australia, completed in 1986.) The reason was really quite simple: There just was not any space left to construct one.

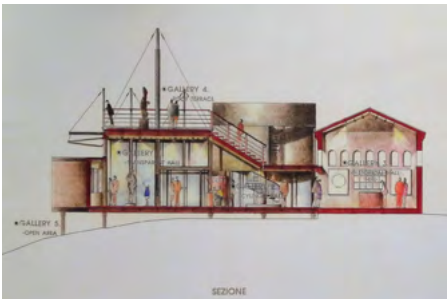
Seok Chul Kim quickly returned to Venice (in January), and we joined him and technicians and other staff from Venice's urban planning office (the Giardini is the property of the city of Venice) on several visits to examine the entire Giardini site. We looked among the different roads and pavilions, trying to see if there might be a space where a new pavilion could be built—even a small one. We had no presumptions about the scale or even about what sort of structure it would be. If construction was possible, we could coordinate it with the surrounding environment, which was filled with large protected trees subject to rigid regulations. But that was if such a space even existed.

After a few disappointing attempts, the search for a buildable spot finally seemed to generate a positive result. We found a small vacant site surrounded by trees on a hillock to the Giardini's east—the only hill of its kind in Venice, which had been created in the early 1800s, far before the site's use for the biennale, based on Napoleon's plan for the park. There was a well-preserved small brick building there,

apparently built during the 1930s and now closed off and virtually abandoned. Certainly, it was not a large area, but perhaps we could suggest incorporating the brick structure into a new pavilion, while building the new portions among the protected trees around it. It just needed to be big enough for a pavilion, and it appeared to be that. It was not large, of course, but it was a location with superb environmental value, situated near the German and Japanese Pavilions. Since it occupied the highest location in the Giardini (and indeed Venice, rising 4.4 meters above the ground of the shore in front), it also afforded a magnificent view of the San Marco Basin.

Buoyed by the unexpected discovery, we first shared the idea verbally, conducting an on-site visit with city architects to explore it. Since we had Mayor Cacciari's support for the Korean Pavilion's construction, we anticipated a favorable outcome. Indeed, the proposal for the pavilion's construction was favorably considered, although the supervising city officers and engineering department deemed that it would be a temporary structure in architectural terms. From there, we had many other follow-up meetings with the city. (In addition, Seok Chul Kim, the director of the South Korean Culture Ministry's art bureau and the cultural attaché at the South Korean embassy visited for discussions on behalf of the South Korean government.) On this basis, it was decided that the pavilion should include the suitably restored structure, which would be connected with the newly built parts in such a way that it did not interfere with the protected trees. Moreover, the "protected tree" designation did not apply only to the exposed portions such as the trunks and branches: It also included the roots of individual trees, which meant we would have to take into account the invisible parts lying underneath the building site. Along similar lines, a provision was added stating that we could not alter the site's topography and course in any way.

Like the other national pavilions built on city property, it was structurally and architecturally to be a temporary structure, which the South Korean government would bear responsibility for removing if so requested by the city of Venice. The temporary



► Color Project
Drawing of the
Korean Pavilion,
1994. © Mancuso
e Serena Architetti
Associati. Courtesy
of ARKO Arts
Archive, Arts
Council Korea.

usage permit would be issued for a construction consisting of two elements: a new structure, owned by South Korea and built on Venice land, and an existing structure owned by the city and integrated with the other structure. It was not the solution we had been hoping for, but it achieved the aim of building the Korean Pavilion, which has been put to fruitful use in the 30 years since then.

4. In late 1993, the project began with the decision that Archiban in Seoul would draft the design drawings. An in-depth analysis of the building site was carried out as various sketches, schemes, experiments, alternatives, and photographs were exchanged early on with Seok Chul Kim. We also held numerous discussions with officials from Venice's technical bureau (as well as cultural heritage officials). On an almost daily basis, we exchanged opinions with Kim, who was to return to Venice in November 1993. At the time, the only way to exchange images was via fax. This was how we communicated until early 1994, when we concluded that it was time to all sit down and work together until a convincing and commonly accepted view of a design could be found. On January 29 of the year, I arrived in Seoul and spent the next week working at Kim's studio there.

Sitting at a large table, I spread out diagrams of the architectural site (showing the exact locations of protected trees and the elevations), and young Archiban staff members and I compared different design

alternatives as we examined the scope of the new construction. All the while, I remained in daily contact with the city of Venice, verifying details and elements within the building site. The young Archiban staffers quickly turned the best design alternatives into study models. A few days later, the designers visited Minister of Culture and Sports Lee Min-sup to report them and held successful discussions. The plans that we showed him in a model form were put together relatively quickly compared with the other alternatives, and it was among these that the decision was made. The South Korean government finally gave the official signal to begin. (Minister Lee would end up visiting Mayor Cacciari in Venice in November of the following year.)

Now that the plan has been determined, some important details had to be designed with Seok Chul Kim. The newly built section was to be prefabricated at a factory and laid three-dimensionally on 25 stone-covered metal columns in such a way that it did not alter the topography. The exterior was to be a wood-finished wall with a waved shape that took into account the protected trees' positions. At the same time, broad windows were to be installed so that those inside the pavilion could look out at the surrounding environment or enjoy the landscape where the balconies project toward the Lagoon. An even more beautiful view could be taken in from the roof, which was to be built as a flat slab accessible to visitors; it was also agreed that two tall flagpoles would be placed there in a form reminiscent of a boat's sails. The new Korean Pavilion had to be made as transparent as possible, like a telescope toward the Lagoon, and it also had to be accessible from the side opposite the main entrance. This was the location of the old entrance to the Giardini, and it appeared that the city had the intention of repairing that entrance to allow access from the park to the rest of the city during the winter. (Because of this aim, they also asked us to install a heating system.)

It was agreed that the information for the presentation to the city of Venice would be drafted at the Seoul studio. While examining and agreeing upon the design details, they coordinated with our team in

Venice and ensured compliance with the laws currently operating in Italy. The new and excessive (frenetic, even!) duties multiplied as we exchanged design drawings and plan explanations. We continued communicating by fax before resorting to the airmailing of CDs to allow each side to work on their respective computers. In March 1994, Seok Chul Kim visited Venice to finalize the basic design. He met with the Mayor of Venice and the urban planning bureau director to explain about it. Two months later—on May 5, to be exact—the project drawings for architectural permit request purposes were submitted through an official presentation attended by D’Agostino (director of the city’s urban planning bureau), Mossetto (director of the cultural bureau), Dr. Bruttomesso from the Centro Città d’Acqua, an attaché from the South Korean embassy in Italy, and of course the designers. On September 30, official approval was finally granted.

After that, we had to work quickly, since the biennale’s opening was set for June, 1995. We had less than a year, and the opportunity for presentation could not be missed. Not only that, but winter was coming in between. We had to find a general contractor to carry out the construction, along with others to handle the individual processes. Not surprisingly, the production of the steel structure, the roof, the floors, the fixtures, the windows, the external elements, and the curving wooden exterior were entrusted to a Laguna shipyard. Other important duties included signing contracts



► Model of the Korean Pavilion being transported for the exhibition, *New Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale*, held at the Olivetti Showroom in St. Mark’s Square on November 8, 1994, in conjunction with the groundbreaking ceremony of the Korean Pavilion, 1994. © Mancuso e Serena Architetti Associati. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

for individual processes, calculating the construction costs, and deciding on the supervisors and supervision methods. It had begun again, with the ball now passed entirely to our studio in Venice. Among the drawings shared with our partners in Seoul, we had to make adjustments to the components and sizes and adapt them to local conditions. These were different from the ones used in South Korea, and many components had to be custom-produced at a factory (under the charge of Alessandro Calafati, a young and talented architect at our studio). We also had to observe the process daily and coordinate so that the various firms carrying out the processes worked properly. After that came the selection of the pavilion's interior and exterior colors, as well as decisions on the fixed furnishings and lighting, and the criteria and methods for restoration of the existing structure. I shared a sense of satisfaction with Seok Chul Kim, who visited the construction site often and witnessed the progress from day to day.

The Korean Pavilion's construction was completed by the deadline. On June 7, 1995 (which happened to be my 58th birthday), the beautiful opening ceremony that I described at the beginning took place. The pavilion is now a significant presence in Venice's cultural life, a platform for announcing to the city the presence of the talented artists and architects taking part in exhibitions there. Some of the people we remember for their involvement went on to maintain cooperative ties with educational institutions in Venice. As a professor at Seoul's Myongji University, Seok Chul Kim presented urban design lectures at IUAV for several years and organized seminars and exhibitions in South Korea with Italian students and faculty taking part. He was soon joined by professor Jinyoung Chun, who continues to lead students at an annual summer workshop at IUAV.

5. The Korean Pavilion now celebrates its 30th anniversary. It has held up well over this considerable span of time, even as it has had to contend with changing exhibition environments from year to year, the installation and removal of exhibitions, and the installation of temporary exhibition structures on its interior and exterior. Because



► Photograph of the construction site of the Korean Pavilion, 1994.
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Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

of these operational circumstances, the individuals in charge of the Korean Pavilion's management had to make some changes to the structure: the removal of an interior spiral staircase leading to the roof (where the restrooms were located) and its replacement with an external staircase, for example, or the replacement of the originally wooden opening and closing bars of the large windows with metal ones. Meanwhile, the demands of exhibition officials and building management have raised the need for clerical and storage space and areas for other uses. At the same time, all pavilions in the Giardini were listed in the city's urban plan drafted in 2001, which meant that the Korean Pavilion was likewise recognized officially as a structure to be preserved.

A design request of Arts Council Korea (ARKO) based on these considerations was presented to our Venice studio in 2017, and a design plan was prepared accordingly. It was drafted under the understanding that no expansion of the Korean Pavilion would be allowed, not only because of the surrounding presence of protected trees (which had only grown in the meantime) but also because of a new walking trail that had been established by the biennale around the pavilion, leading to the Lagoon. The project was not easy, as it needed to take place in the space of a few (winter) months after one exhibition had ended and its exhibitions removed and before the start of installation efforts for the next event. The request for approval of the Korean Pavilion's renovation was submitted in December 2018 based on discussions with city officials, in compliance with the aforementioned conditions. The city's position

is that because the granting of a different concession period for each national pavilion has created a number of problems, issues should be addressed collectively once all the pavilions' concession periods have ended. Even now, after the concession periods for the pavilion have all elapsed (including the Korean Pavilion), no follow-up action has been taken.



► Photograph of Franco Mancuso visiting the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation, 1995. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

In the meantime, I visited South Korea to provide ARKO with a donation of all the archival materials I had kept on the Korean Pavilion. These included all the design drawings made in Seoul and Venice: the technical reports; photographs and videos from before, during, and after construction; correspondence exchanged between Archiban and the relevant Italian and South Korean agencies; opinions and administrative documents; posters; models; and more. The agreement for the donation was signed on October 10, 2022, and the shipment of materials to ARKO began in June 2023. This was the return of an enormous amount of classification and digitalization work carried out with my architect colleague Mario Guerrasio, along with more or less daily contact with ARKO. In October 2023, I had the opportunity to see those archival materials again at the ARKO Art Archives in Seoul. (The Archives is located in the same Seoul Arts Center complex mentioned at the beginning of this essay.)

This has been a brief account of my friendship with Seok Chul Kim and my own contributions in connection with the history of the Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion. I conclude this story with my wish for a beautiful feature for the Korean Pavilion, which has become a part of South Korea and its people at the center of global art.

IL PADIGLIONE DELLA COREA ALLA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

§ Franco Mancuso & Ernesta Serena

1. Il Padiglione della Corea alla Biennale di Venezia compie trent'anni. Era stato inaugurato nel luglio del 1995, dopo poco più di un anno e mezzo dall'inizio dei lavori avvenuto nel Novembre dell'anno 1993, con un evento che era stato celebrato con una bellissima cerimonia, svoltasi nello spazio antistante l'ingresso; con i saluti e i discorsi ufficiali delle autorità, seguiti da una grande festa: uno straordinario spettacolo, animato da musiche coreane eseguite con strumenti tradizionali accompagnate dai movimenti di bravissime (e bellissime) danzatrici, anch'esse in abiti tradizionali, accolte da un pubblico entusiasta. L'inaugurazione del Padiglione, meticolosamente preparata, era stata l'occasione per ringraziare quanti avevano operato per la sua realizzazione, i progettisti, gli esecutori dei lavori, i rappresentanti delle autorità cittadine e della Biennale; ma anche e soprattutto per rendere omaggio da parte della Corea alla città di Venezia: per l'ospitalità concessale nel cuore dei suoi giardini più prestigiosi, superando le non poche difficoltà di doverlo realizzare in pochissimo tempo, e in un luogo davvero inimmaginabile.

Ecco dunque le ragioni della festa, aperta a tutti; ma anche del suo inaspettato prolungamento cittadino: perché dopo la cerimonia, senza alcun preavviso, un gruppo di bellissime e coloratissime danzatrici lasciarono i Giardini per raggiungere il cuore della città, Piazza San Marco: continuando con musiche e danze lo spettacolo iniziato ai Giardini, sorreggendo un grande striscione con scritte in italiano che annunciavano l'evento dell'inaugurazione del padiglione.

A Piazza San Marco dunque, lo spazio e il simbolo della città: ma anche perché proprio a San Marco, un anno prima (era il mese di novembre del 1994), l'idea e la forma del padiglione erano stati anticipati alla città in una mostra ospitata nell'aulico spazio del Negozio Olivetti, disegnato a suo tempo dall'architetto Carlo

Scarpa, un grande della cultura architettonica italiana, adibito da qualche anno ad eventi espositivi e celebrativi: lì infatti erano stati esposti i quindici pannelli illustrativi predisposti a Seoul dallo studio dell'architetto Kim Seok Chul (ma con didascalie e scritte in italiano) che illustravano efficacemente il progetto, insieme ad un grande modello in legno dell'edificio nel suo contesto, eseguito dal nostro studio qui a Venezia. La sfilata in Piazza San Marco era stata dunque una forma di ringraziamento a Venezia, alla città tutta e alle sue istituzioni amministrative e culturali: alla Municipalità anzitutto, e alla Soprintendenza ai Monumenti e alla Biennale, che avevano accolto l'idea di poter aprire, qui a Venezia, un'inedita finestra sulla cultura di un paese così importante come la Corea, concordando sull'iter per poter approvare rapidamente il progetto del padiglione. Ma anche all'Istituto Universitario di Architettura e al Centro Internazionale Città d'Acqua, che avevano animato ed ospitato iniziative e manifestazioni culturali aperte alla città indirizzate a rendere palese lo spessore della cultura architettonica e urbanistica della Corea, e segnatamente della sua capitale Seoul.

2. Sì, all'Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia: perché è da lì a ben guardare che trae origine la vicenda degli intensi rapporti culturali con la Corea che prende corpo con l'avventura del padiglione coreano. Era il dicembre del 1990 quando giunge nella nostra sede di Ca' Tron un giovane ricercatore coreano, laureatosi da poco in architettura a Seoul, Kim Kyong Soo. Aveva una borsa di studio governativa che gli consentiva di trascorrere un anno a Venezia, presso lo IUAV appunto, e di approfondire i suoi studi sull'architettura italiana, e segnatamente su Venezia. Lo IUAV accoglie calorosamente, come del resto faceva e aveva fatto con altri giovani laureati, provenienti soprattutto dal Giappone, interessati a studiare le nostre città, e affida a me il compito di assisterlo nel suo percorso di studi (allora io ero un giovanissimo docente, con il vantaggio, per questa incombenza, di risiedere a Venezia; oltre che di aver già svolto questa funzione di tutoraggio di ricercatori e studenti provenienti da paesi orientali).

Con Kim Kyong Soo ci si incontra frequentemente (gli avevo offerto

di lavorare nella mia stessa stanza a Cà Tron), e ci capita spesso di parlare della sua città; di farmi raccontare dell'architettura moderna in Corea, allora da noi pressoché sconosciuta (a differenza di quella del Giappone, per la notorietà internazionale di molti dei suoi protagonisti). La sua assidua frequentazione degli spazi e dei momenti dello IUAV -gli incontri con molti dei nostri docenti, oltre che con giovani ricercatori provenienti da altri paesi, e con studenti italiani in seminari e lezioni - determina gradatamente lo sviluppo di un clima culturale interessato all'approfondimento della cultura architettonica e urbanistica coreana: quella della storia, della quale non si sapeva quasi niente, e quella della contemporaneità, della quale si sapeva ancor meno. Kim Kyong Soo è visiting professor, e partecipa attivamente alle nostre iniziative didattiche, oltre a mantenere da Venezia i contatti culturali con il suo paese: e un certo giorno ci propone di incontrare un bravo architetto di Seoul che farà presto tappa nella nostra città con alcuni suoi colleghi coreani, per visitare la Biennale, e che si chiama Kim Seok Chul; con lui ci incontriamo a Cà Tron (nel settembre del 1991) e si va insieme più volte ai Giardini: lì c'è l'architettura di ventisei paesi, per lo più europei; ma del mondo orientale non c'è che il Giappone, inaugurato nel 1956. E non potrebbe esserci la Corea?

I rapporti con la Corea intanto si intensificano: l'anno successivo capita a me di andare in Giappone (nel mese di ottobre del 1992), per uno dei frequenti seminari che vi si svolgono con la presenza di docenti dello IUAV, e Kim Seok Chul mi propone di fare una sosta di qualche giorno a Seoul (di tre giorni, si conviene, dal 5 al 7): è la scoperta di una straordinaria immensa città, della quale avevo solo sentito parlare: dell'acqua del fiume Han che la attraversa, delle intonse colline circostanti, dei parchi e delle ville imperiali; della vitalità (e la convulsione) del centro, le new towns della periferia.....

A Seoul rincontro Kim Seok Chul, che dopo una fruttuosa visita alla città guidato da un suo giovane collaboratore, mi introduce al suo studio (il cui nome ufficiale è Archiban) e mi porta al Seoul Art Center: uno straordinario complesso culturale ai margini sud-orientali di Seoul, dove la città si sfrangia su una cornice di verdeggianti colline, come dappertutto; il grande cantiere è ancora aperto, ma sono già

finiti l'auditorium, una sala da concerti, la biblioteca.....

Di Kim Seok Chul parliamo fittamente con Kim Kyong Soo al mio ritorno a Venezia: dei suoi lavori, ma anche di quelli di altri protagonisti della cultura architettonica coreana contemporanea, visti a Seoul. Ne discuto con Giancarlo De Carlo, che insegna ancora a Venezia: perché non ospitare su "Spazio e Società", come aveva fatto per altre città, un servizio su Seoul? Me ne sarei occupato volentieri, come mi era capitato di fare per la sua rivista su altri paesi e altre città. Si fa, e nel numero 61 del 1993 "Spazio e Società" presenta una sezione dedicata all'architettura coreana, ricca di inedite immagini: con una mia introduzione su Seoul, un saggio del nostro Kim Kyong Soo dedicato all'avvento dell'architettura moderna ("1945-1990, una faticosa modernizzazione"), ed uno di Kim Seok Chul sul Seoul Art Center.

Era la prima finestra, non solo in Italia credo, aperta sui caratteri della cultura architettonica e urbanistica di Seoul (ma non sarà la sola, perché tre anni dopo la stessa rivista deciderà di pubblicare, nel numero 76, proprio il progetto del padiglione coreano alla Biennale, con un ricco corredo di disegni e di immagini dell'opera realizzata). E nello stesso anno la rivista "Aquapolis", organo ufficiale del "Centro Internazionale Città d'Acqua" diretta da Rinio Bruttomesso, anche lui docente allo IUAV, dedicherà un numero monografico alle "Cities on Water in Korea": con una presentazione di Choo Don Shik, Ministro della Cultura e dello Sport della Repubblica di Corea, e saggi di autori vari, fra i quali Kim Seok Chul e Franco Mancuso). Ma quello di Spazio e Società non è il solo contributo italiano dedicato alla Corea. Lo IUAV aveva accolto infatti l'idea di ospitare a Venezia una mostra sull'opera di Kim Seok Chul, come del resto aveva fatto poco prima per quella di Fumihiko Maki. Ci si era lavorato per più di un mese, e nel mese di marzo del 1993 la mostra si inaugura a Cà Tron: con modelli, disegni e pannelli predisposti da Archiban, lo studio coreano di Kim, e un seminario di apertura con l'autore e non pochi docenti dello IUAV. Seok Chul dunque è di nuovo a Venezia, questa volta con le sue opere. Ma ci era tornato anche l'anno prima, a Marzo e a Luglio, anche per incontrare Rinio Bruttomesso, docente pure lui allo

IUAV, che lo introduce alle iniziative del "Centro Internazionale Città d'Acqua": un'associazione nata Venezia nel 1989, del cui Comitato Scientifico facevano parte città italiane, olandesi, americane, sudafricane, giapponesi, cinesi, australiane, canadesi, presieduta dal Sindaco di Venezia, che era allora il filosofo Massimo Cacciari.

E' in queste occasioni che si comincia a parlare di un possibile padiglione della Corea alla Biennale: Kim Seok Chul avrebbe sondato la disponibilità del governo coreano a sostenere l'iniziativa, anche e soprattutto sul versante diplomatico ed economico, e noi veneziani ad avviare i contatti con il Comune (e con la Biennale) per verificare la disponibilità ad ospitare un nuovo padiglione ai Giardini. Avremmo poi lavorato insieme al progetto. L'iniziativa di Kim Seok Chul sembra avere successo, la Corea è disponibile a finanziare la progettazione e la costruzione del padiglione (ho ritrovato con commozione nel mio archivio la lettera di Kim con la quale mi comunicava la notizia): avremmo fatto insieme il progetto, e io ne avrei poi seguito la realizzazione, con la collaborazione di un membro del suo studio coreano qui a Venezia; mentre Rinio Bruttomesso avrebbe garantito all'iniziativa il suo contributo, oltre che quello del Centro Città d'Acqua, soprattutto per quanto riguarda l'avviamento e l'evolversi dei rapporti con il Comune di Venezia. Il tutto avrebbe dovuto concludersi nel giro di due anni, per essere pronti per l'edizione 1995 della Biennale.

3. Si era all'inizio del 1993, e però i primi sondaggi con i tecnici del Comune e funzionari della Biennale sembravano rivelare non pochi ostacoli alla realizzazione di un padiglione ai Giardini. Ostacoli non tanto procedurali, o amministrativi, tutti oramai concordano sull'ingresso della Corea alla Biennale: ma difficoltà nel decidere dove ospitare il nuovo padiglione; era da anni che nessun padiglione era stato più realizzato, a fronte di tante richieste (l'ultimo era stato quello dell'Australia, inaugurato nel 1986): per la semplice ragione che ai Giardini non vi erano più aree disponibili per l'edificazione. Con Kim Seok Chul, rapidamente di nuovo a Venezia (era il gennaio di quell'anno) e con alcuni tecnici e funzionari dell'Ufficio Urbanistica del Comune di Venezia (il Comune è il proprietario dell'area dei Giardini) visitiamo a più riprese l'intero compendio dei Giardini:

cercando di capire se ci fosse qualche spazio, nel reticolo dei percorsi e dei padiglioni, per realizzarne uno di nuovo; anche non grande, non avevamo alcuna preclusione circa la sua dimensione (né ancora alcuna idea sulla sua possibile architettura). Ci saremmo adattati alle circostanze, se favorevoli, e ci saremmo altrettanto favorevolmente collocati dove le imponenti alberature storiche, tutte vincolate da inflessibili normative, avessero lasciato uno spiraglio su cui operare.

Dopo alcuni deludenti tentativi l'esplorazione sembra dare un primo esito positivo: nella parte orientale dei Giardini, sulla sommità di un piccolo rilievo (una sorta di collinetta, l'unica a Venezia, che era stata lì collocata all'inizio dell'800 sulla base del progetto napoleonico per la realizzazione dei Giardini- assai prima quindi che la Biennale vi si installasse – c'è uno slargo, circondato da altissime alberature, sul quale insiste un piccolo edificio in mattoni: un manufatto di buona fattura, realizzato probabilmente negli anni '30 del 1900, ora chiuso e pressoché abbandonato, ma nell'insieme ben conservato. Un'area non grande certo, ma dove si sarebbe potuto approfittare di quell'edificio, proponendo di incorporarlo nel padiglione, e di prevedere la parte nuova negli spazi liberi dalle alberature circostanti. Quanto sarebbe bastato per un padiglione, ci sembrò di poter convenire, non grande certo, ma ubicato al contempo in un luogo di eccezionale valore ambientale, prossimo a quelli della Germania e del Giappone, nella posizione più elevata di tutto l'ambito dei Giardini (ad una quota del terreno di + 4.40 rispetto alla Riva antistante, la più elevata di tutta la città!); e dunque con una potenziale splendida vista sul Bacino di San Marco.

Forti di questa inaspettata scoperta, proponiamo l'idea, ancora solo verbalmente, dopo una verifica sul posto con gli architetti del Comune, che sapevamo favorevole all'idea di poter ospitare un padiglione della Corea, grazie anche al sostegno del sindaco Cacciari. La proposta fu dunque positivamente considerata, anche se il Comune volle che, per voce dei suoi rappresentanti e tecnici agli incontri, il progetto definitivo si conformasse ad un'intesa preliminare sulle caratteristiche architettoniche che l'edificio del

padiglione avrebbe dovuto avere. Si convenne quindi con il Comune, nel corso di innumerevoli incontri successivi (venne a Venezia in quell'anno, oltre a Kim Seok Chul, una delegazione del governo coreano, con il direttore del Dipartimento di Arte del Ministero della Cultura e l'addetto culturale dell'Ambasciata in Italia di Corea), che il padiglione sarebbe stato architettonicamente costituito dall'edificio esistente, opportunamente restaurato, e da una parte nuova, ad esso integrata, concepita in modo da non interferire con le alberature di pregio esistenti: non solo con i tronchi e con i rami, ma anche con le radici di ogni singolo albero, sicuramente esistenti, anche se non visibili, su tutta l'area interessata dall'intervento. Analogamente, si convenì che l'andamento e il profilo del terreno su cui realizzare la parte nuova non venissero in alcun modo alterati.

Infine, che trattandosi di una costruzione da realizzarsi su un'area di proprietà comunale, come tutti i padiglioni del resto, e che tale nel tempo sarebbe rimasta, la parte nuova del padiglione sarebbe stata concepita con una soluzione strutturale e architettonica improntata ad un carattere di provvisorietà: impegnando il governo coreano a rimuoverla, se ciò fosse stato ritenuto necessario da parte del Comune. Si sarebbe realizzato quindi un padiglione composto da due elementi, fortemente integrati: una parte da costruirsi ex novo, di proprietà della Corea, ma costruita su un terreno di proprietà del Comune, integrata all'edificio preesistente anch'esso di proprietà del Comune: terreno ed edificio concessi quindi provvisoriamente in uso. Una soluzione insperata, che ha salvato però l'idea del padiglione, e ha permesso alla Corea di realizzarlo, e di utilizzarlo proficuamente per questi primi trent'anni.

4. Siamo alla fine del 1993, e si parte subito con il progetto, decidendo che gli elaborati progettuali verranno predisposti nello studio Archiban a Seoul. Primi scambi di idee con Kim Seok Chul, schizzi, schemi, tentativi, alternative, foto; si approfondisce l'analisi del luogo, e ci si incontra nuovamente e a più riprese con gli uffici tecnici comunali (oltre che con quelli della Soprintendenza ai Monumenti). Scambi pressoché quotidiani con Kim Seok Chul, che sarà di nuovo a Venezia nel novembre del 1993: confronti via

fax - non c'erano altre possibilità per scambiarsi delle immagini. Fino a quando, e siamo all'inizio del 1994, non si decide che è venuto il momento di sederci intorno a un tavolo, e di lavorare congiuntamente al progetto: fino al raggiungimento di una soluzione progettuale convincente e condivisa. A Seoul dunque (dove arrivo il 29 gennaio di quell'anno, e mi tratterò per tutta la settimana), nello studio di Kim Seok Chul.

Si lavora sullo stesso grande tavolo, anche e soprattutto con i giovani collaboratori di Archiban: si disegna confrontando più soluzioni alternative, riportandole su di una planimetria dell'area che avevo portato con me con l'esatta individuazione delle alberature esistenti da salvaguardare e delle quote del terreno da non modificare; oltre che del perimetro dell'edificio da recuperare. Si comunica quotidianamente con Venezia, per ottenere verifiche di dettaglio relative al sito e alle sue preesistenze. I giovani di Archiban costruiscono rapidamente modelli di studio delle soluzioni progettuali più convincenti, anche in vista di un incontro di noi progettisti con il ministro della cultura coreano Lee Min Sup: un incontro che avviene con successo qualche giorno dopo nel suo ufficio a Seoul, presentandogli i modelli che erano stati rapidissimamente realizzati relativamente alle diverse soluzioni architettoniche studiate; e si decide. C'è dunque il via ufficiale della Corea (lo stesso Ministro verrà poi a Venezia nel novembre dell'anno successivo, per un incontro con il Sindaco Cacciari)

Si conviene quindi con Kim Seok Chul sulla soluzione da sviluppare, e se ne cominciano a precisare alcuni dei caratteri principali: la parte nuova sarà sostenuta da una struttura metallica tridimensionale, prefabbricata, appoggiata su una trama di pali (saranno poi 25), rivestiti in pietra, conficcati nel terreno senza alterarne l'andamento; le pareti saranno in legno, con un andamento sinuoso ove occorra per raccordarsi alla presenza delle alberature esistenti; saranno interrotte da ampie vetrate, per assicurare dall'interno la percezione dell'ambiente circostante, godibile anche da balconate che si protendono sul lato dove il padiglione si affaccia sulla Laguna: un ambiente godibile ancor più dal tetto, che si concorda che debba

essere piano e accessibile, e che se ne percepisca la presenza e l'intento anche da fuori con l'installazione di due alte aste metalliche portabandiera che richiamano l'immagine di un'imbarcazione. Un edificio trasparente, per quanto possibile, una sorta di cannocchiale proiettato verso la laguna, accessibile anche dal lato opposto a quello dell'ingresso principale, perché da lì ci si potrebbe collegare con un vecchio accesso ai Giardini, che il Comune sembra intenzionato a ripristinare, anche in vista di una possibile apertura invernale dei Giardini alla città (tanto che ci chiede, in questa prospettiva, di dotare il padiglione di un impianto di riscaldamento). Ci si lascia alla fine con gli accordi sulla stesura ufficiale degli elaborati grafici da presentare in Comune, che sarà svolta nello studio di Seoul; che lavorerà in sintonia con quello di Venezia, per verificare e concordare le soluzioni progettuali reciprocamente studiate, oltre che per la necessità di dover uniformare gli elaborati alle consuetudini normative vigenti in Italia. Nuova ed intensa (frenetica!) fase di lavoro quindi, con scambi ancora più fitti di disegni e legende (ancora fax, ma presto compact disc, spediti per posta aerea, da usare nei rispettivi computer).

Nel marzo del 1994 Kim Seok Chul è di nuovo a Venezia, per un'ultima verifica sugli elaborati del progetto di massima e, con l'occasione, per una illustrazione del progetto al Sindaco di Venezia e all'Assessore all'Urbanistica. Due mesi dopo, esattamente il giorno 5 maggio, gli elaborati del progetto vengono presentati in Comune, nel corso di un incontro ufficiale che si svolge con gli assessori D'Agostino e Mossetto per il Comune e il professor Bruttomesso per il Centro Città d'Acqua, alla presenza dell'addetto culturale dell'Ambasciata di Corea in Italia; e, ovviamente, dei progettisti. Nel settembre, il giorno 30, il progetto sarà ufficialmente approvato.

Ora bisogna correre, ancor più rapidamente, perché l'apertura della Biennale è fissata per il mese di Giugno del 1995. Meno di un anno dunque, e non la si può mancare; e di mezzo c'è l'inverno. Eccoci allora alle prese con individuazione del general contractor e delle ditte che realizzeranno le singole componenti dell'edificio, le strutture metalliche, le coperture, le pavimentazioni, gli impianti,

i serramenti, le sistemazioni esterne; e le sinuose pareti in legno, affidate non a caso ad un competente cantiere navale lagunare. E poi la stesura dei contratti per l'affidamento dei singoli lavori, la tenuta della contabilità, la individuazione dei titolari e delle modalità dei collaudi..... Si riparte, ed ora la palla passa quasi interamente al nostro studio veneziano: anche perché i disegni esecutivi, che pure erano stati condivisi con Seoul, andranno ora per lo più rifatti, per adattarli a componenti (e misure!) diverse da quelle in uso in Corea; e molti altri sarà necessario predisporre (vi lavora nel nostro studio Alessandro Calafati, un giovane e bravissimo architetto) per consentire alle non poche ditte coinvolte nel cantiere la costruzione dei diversi manufatti: e sarà un cantiere, lo si sa bene, al quale occorre garantire una presenza pressoché quotidiana. E poi.....: scegliere i colori, dentro e fuori; definire le componenti dell'arredo fisso e dell'illuminazione, stabilire i criteri e le metodologie del restauro dell'edificio preesistente..... Giorno dopo giorno; con la soddisfazione, condivisa da Kim Seok Chul nelle sue frequenti venute a Venezia, di veder sorgere giorno dopo giorno il padiglione che ci si aspettava.

Si finisce in tempo! E dunque, eccoci a quella splendida festa, il 7 giugno del 1995 (era il mio cinquantottesimo compleanno!) con la quale abbiamo iniziato questo nostro racconto. Il padiglione è ora una presenza significativa della cultura coreana nella vita culturale della città, che induce una presenza a Venezia sempre più cospicua di personalità dell'arte e della architettura interessate alle manifestazioni che vi si svolgono. Anche perché alcuni dei protagonisti dell'avventura che abbiamo cercato di ricostruire mantengono con le istituzioni veneziane relazioni e contatti: Kim Seok Chul, docente alla Myongij University di Seoul, sarà chiamato dallo IUAV a tenere per più anni un corso di progettazione urbana, e organizzerà in Corea seminari e mostre con la partecipazione di studenti e docenti italiani. E a lui si affiancherà presto il professor Chun Jin Young, che condurrà ogni anno a Venezia, e conduce ancor ora, il gruppo degli studenti della Miongij University invitati a partecipare ai seminari estivi di progettazione organizzati dallo IUAV.

5. Il padiglione compie dunque trent'anni, e sembra aver retto bene a questo non breve arco di tempo; pur essendo stato di anno in anno sottoposto al travaglio di sempre mutevoli esigenze espositive, per l'altrettanto mutevole lavoro di montaggio e smontaggio, di anno in anno, degli apparati espositivi interni e delle opere da esporre. Tutto ciò ha portato i responsabili della sua gestione ad apportare all'edificio alcune modifiche, e ad introdurre alcuni adattamenti, soprattutto degli spazi interni: come l'eliminazione della scala a chiocciola che era stata prevista per raggiungere il piano del tetto (dove erano collocati i servizi) con la sua ricostruzione all'esterno dell'edificio; o la sostituzione delle chiusure mobili delle grandi finestre vetrate, originariamente in legno, ed ora in metallo. Allo stesso tempo si manifesta l'esigenza, da parte dei responsabili degli allestimenti e della cura del padiglione, di poter disporre di qualche spazio ulteriore, per un ufficio e un magazzino, e per altre esigenze. Mentre tutti i padiglioni dei Giardini vengono inseriti in un Piano Urbanistico Comunale (2001), che conferma la presenza e la conservazione del padiglione della Corea.

A partire da queste considerazioni viene predisposto un progetto di adeguamento del padiglione (nel 2017), con un incarico professionale affidato da ARKO al nostro studio veneziano. Un progetto che è stato prontamente redatto partendo dalla considerazione che nessun ampliamento del padiglione sarebbe stato accettabile da parte del Comune: sia per la presenza, all'intorno dell'edificio, di quelle stesse alberature rilevate all'inizio, fattesi nel frattempo ancor più imponenti, e sia per l'avvenuta realizzazione, da parte della Biennale, di un bel percorso pedonale che rasenta tutto il fronte del padiglione che si affaccia verso la laguna; un progetto non semplice, occorre dire, perché riguarda interventi che devono necessariamente essere realizzati nei pochi mesi (invernali) nei quali l'esposizione precedente è stata smontata, e la successiva non è ancora stata installata. Il progetto, anche in questo caso concordato con gli uffici del Comune, viene comunque presentato nel dicembre del 2018, comprendendo un piccolo ampliamento che rispetta le limitazioni sopra richiamate. A tutt'oggi si è tuttavia ancora in attesa della sua autorizzazione, perché il

Comune ha intanto deciso di predisporre un provvedimento di assestamento riguardante tutte le concessioni nel tempo date ai diversi paesi per i rispettivi padiglioni, e a tutt'oggi scadute; compresa dunque quella che riguarda la Corea.

Nel frattempo si è convenuto con ARKO di donare tutti i documenti del nostro archivio riguardanti il Padiglione della Corea: tutti gli elaborati grafici redatti a Seoul e a Venezia; le relazioni tecniche e descrittive del progetto e delle sue componenti; le immagini fotografiche scattate prima, durante e dopo la realizzazione del padiglione; la corrispondenza intercorsa con Archiban e con le autorità tecniche e amministrative competenti italiane e coreane; i pareri e gli atti autorizzativi conseguiti; manifesti e poster, un modello..... L'accordo per la donazione è stato sottoscritto il 10 ottobre del 2022, e la spedizione è avvenuta nel mese di giugno del 2023, dopo un ingente lavoro di classificazione e di digitalizzazione di molti dei documenti, svolto qui a Venezia insieme ad un nostro collaboratore, l'architetto Mario Guerrasio, sulla scorta dei contatti tenuti quasi quotidianamente con ARKO; lo scorso ottobre li abbiamo rivisti con commozione a Seoul, nella bellissima sede dell'Archivio (che, sembrava quasi incredibile, è proprio nell'amato Seoul Art Center che abbiamo richiamato all'inizio di questa storia).

1. *Venice, Venice Biennale*, aired June 17, 1995, on MBC, 78 min.
Videocassette (VHS) from the collection of the ARKO Arts Archive.
2. Nam June Paik, *Wolgan Misul* (July 1993), 72.
3. Yongwoo Lee, "Heroes of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale," in Franck Gautherot and Seungduk Kim, ed., *Kimsooja, To the Breath: Bottari* (Les Presse Du Reel, 2013), 13-15.
4. The fact that the name of the country is written as "Corea" on the façade of the Korean Pavilion, rather than "Corea del Sud" or "Repubblica di Corea," hints at the possibility that building could be used by both North and South Korea in the future after the two countries had been reunified. Interview with Jun Hui Byun who worked as a local coordinator for the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, July 13, 2014.
5. A model of the Korean Pavilion and a panel of design drawings were exhibited at this ceremony at the Olivetti Exhibition Center, and a dinner was hosted by the Minister of Culture and Sports at the Danielli Hotel. It was attended by Nam June Paik, the Italian Minister of Culture, and more than 70 other guests.
6. A Panel discussion with Achille Bonito Oliva, Kim Levine, and Yongwoo Lee, "The Give and Take in the Culture of Art, That's the Issue," *Wolgan Misul* (January 1995), 71.
7. The program was hosted by Song Byeong-jun, Lee Ahyeon, Sumi Jo, and Jung Junmo. It featured Nam June Paik, Kwak Hoon, Kim In Kyum, Yun Hyong-keun, Jheon Socheon, Kubota Shigeko, and others.



II. Previous Art Exhibitions

1995

1997

1999

2001

2003

2005

2007

2009

2011

2013

2015

2017

2019

2022

2024



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1995

I - 1995

In the year the Venice Biennale celebrated its 100th anniversary, the Korean Pavilion celebrated its inaugural exhibition, headed by Korean art critic Lee Yil (1932-1997). The biennale that year was directed by French scholar Jean Clair, the biennale's first non-Italian director of visual arts, and was titled *Identity and Alterity: Figures of the Body*, exploring discourses popular among the arts and humanities in the 1990s. In pace with the overarching theme, Lee chose to show works by Jheon Soocheon, Yun Hyong-keun, Kim In Kyum , and Kwak Hoon. Lee studied in France before returning to South Korea in 1965, and taught as a professor at Hongik University beginning in 1966. As an art critic, he is recognized for introducing Western art movements to the South Korean contemporary art scene. Curating was not a familiar or common profession at the time, and it was not unusual for an art critic to direct an exhibition.

Kwak Hoon presented a performance on the front lawn of the Korean Pavilion, featuring large pottery works by the artist and Kim Young-Dong, a traditional Korean musician, with Buddhist nuns. Kim In Kyum presented *Project 21—Nature Net*, and the installation followed the stairs up to the roof, utilizing the spatial idiosyncrasies of the Korean Pavilion. He installed computer monitors that showed the movement of visitors, and also played images of bubbles emerging from a transparent acrylic wall. Yun Hyong-keun, the master of South Korean minimalist painting, presented a new work on a large canvas. Jheon Soocheon presented the *Clay Icon in Wandering Planets—Korean's Spirit*, an installation featuring industrial waste, TV monitors, and clay icons baked from kilns in Gyeongju. Jheon was awarded Honorable Mention for his installation work, a meaningful achievement for the first exhibition in the freshly-built pavilion. His

installation was compatible with Jean Clair's main project for the exhibition of re-interpreting art history through the perspective of the body. As a result, after the opening of the Korean Pavilion, Jheon was interviewed by 16 different TV stations across Europe, and introduced in many international newspapers and magazines.

The Korean Pavilion at the 46th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

June 11–October 15, 1995

Commissioner

Lee Yil

Organized by

Korean Culture and Arts
Foundation

Exhibitors

Kwak Hoon, Kim In Kyum,
Yun Hyong-keun, Jheon
Soocheon

Sponsored by

Korean Air



▼ Poster for the Korean Pavilion, 1995.
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts
Council Korea.



▼ Poster for the Korean Pavilion's return
exhibition, 1995. Courtesy of ARKO Arts
Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by
CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

On the Occasion of the Inauguration of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

§ Lee Yil

Looking back, I can see that it was at the second Paris Biennale in 1961, already 30 years ago now, that South Korean contemporary art made its first appearance at an international exhibition with a biennale format. The Paris Biennale was established in 1959 to showcase artists under the age of 35, and South Korea was one of the nations that participated in the event from its early stages. (Unfortunately, the Paris Biennale would fold shortly thereafter.) Now in their mid-career phases, the South Korean artists who participated in the Paris Biennale have been actively engaging in the domestic art scene in recent years and serving as a major driving force in the development of contemporary art in the country. South Korean artists subsequently participated in the Bienal de São Paulo for a considerable period of time. However, it would not be until 1986 that South Korean artists started to engage with the Venice Biennale, the most prestigious event of its kind and the one with the longest history. This year, the 46th Venice Biennale marks only the fifth iteration featuring South Korean participation.

I have just mentioned that this year marks the 46th edition of the Venice Biennale, but it is also its centennial. This year the Korean Pavilion will be built in the Giardini della Biennale (Gardens of the Biennale), the site where the Venice Biennale will be held. Its inaugural exhibition will coincide with the Biennale's 100th anniversary celebrations.

It is significant indeed that the Korean Pavilion will be opening in the 100th year of the biennale, but the fact that South Korea has constructed its own pavilion after only participating four times is unusual in the history of the event. It is all the more special considering that there have been only 24 countries with their own

dedicated pavilions among all the nations that have participated in the event. The Korean Pavilion will therefore be the 25th national pavilion. South Korea is the second Asian country (after Japan) to erect its own pavilion. I have heard that the Korean Pavilion will be the final national pavilion to be constructed in the Giardini. This is certainly a testament to the growing stature of South Korean contemporary art in the international art scene.

As the commissioner of the Korean Pavilion, I visited the construction site in the Giardini last year on November 9 when I arrived in the city to participate in a meeting of commissioners of national pavilions. The site where the groundbreaking had taken place two days before my arrival remained little more than heaps of soil, but the magnificent views showed its exceptional quality. It is surrounded by national pavilions of major participating countries, including France, Germany, Britain, Canada, Russia, and Japan. In line with the excellent location, the architectural design of the Korean Pavilion (created by the architect Seok Chul Kim, director of the Archiban firm) presents a contemporary edge of equal quality, even when compared to the neighboring pavilions.



► Leaflet for the Korean Pavilion, 1995. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

The overall structure of the Korean Pavilion consists of three independent exhibition halls. (The rooftop has also been designed for use as an outdoor venue for exhibitions.) Each of the three exhibition halls (respectively 198, 66, and 66 m²) can be specially

adapted depending on the nature of works to be displayed to allow a wide range of installations. The construction is expected to be completed by the end of April. (The official opening ceremony of the biennale is scheduled for June 8, 1995.)

It goes without saying that the spatial structure was taken into consideration when selecting artists to present at the Korean Pavilion. Four artists—Yun Hyong-keun, Kwak Hoon, Jheon Soocheon, and Kim In Kyum—have been designated after choosing artworks suited to the characteristics of each exhibition space. The list of artists was finalized without any bias towards a specific genre. In the end, two artists who respectively explore two-dimensional and three-dimensional genres were selected along with two installation artists in accordance with the structural conditions of each exhibition space, including the outdoor space on the rooftop. Looking at the results, I believe that, even though it was not intentional, the selection was ideal in terms of the age range of the featured artists by not leaning towards any specific generation. When selecting artists for an exhibition, it is natural that consideration be given to the tendencies and character of their art. In the case of this exhibition, I was required to consider the theme of the biennale "Identity and Alterity" concurrently with our own theme "Interactions between the East and the West." However, I would like to clarify that I deliberately refrained from following a trend or going along with certain types of work when examining artistic tendencies and thematic issues.

Regarding the grand opening of the Korean Pavilion, I would also like to emphasize that South Korea's participation in the 46th Venice Biennale is not some one-off achievement to celebrate, even though the inauguration is coinciding with the centenary ceremony of the biennale, but marks the start of a long-term project. It is natural that the successful opening of the Korean Pavilion should be celebrated as it is indeed a significant event for our country, but at the same time we need to maintain a level of perspective and take a long view of the future management of the Korean Pavilion. Undoubtedly there will need to be greater engagement, support,

and investment at the national level.

In this regard, I would like to suggest that the opening of the Korean Pavilion become the impetus for the establishment of a permanent independent organization dedicated to coordinating matters related to international exhibitions. As we have seen in past examples, it is risky and undesirable to hastily organize a new steering committee every time we participate in an international exhibition. Government support is also required in this matter.



► Kim In Kyum, *Project 21—Natural Net*, 1995. © Kim In Kyum. Courtesy of Kim In Kyum Estate.

I might be drifting off the subject here, but I recall an incident from far back, during the Venice Biennale 30 years ago. That year, the world witnessed an extraordinary event when the Grand Prize was awarded to Robert Rauschenberg from the United States. At that time, Rauschenberg was just a fledgling artist in his 30s and there seemed to be a veiled story behind his designation. We might understand through this how national power can contribute to art. Returning to our own situation, South Korean contemporary art's entry into the international scene should not be solely regarded as a matter at the personal level of individual artists. It is a display of national power. Without proper national support, entry into the global cultural and artistic community may easily end as being

merely a formality and prove ineffective. Considering that it is how international audiences receive and evaluate it that will determine the success or failure of the entry of South Korean culture and arts into the international scene, we urgently need to foster a more global mindset.

Today, there is a lot of talk about “globalization,” but (we should understand that) globalization is not a unilateral phenomenon. There are, of course, pressing matters to be addressed: displaying national power and, in the case of art, invigorating South Korean art to ensure a larger presence in the international art scene. At the same time, when we talk about globalization or internationalization of South Korean art there is an equally important challenge ahead: that of international exchanges. In other words, we will also need to more actively invite overseas artists and host international art events and not simply focus on South Korean art’s expansion into the global scene. I believe that a true internalization of South Korean art can thereby be achieved.

The English translation of the special contribution to *Misul Segye* originally written in Korean during the preparations for the first Korean Pavilion exhibition at the 1995 Venice Biennale is published here.

*Original text: *Misul Segye*, January 1995, Vol.122, pp.84–85.

Jheon Socheon_Artist for the 1995 Korean Pavilion

“Thinking back on that moment still makes my heart flutter. It’s hard to put into words the overwhelming feeling. At that time, I was someone on the fringes of the art world who could not even imagine the goal of elevating the status of Korean art worldwide (...) Of course, it was also a significant opportunity to instill a sense of cultural pride in Koreans. The Korean Pavilion, where works by Korean artists were exhibited, was the starting point. A young man, with moistened eyes, confided in me that the South Korean Pavilion had given him much-needed confidence, empowering him to proudly embrace life in Western society.”

***Interview “What does Korean art dream of?”, *Art in Culture*, June 2013 issue, p.134**



▼ Jheon Socheon, *Mother Land: T'ou (II)*, 1995. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.



II

1997

II - 1997

Many South Korean artists had ambitions to show their work in the second exhibition at the Korean Pavilion in 1997. Even those who had already shown wished for another opportunity in the new venue. This posed a challenge for Kwang-su Oh, the curator tasked with selecting the artists that year. Oh felt that the Korean Pavilion was not sufficient to present four artists, as they had in the previous exhibition. One or two seemed more reasonable. In the end, he introduced works by Ik-Joong Kang and hyung woo Lee.

The two artists chosen to represent the Korean Pavilion in 1997 were relatively young, being in their 30s and 40s. Considering the protocols of the South Korean art community at the time, the selection was highly unconventional. However scandalous, it was a good informed decision based on his insight into the overarching trends of other pavilions as well as the biennale itself. His strategy hit the mark when the 37-year-old Ik-Joong Kang received the Honorable Mention. The panel of judges praised the work of Kang for its ingenuity in creating an encyclopedic world out of small pieces. What made the award even more meaningful was that Kang delivered a speech on behalf of the laureates at the winners' celebration party held after the award ceremony on June 15. At the press conference upon his homecoming, he elaborated that "the significance of his exhibition is to uphold and expand tradition on a global level." Furthermore, the Korean Pavilion was nominated for the Golden Lion for the Best National Participation. At the time, both domestic and international public perception interpreted the Korean Pavilion's consecutive awards as "a firm recognition of South Korean contemporary art by the international art community."

When Kang's work was shown in the Korean Pavilion in consecutive exhibitions, the South Korean art community started to perceive the Venice Biennale differently: The misconception that the biennale was the final hurdle, approachable only by established artists, was replaced with an understanding of it as a place where changes in contemporary art were embraced and commentary welcomed.

The Korean Pavilion at the 47th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

June 15–November 9, 1997

Commissioner

Kwang-su Oh

Exhibitors

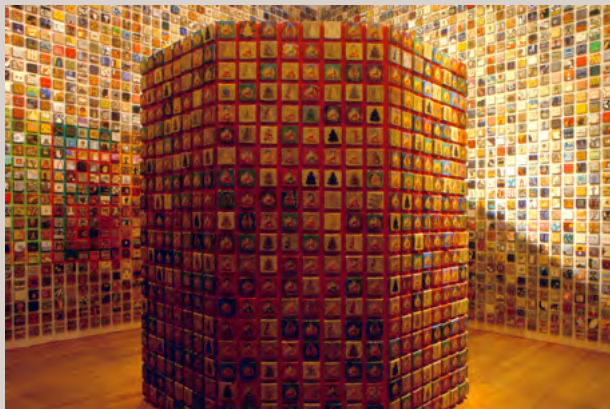
Ik-Joong Kang, hyung woo Lee

Sponsored by

Korean Air

Organized by

Korean Culture and Arts
Foundation



▼ Ik-Joong Kang, *Throw everything together and add*, 1997. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

Exhibition Preface

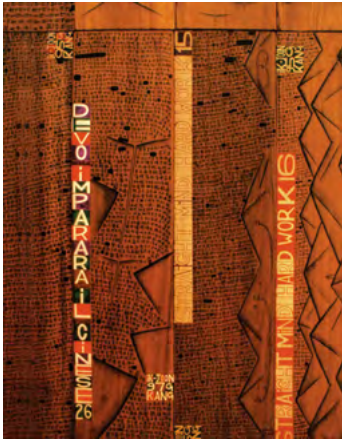
§ Kwang-su Oh

South Korea has participated in the Venice Biennale since 1986, but this year marks the second time since the construction of its own national pavilion. Since the 1960s, contemporary South Korean art has been introduced to the world through various routes, but it was only in very recent times that participation in the Venice Biennale has come about, offering another route through which the international audience may experience the unique characteristics of South's contemporary art.

For this biennale, two young artists, Ik-joong Kang in painting and hyung woo Lee in sculpture, have been selected. These two artists are still in their thirties and forties, and this is the first time that South Korean artists of such a young generation are taking part in this international exhibition. But despite their relatively youthful careers, each of these artists has a definite aesthetic language and realm of his own. In some ways, they are noteworthy more for their abundant potential than for their experiences and achievements thus far. We are at a point when we are devoting a great deal of concern toward what is being shaped in the present and what is to be achieved in the future, no less so than toward what we have accomplished in the past. And in this effort, we can foresee the bright prospect of South Korean contemporary art. Such future possibilities figure into the expectations we have of these two young artists.

In addition to the fact that one works in painting and the other in sculpture, these two artists also reveal differences in their distinctly individual methods of visual expression. But even amid such disparities, their works somehow manage together to achieve an uncanny accord, converging towards harmonious unity. While bringing together distinctive visual languages, we did not overlook the importance of the Korean Pavilion as a whole. We were especially

conscious of this point, considering the particular structure of the Venice Biennale, which is composed of exhibitions presented in national pavilions. Our intention was to organize an exhibition in which each artist would be able to display his own singular aesthetic realm that would also be subsumed into a larger, harmonious whole.



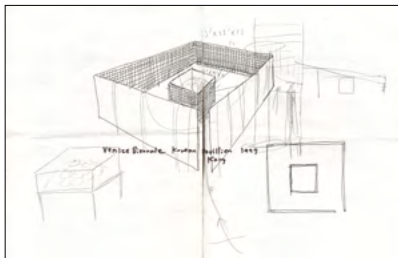
► Ik-Joong Kang, *Throw everything together and add*, 1997. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

After receiving an art education in South Korea, Ik-joong Kang and hyung woo Lee went on to further training in New York and Paris, respectively. Kang eventually settled in New York, while Lee returned to South Korea after a period of study in Rome and Paris. Lee actively continues to produce and show his work, in addition to teaching at his alma mater in Seoul.

Kang's uniquely structured work is derived from his daily life, and accordingly the content of his work often calls to mind a personal diary or journal. During his early years in New York, Kang spent up to twelve hours a day working in grocery stores or doing other odd jobs, and his distinctive miniature pictures were produced in spare moments as he rode the subway to work. The necessity of having to work on the subway meant that he had to create canvases small enough to hold in his palm or slip into his pocket. Thus, the various

phenomena of his daily life are recorded in scenes measuring only three-inch square: events taking place around him, passing cityscapes, and his memory and desire revealed in fragmented images, scrawls or epigrams. There are even flickering glimpses of the English alphabet, numbers and signs. Together, these small scenes constitute the accumulation of all that Kang saw, heard and felt—in short, a direct reflection of his life—during his twelve years in New York. Kang has since gone on to expand the scope of his art, wandering all over New York in search of images.

The images in Kang's miniature scenes seem unfettered by any systematic order, rule or motive. His reactions, observations and curiosity toward his subjects, along with the imaginative associations they give rise to, come together—seemingly almost indiscriminately—in the form of allusive pictures or cartoon-like images and caricatures. But these diverse, individual objects are arranged to form a grid on the wall, where they constitute a greater whole. Each discrete module is transformed into a component in a large-scale mural. The appeal of Kang's work lies in its ability to provoke visual pleasure and wonder through the connection and arrangement of the fragmented images that are themselves filled with wit and humor.



► Sketch of Ik-Joong Kang's artworks exhibited at the Korean Pavilion. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

Kang often compares his work to *bibimbap*, a Korean dish which combines all kinds of vegetables and meat mixed into a bowl of white rice and flavored, finally, with red chili paste and sesame seed

oil. Korean dinner is usually centered around rice and soup with an arrangement of side dishes, often some sort of meat or fish and small servings of various vegetables. But in *bibimbap*, all of these separate foodstuffs are combined into a large bowl to create a mixture, resulting in a taste which is something new and other than the mere sum of its individual parts. Hence, *bibimbap*, though served in a single bowl, encompasses a variety of foods high in calories.

The reason Kang compares his work to that peculiarly Korean dish called *bibimbap* is that the various discrete attributes of his work intermingle—and even the unfamiliar and the ambiguous blend together—to compose a panorama on the single large surface of a wall. In addition to the visually exuberant effect of his wall structure, another compelling aspect of his work is the incorporation of sounds, the synthesis of visual and auditory elements. In particular, the Western music that emanates from his work composed of numerous Buddha images induces the spiritual shock of an unexpected encounter. In some of Kang's work, we find elements of cultural criticism that are hard to overlook. Such elements can be seen as a natural reflection of the critical spirit that he must have acquired when he found himself cast into the foreign territory of New York after growing up in South Korea.

Hyung woo Lee has held several solo exhibitions since he returned to South Korea after studying in Rome and Paris. Lee's work reflects his composed and careful personality. His work is distinguished by its simplicity, and his distinctive visual expression tends to evoke that which is essential and primary. He has worked in a wide range of materials, beginning with plaster and moving on to terracotta, wood, bronze, and most recently, steel. Though there are variations in his materials, they do not seem to have much bearing on his forms. If it is clay he is working with, he follows the formal possibilities arising out of that particular substance, and if it is wood, then the resulting form would be something that corresponds to that material's properties. But in spite of this, the forms he has pursued have maintained a consistent tone: all of the material properties have been openly accommodated and fused into a kind of order arising from Lee's formal pursuits. And it is in this aspect that we can identify him as a seeker of forms.



► hyung woo Lee,
The There Is, 1997.
Courtesy of the artist.
Provenance: Art in
Culture.

“In his work, Lee creates the most basic of solid forms, including cubes, cones, cylinders, spheres and triangular solids. Regardless of whether they are made of clay, wood or bronze, they are constrained by a definite formal order. Rid of all possible extraneous implications, they stand out as a substantive embodiment of a will to simplicity.”

Lee himself has said of his work that it is a “pursuit of formal essence.” He gives a brief explanation of the work he has carried out thus far in his career: “Just as I have consistently sought to do up to this point, I will take the essence of sculpture, the notion of ‘making,’ as the starting point of my work for the Venice Biennale. In particular, I will emphasize three aspects, art as practice, the precedence of execution in artistic creation, and the importance of materials, in order to present the process of creation and the completion of the artwork that make up sculpture.”

Indeed, the basic concept of his work is the notion of “making” as the starting point. For a sculptor, “making” implies the composition of a tangible mass from the substance of his materials. In contrast to sculptures of the past, which began from the point of imitating nature’s appearance, Lee stands at the starting point of formal creation by making the most basic of shapes—geometric objects. Eliminating all explanations that forms are usually imbued with, and thereby heightening the essence of only the form itself, Lee’s work is

always and at once the beginning and the completion. And thus, "The There Is," as the artist himself expresses it, comes into existence.

While the works of both Ik-joong Kang and hyung woo Lee stand at points of departure from painting and sculpture, they also include a sense of restoration, of a continual return to painting and sculpture. In other words, the departure itself begins with questions about the source and the essence. Needless to say, those questions are none other than "What is painting?" and "What is sculpture?" To draw on a tiny surface or to make very spare structural forms is to meditate on the original modes of drawing and making. And it is this aspect of their art which will elicit the astonishing experience of glimpsing an original moment of pure creation.

Despite their universal aesthetic appeal, the works of these two artists also reflect traditional Korean aesthetic sensibilities. Although derived from his recent years in New York, Kang's fragmented images and signs—to say nothing of the repetition of Buddha figures—also evoke elements of *minhwa*, or folk painting, and *bujeok*, the talismanic inscriptions common in folk religions. His scenes are permeated, perhaps without his conscious awareness, with all manner of images and symbols prevalent in the spaces and surroundings of Korean life. Hyung woo Lee's small wood and terracotta objects also evoke household goods and utensils commonly found in traditional Korean living spaces. In his work, we have the strong impression of coming upon an arrangement of broken pieces of wooden vessels gathered from an old farmhouse. Of course, this aspect of their works is not intentional, for these artists insistently try not to invoke, or reflect any kind of obsession with, the traditional. It is probably an embodiment of their own individual aesthetic sensibilities emerging naturally amid a long transcendent process.

The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997 is republished here.

*Original text: 1997, *La Biennale di Venezia, Republic of Korea*, Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, pp.8–11. 1997

Kwang-su Oh_Commissioner for the 1997 Korean Pavilion

“Venice leaves a lasting impression not just because of the biennale. After participating in the commissioners’ meeting in February 1997, I agreed to meet up later with hyung woo Lee and Ik-Joong Kang, who had traveled to Venice for a preliminary visit. I spent two days in Paris before flying to Venice. Unable to land at the Venice airport due to fog, my plane diverted to the neighboring city of Verona, from where I took a bus to the Venice airport. Then, I boarded a water taxi to St. Mark’s Square. However, the dense fog obscured my view, making it challenging to navigate. I could only discern the silhouettes of people mere five meters ahead, resembling dark pillars. The murmur of voices surrounding me was all I could discern. It felt like I was wandering through a misty dream, a characteristic of February in Venice. But I didn’t find the dreamy atmosphere unpleasant.

The entire city becomes even more enchanting in February with a masquerade festival. Encountering men and women dressed in Renaissance costumes and masks on the streets and alleys gives you the illusion of traveling back to the Renaissance. Even the mindset of the locals who live in this old city reflects the traces of its profound history. Given our bustling lifestyle, we can only be jealous of how they can afford to embrace the past while living in the modern day.”

****My Half-Century of Contemporary Art, aMart, September 2013, p.240***



▼ Leaflet for the Korean Pavilion, 1997. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

III



1999

III - 1999

The 48th Venice Biennale on the eve of the new millennium planned to be its most spectacular and avant-garde exhibition yet. The legendary curator Harald Szeemann took the helm, and the Arsenale had been renovated, transformed into grand exhibition spaces. The ambitious *d'APERTutto* exhibition sought to set itself apart from any other biennale. Misook Song curated the Korean Pavilion that year, featuring depictions of an apocalyptic society in 1999. Song explained that the two artists at the pavilion presented the ambivalence and paradoxical nature of the inner-value system, a subject clearly capable of connecting with the audience, even on an international stage. Attention was drawn to the fact that it was the Korean Pavilion's first year with a female commissioner and a female artist. With Louise Bourgeois winning the Golden Lion, 1999 was truly a year of women. Lee Bul also won the Honorable Mention—a third consecutive honor for the Korean Pavilion.

Beyond the Korean Pavilion that year, Lee also participated in *d'APERTutto*. For the main exhibition, Lee presented her *Cyborg* sculpture and the notorious *Majestic Splendor* of decomposing fish adorned with sequins. For the Korean Pavilion, she presented *Gravity Greater than Velocity* and *Amateurs*, an installation featuring capsule *noraebang* (South Korean karaoke booths) and footage of uniformed schoolgirls. Noh Sang-Kyoon presented *For the Worshippers—Buddha*, a figure of Buddha shaped using sequins and *The End*, a panel-framed piece covering three walls. Easily mistaken at first glance for a monochrome painting, *The End* is Noh's minimalist meditation in sequins, illuminated by dimming fixtures that cycle in brightness every 80 seconds, maximizing the reflective properties of the sequins.

The Korean Pavilion at the 48th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

June 12–November 7, 1999

Commissioner

Misook Song

Curator

Seungduk Kim

Exhibitors

Noh Sang-Kyoon, Lee Bul

Designed by

Kim Doo-sup, Cheong Yeong-woong

Sponsored by

Samsung Foundation of Culture,
Korean Air

Organized by

Korean Culture and Arts
Foundation

Noh Sang-Kyoon

Sponsors

Gallery Hyundai, SSsamzie
Art Project, Dr. Young-Ho Kim

Planning and Production

Handan Communication Co.,
Ltd.

Additional Production Support

Hong Sun-ok, Kim Jee-yeon,
Son Jin-woo, Ahn Yoo-chong,
Kim Hak-kyun

Lee Bul

Sponsors

Samsung Foundation of
Culture, Art Sonje Center and
Museum, SSsamzie Art Project,
Dr. Young-Ho Kim, UN Jazz
Music Inc (Rika Muranaka)

Special Thanks

Julia Kim & Makco Plus Ltd.

Planning and Production

Yi Bahng & SIO Planning, Nam
Jee, Rhee Jae-yong

Additional Production

Support

Myung-chun Park &
MassMESSage, Lee Kyung,
Kim Tae-hoon, Kim Taek-gyu,
Ko Eun-joo, Lee Sang-ok,
Chang Bae-il, Yoon Ju-hyun,
Kwon Sang-woo

The Korean Pavilion at the 48th Venice Biennale

§ Misook Song

Two relatively young artists have been chosen to represent South Korea in the 48th Venice Biennale. The selection of Lee Bul, a female installation artist, and Noh Sang-Kyoon, a male painter, to mark South Korea's third presentation in its own national pavilion is intended to recognize the remarkable talent and originality these artists have shown in incorporating fresh, imaginative notions of contemporary Korean culture into their works. It is also consistent with a broader effort to encourage and promote younger Korean artists, to expand their opportunities for participation in large international exhibitions so that they may play a greater role in shaping not only the present state but the future development of contemporary South Korean art as we approach the next millennium.

The decision also takes into consideration the particular spatial constraints of the Korean Pavilion. Though the architecture of the pavilion may be aesthetically pleasing and appropriate to the context of the site, the space available for exhibiting art is relatively limited, especially in comparison to other pavilions in the Giardini. Adding to the difficulty of presenting works in this space, the exterior of the pavilion, except for a long, curvilinear side wall, is composed entirely of transparent glass, leaving the interior completely exposed to natural light. Thus, for the commissioner charged with the task of selecting artists, and for the artists themselves, the unusual features of this exhibition space have posed a challenge requiring an effective response or engagement.

With these spatial conditions in mind, then, this year's presentation is divided into two areas. In the main area that opens up from the entrance, Lee Bul installed a work newly produced for this exhibition. It consists of two *norae-bang*, or karaoke "capsule" rooms, with a



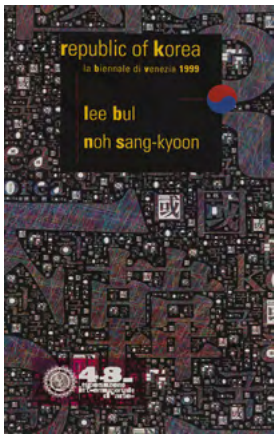
▼ Top: Photograph of the Korean Pavilion participating artists' homecoming reception, 1999. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea
Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho



▶ Bottom: Photograph of the appreciation plaque awarded to the Korean Pavilion participating artists at the homecoming reception, 1999. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

large video projection on the far rear wall of the pavilion. The video images are combined with superimposed lyrics of the songs chosen by audience members in the capsules. To the left of the entrance and at a right angle to the main area is a separate room, small but ideal in shape, allotted to Noh Sang-Kyoon, who has covered the walls entirely in subtle patterns of brilliant sequins. At the doorway to this space sits a life-size, readymade Buddha also covered in flesh-tone sequins suggesting skin.

While these artists possess qualities distinctly their own, they nonetheless have a shared interest in culture to elicit participation, interaction, or reflection from using mass-produced or readymade artifacts of contemporary audiences, and to both heighten and subvert our experiences of art and life. Audience engagement, whether physical or psychological, has long been an important part of Lee's aesthetic strategies; in the *norae-bang* project, that



► Leaflet for the Korean Pavilion, 1999.
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council
Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho

element is essential to the work's function and meaning. With his sequin-covered panels, Noh induces in the viewer a dizzying optical effect, verging on claustrophobia, produced through the rotational designs and the shimmering surface of the sequins themselves.

Considered within a broader context, this year's presentation also underscores the transformations taking place in contemporary South Korean society, where the traditional power strategies of the phallogocentric system are being increasingly met with new challenges that are gradually subverting the efficacy and even the validity of their programs. In this sense, the division of the exhibition space with the larger area assigned to the female artist, and the smaller area to the male artist is meant to disturb, or even reverse, the conventional, male-centric hierarchy. Likewise, the large video projection that is a part of Lee's *norae-bang* suggests, at least in appearance, the dynamic principle of life typically thought of as a male characteristic in Korea, while Noh's intricate, sequined "paintings" seem to convey what is conventionally thought to be a feminine sensibility, the more passive, contemplative approach to life.

From a purely aesthetic viewpoint, we may also regard the exhibition

as a juxtaposition of the two heterogeneous and contrasting tendencies modernism on the one hand and postmodernism on the other that coexist in contemporary Korean art. In her performances and installations, Lee has often deployed self-referential or private narratives that expand to involve public issues and cultural discourses connected to the postmodern condition. Noh's work, on the other hand, adopts a self-contained, autonomous minimalist vocabulary to produce a tension between an inward, Kantian self-criticality and an outward engagement with the viewer. In this way, this year's exhibition is designed to shed light on the ambivalent, contradictory dynamics behind contemporary Korean life and art.

Trained in sculpture, Lee Bul has produced since the late 1980s a wide-ranging body of work, including provocative performances, installations, and sculptural objects that addresses a broad spectrum of issues, such as discourses of the Other, representations and re/productions of the body, and above all, conceptions of femininity. In this exhibition, such issues are further explored through the inherent Gesamtkunstwerkian, or synesthetic, qualities of *norae-bang*, a form of public entertainment that is very popular in Korea and other parts of Asia, and increasingly, throughout the world. Showing a group of adolescent schoolgirls at play, the video which serves as the accompaniment and the visual background to the song lyrics destabilizes the typical subject/object orientation of the "gaze." And the experience of "reading" the lines of lyrics that appear on the screen while simultaneously forming the sounds through the act of singing heightens the fundamental disparity between the written and the spoken word. The process results in a kind of deformation which paradoxically generates new, unexpected associations and suggestions from the banal, familiar lyrics of pop songs long emptied of any meaning. The work effectively conveys the artist's notion that everyone's life has a "soundtrack" evoking a mixture of memory and desire that is distinctly individual and private, though ironically it is composed of elements that are artifacts of mass production and public consumption.

Noh Sang-Kyoon's continuous use of sequins since he first began making art is related to a childhood experience of near-drowning. He recalls that, struggling in the water, he felt despair and hopelessness, as though he were a meager fish tossing in the depths of a vast sea. Thus, the fish became for him a private, allegorical symbol of that moment between life and death; and he came to associate sequins, the readymade material used for decorating women's clothing and stage costumes, with the skin or scales of fish. As though fueled by a kind of obsessive impulse, Noh has covered huge canvas panels with these sequins and installed them in his space in the Pavilion so that all four walls give off a vibrant optical effect. The viewer experiences an almost physical sensation of either being pulled in or pushed away, depending on the starting point and the direction of the circular patterns of these panels. Despite its relatively static format of being a wall work, Noh's shimmering sequined panels do not permit a detached, distanced viewing. The visual vibrance, the countless reflective surfaces of the sequins, ultimately induces a dizzying sense overload that verges on claustrophobia but opens up new perceptual and psychological realms.

The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999 is republished here.

*Original text: 1999, *La Biennale di Venezia, Republic of Korea*, Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, pp.4–7. 1999

South Korean Artists Participating in the Main Exhibition

The year 1999 marked a historic experimental exhibition in the history of the Venice Biennale, with the appointment of the internationally renowned curator Harald Szeemann. That year, Lee Bul and Kimsooja became the first South Korean artists to be invited to the main exhibition of the Venice Biennale. Lee Bul exhibited *Cyborg*. Kimsooja showcased *d'Apertutto, or Bottari Truck in Exile*, a 19-meter-long line of *bottari* (cloth bundles) trucks arranged along the aisles of the Arsenale. Do Ho Suh was the only South Korean artist to participate in the 2001 Venice Biennale, titled *Plateau of Humanity*, which Harald Szeemann consecutively directed. In 2003, the largest number of South Korean artists participated in the exhibition, totaling five, including KOO JEONG A, Sora Kim, Gimhongsok, Young Hae Chang, and Joo Jae-hwan. In 2005, Kimsooja participated for the second time in the main exhibition, while in 2009, KOO JEONG A also made her second appearance, and Haegue Yang made her debut at the event. In 2015, Ayoung Kim, Hwayeon Nam, and Im Heung-soon participated in the exhibition, ending a six-year hiatus of South Korean artists' appearances, followed by Sung Hwan Kim and Yeesookyung in 2017. In 2019, Lee Bul returned for her second participation since 1999, along with Suki Seokyeong Kang. Mire Lee and Geumhyung Jeong participated in 2022, and Yun-shin Kim and Kang Seung Lee will be involved in the 2024 exhibition.

— Kyung-yun Ho (H)



▼ Photograph taken at the Korea Pavilion pre-opening promotional party, 1999. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

Just before the opening, a staff member of artist Noh Sang-Kyoon bought beef and prepared *bulgogi*, hosting a barbecue party in front of the Korean Pavilion courtyard, attended by staff from neighboring national pavilions and biennale officials.

IV



2001

IV - 2001

Kyung-mee Park was designated to serve as commissioner. She had been curating exhibitions while preparing to open PKM Gallery. Michael Joo and Do Ho Suh were selected to examine the dynamics and identities at play between individual and social systems, human beings and nature. Park explained her choice, stating, "the two artists come from an understanding on the issue of Korean cultural identity within the trend of pluralism and globalization, and this is apparent through their works that are simultaneously traditional and contemporary."

Michael Joo presented four different works that made use of the many windows of the Korean Pavilion. Joo presented *Tree*, a large oak tree 1.4 meters in diameter sourced locally in Italy, cut along its length and reattached using stainless steel poles, alongside *Family*, *Access/Denial*, and *Improved Rack*. Joo's *Tree* was particularly eye-catching, as it appeared to extend beyond the exhibition space and outdoors into the pavilion terrace.

Do Ho Suh showed works exploring the dynamics between the individual and the collective. His *Some/One*, which had been presented earlier that year at the Whitney Museum, reappeared alongside *Who Am We?* and *Public Figures*. Suh also participated in Harald Szeeman's main exhibition *Plateau of Humankind* with *Floor*, featuring a two-centimeter thick glass panel upheld by thousands of little human figures that visitors could step on. Suh's work was featured on the cover of some of the biennale's promotional materials.

That year, the Korean Pavilion hired a promotion specialist.

Promotional activities were actively pursued, including a luncheon party held for the first time on the second-floor terrace of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, and a party in the Korean Pavilion yard on the eve of the exhibition opening. The Korean Pavilion promotion luncheon party at the Guggenheim Collection was sponsored in full by the Samsung Foundation of Culture.

The Korean Pavilion at the 49th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

June 10–November 4, 2001

Commissioner

Kyung-mee Park

Organized by

Korean Culture and Arts
Foundation

Exhibitors

Michael Joo, Do Ho Suh

Korean Pavilion Exhibition

Coordinators

Seong-bong Yun, Yu-kyung

Choi, Doryun Chong

Translation & PR Director

Doryun Chong

PR Coordinator

Ellen Oh

Design

2Plus Design

Artists' Website Design

Peter Choi, Heishin Lee

Color Separation

Graphic Korea

Sponsored by

Samsung Foundation of Culture,

LG Electronics, Korean Air

Dialectical Identity

§ Kyung-mee Park

In recent years, the pattern of human life has changed from one of settlement to one that is endlessly moving and itinerant. The turn-of-the-century paradigm shift, marked by—among others things—the collapse of the Cold War world order and the rapid development of transportation and communication, has turned the whole world into a global village, one in which previously unimaginable time-and-space compressions and cultural exchanges now take place. Older concepts of “time” and “space” have disintegrated: Today, it is “speed,” “multiplicity,” and “lightnesses,” passing us by uncontrollably, that have become the familiar notions of our time. This is especially true for artists, whose experience of various cultures through ceaseless crossings of time zones and places effectively confirms their identity—one that is unable to settle down in one place and is continuously changing.

Do Ho Suh's work begins with this memory of spatial experiences, which leads to the constant act of memorial rites vis-à-vis his identity. The bodily experience of space, as lodged in the human memory, becomes the foundation of consciousness and the sensibilities. That is, the physical occurrence of the body encountering a space is the unit of action that composes the continuity of our lives, and it also connects up with the psychological experience within our consciousness. Thus, the experience of a specific situation in a specific space is projected into a person's consciousness and established in the memory of that invisible interior space: There, it produces cultural identity. Do Ho Suh migrated in his late twenties from Seoul to New York, the cultural melting pot where multiplicities and changes occur more vigorously than in any other place. In his subtly detailed installation works, Suh has expressed the ways in which his interior world—deeply rooted in space, South Korea, where his cultural identity had

formed for nearly three decades—has metamorphosed in response to a new environment in which diverse ethnic groups and their cultures co-exist. For instance, in *Seoul Home/LA Home/New York Home*, Suh reconstructs the interior of the traditional Korean house in which he was born and raised, by taking fine translucent silk and sewing every single architectural detail, and then placing it in the alien places like L.A. and New York. Likewise, *348 West 22nd Street Apt. A, New York, NY 10011, USA*, another fabric installation work, is a recreation of the interior space of his small New York apartment through the same process. When folded and put away, their forms and spatial sense disappear, but whenever wished, the diaphanous and beautiful silk can be unfolded and suspended to resurrect the shapes and spaces. These works, which contain the concept of temporal-spatial passage that is always possible, represent the artist's own dialectical identity that is endlessly variable while being rooted in things that are never replaceable.

In the age of travel and multiculturalism, Do Ho Suh's art, while extending the legacy of the language of Western art-making through processes of labor that are extremely visually detailed, simultaneously invests his works with conceptual discourses of cultural identity. As a result, his works significantly transcend the standard formalism of Western art. The special quality of the materials he uses in his works—neither transparent nor opaque—functions, like rice paper, both to allow light to penetrate and to divide a space into two: It seems to symbolize something in the interior world that is firmly stable and teetering at the same time. Moreover, the architectural details, sewn with obsessive meticulousness, and, indeed, the labored process of sewing itself, appear to be a gesture metaphoric of the accumulated experiences in the artist's memory and of remembrances thereof. When looking at those of Do Ho Suh's works that use castings of architectural spaces, and thus reinterpret the cultural discourses contained in them, one may be reminded of the British artist Rachel Whiteread's castings of immense spaces. Whiteread reckons the structure of the space where everyday life takes place through physical contact such as a bed, a kitchen, an old apartment as one large sculptural

mold, which she casts as a whole. Thus, she paradoxically confers a sense of existence to this empty space and mutually substitutes our consciousness and unconsciousness. Suh's works, on the other hand, allow for the continual replacement of the meanings contained within, depending on where they are installed: The condition of placement determines the significance of works.



► Do Ho Suh, *Some/One*, 2001. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

Whereas these works of flexible, supple, always unfixed beautiful architectural structures evocatively metaphorize the dialectical evolution of a self-identity that refuses to be predetermined, another axis of Do Ho Suh's art is his interest in the dynamic relationship between individuals in mass society and the power of society that controls them. From this interest, he attempts to draw out the mutually effective operation of fundamental questions and answers about the essence of human beings and social groups. Suh's experience of how a society can have absolute dominance over individual members that compose it finds its roots in the period when he was enrolled in a high school and serving in the army in South Korea. In the culture of South Korean high schools—symbolized by crew-cut hair style and black uniforms, both remnants of Japanese Imperialism—and in the army—in turn symbolized by its own uniform, collective behavior, and ruthless reprimands—Suh perhaps found the first opportunities for deep reflection on the dynamics between the inviolability of individuals

and the orientation of dominating power i.e., collectivization that refutes individualism. From his early works on, Suh has relentlessly asked the questions, "Who am I?" and "Who are we?". Works such as *Uni-Form*, an early installation that shows the disappearance of persons and the sole presence of the power of a group, *Self-portrait; Mirror Image*, which juxtaposes photographs of himself and montages of characteristic features of his face perceived by others, and *Who Am We?*, which reduces the pictures of his colleagues in the high school yearbook to fingernail-sized dots and turns them into a patterned wallpaper, all examine the power relation between single individuals' identities and the power of a group.

His recent works *Floor*, *Doormat*, and *Some/One* bring such topical concerns to a definitive level of accomplishment and successfully deliver the message to the audience. *Some/One*, of which armor-like structure consists of tens of thousands of tiny dog tags, and *Floor*, made up of numerous two-inch-high miniature human figures holding up thick glass panes on top of which the viewer can freely tread, create environments in which the audience is turned into the protagonist of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Just as with *Who Am We?*, which at first appears to be an integral part of interior space, but is in fact an aggregation of breathtakingly detailed photographic images, the viewer realizes that with *Floor*, which denies not only the monolithic volumetricity and authority of the sculptural genre, the main objective is to draw attention to the perpetual combination and collision between the single person's self as a member of the society and the sociocultural space that controls him or her. In other words, these works—the patterned paper on the wall and the sculpture affixed to the floor—are on the one hand created through an extreme minimization of the beingness of each object, its conversion into the most minimal structure, a thin layer. When viewed at close range, however, they reveal their paradoxically complex form and structure. His *Public Figures* appears to be a conventional massive pedestal for the public sculpture, but in fact replaces the expected figure with a flock of tiny human figurines supporting the base plinth. In that way, the work subverts the conventional concept and ultimately proffers a

critique of traditionalist authoritarianism.

As stated above, Do Ho Suh's art is building its own niche with works by adding sensitive processes of making and discourses to forms of expression that have already become "traditions" of contemporary art. Furthermore, while disavowing neither his own roots nor the self that is metamorphosing in the constantly transforming cultural environments and spaces of varied experiences, Suh will continue the open-ended conversation with this perpetually changing world.

Seoul, 2001

The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001 is republished here. Separate exhibition catalogs were made for each participating artist (Michael Joo, Do Ho Suh) that year, and the catalogs only included English texts.

*Original text: *Do Ho Suh*, Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, pp.5-7. 2001

Visible / Invisible

§ Kyung-mee Park

In his earlier career, Michael Joo produced works that put on display processes by which visible entities, such as human body and flora and fauna in nature, consume invisible calories as well as crystallized byproducts generated by these processes: One example is the installation work *Saltness of Greatness*, which converts the calorie amounts that would have been consumed by various historical personages of the East during their life spans, into commensurable quantities of salt. Through these works, Joo demonstrates what forms his own mental and corporeal expenditures in the act of attesting to cultural, historical identity can take. In other words, Joo joins art-making with apparently scientific subjects of energy production and calorie consumption incurred by the human being during his or her physical and psychological efforts and endeavors to reach a transformed state. By substituting the locus of the artwork with such practices of scientific thinking and its physical resultant objects, he attempts to obliterate the boundary between the scientific and the aesthetic. In comparison with Pop Art, which appropriates popular cultural images and thus demonstrates the collapse of division between fine art and everyday life, and conceptual-sculptural installation works by artists such as Joseph Beuys, which dissolve the division between the artwork and meaningful quotidian “things” that are also personally invested, Michael Joo’s art visibly concretizes the unity of mental thinking and physical reaction, by crossing the boundary between the outcomes of natural phenomena, which can be understood through scientific theory, and the artist’s own production.

The return to his own roots, revisiting the origin of his historical identity as a second-generation Korean-American, must have required immense energy and effort on Joo’s part. As a former science student—he majored in biology in college—Joo has been



► Michael Joo,
Tree, installation
view, 2001.
Courtesy of ARKO
Arts Archive, Arts
Council Korea.

performing such an act with depth through the aforementioned approaches. That is, in response to being raised in the United States, a place where various ethnicities and cultures intermingle, Joo has produced performance and sculptural works that remark upon the amount of energy and calories necessary for a return trip back to the original state, one prior to hybridized cultural existence. Subsequently, Joo's work has gradually gained further depth through subject matter that fuses Western scientific thinking and Eastern spiritualism, and through a more fundamental exploration into the materiality of things and its background-consciousness, energy, and structure of *qi*. One recent work that is particularly successful at expressing such a concept is *Visible*, exhibited at the Whitney Biennial in 2000. It is a headless seated figure of the Buddha—the symbolic personage of Eastern spiritualism—cast in transparent polyurethane: In it, Joo places the bone structures and inner organs, and exposes them to sight, as in an Western medical or scientific anatomical model. The sculpture humorously articulates the ultimate joining into a single structure—like the two sides of a coin—of order existing between opposing elements, such as outside and inside, and soul and body. It may be a mere headless body without the thinking brain, but also at the same time, this sculpture remarkably metaphorizes the co-existence of another world, i.e., the spiritual world, that controls the physical body. To restate, in artists through sexuality-oriented works, Joo's work, also encompasses the notion of the invisible world, which coexists with

the visible. Furthermore, the very significant quality observable in the group of works to which Visible belongs is that they take certain forms that demolish the border between outside and inside, allowing the two to gaze at each other. A good example is a sculpture of animals with their inner organs, exposed and placed in a transparent glass vitrine. Namely, it unambiguously exposes the materiality of the organs by excising the epidermis of a living being, and reminds the viewer of the mystery of existence and energy by juxtaposing life-ness and thing-ness. At the same time, by erecting a glass wall between this object, i.e., the artwork, and the audience, this work enables the paradox of transparent mutual discernment between the audience outside the wall and the object within the vitrine. That is, it is not that the glass wall separates the audience and the work, but that, contradictorily, it clearly functions as a reminder of the reciprocally projectable relationship existing between the two. Michael Joo strives to maximize this concept with his exhibition at the Korean Pavilion in this year's Venice Biennale. The artist wishes to emphasize (paradoxically) the sense of oneness between the works and the audience, by not interfering with the pavilion's architectural characteristics (a generous number of glass walls) and enhancing its atmosphere of a glass vitrine. He will modify the pavilion structure to produce three sub-spaces: the central space from which the outside is clearly visible; a undulating wooden wall and a temporary long glass wall, which together will resemble a display cabinet in a natural history museum; and a small square space that will look like a showroom. In the central space, he will place a huge oak tree trunk, first divided into segments, then reconnected with metal links. *Improved Rack*, composed of moose antlers similarly dismembered, then returned to its original shape with metal pipes, will be hung on the long, undulating side wall like objects on display in a natural history museum. In addition, the vitrine-like square space will hold a group-portrait sculpture, *Family (tradition)...*, a bronze casting just smaller than life-size. Each body in this group portrait is an individual entity that also forms part of a mutually dependent (and organic) loop of harmony.

What Michael Joo wishes to show us through these works is

perhaps the fundamental order that can be discovered in the co-existence of contrasting elements such as fragment and whole, inside and outside, nature and artifice, destruction and restoration, individual and group, and East and West. At the core of Joo's art lies the unchanging force and organizing processes of nature, which enable the circulatory structure of existence and expiration—the mutable conditions of living beings that originate from the combination of materiality and immateriality. As examined here, Joo's early work shows artistic uniqueness through its combination of cultural discourse with logical scientific notions, by connecting his own travel in search of identity to the body's physical metamorphoses and their byproducts. Currently, his work displays the development of this socio-cultural awareness into more fundamental problems of living beings' existence, the order of the universe, and others. In this way, Joo's art continues to expand its resonance.

Seoul, 2001

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*Original text: *Michael Joo*, Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, pp.5–6. 2001

Kyung-mee Park_ 2001 Commissioner of the 2001 Korean Pavilion

“The theme of the works by Do Ho Suh and Michael Joo both revolved around cultural self-identity, but the contrast in their approaches to understanding and sculpturally expressing that theme was very interesting. These artists had established their sculptural languages that were universally interpretable on the international stage beyond local art. I hoped they would resonate with the international art community and take the Venice Biennale as a stepping stone to elevate their careers to the next level. (...) I remember one episode where, after selecting Michael Joo and Do Ho Suh as the artists, there was a presentation for the representatives of the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation, and they were concerned about Michael Joo’s nationality as a U.S. citizen. I convinced them that in the era of internationalization, where boundaries in art have already been blurred, an artist’s nationality should no longer be an issue, citing the precedent of Nam June Paik, who participated in the Venice Biennale as the lead artist of the German Pavilion.”

***Geummi Kim, “2020 Special Study on Art Policy of the Arts Council Korea—Discovery and Collection of Data to Build an Archive of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: Focusing on Art Exhibitions from 1995 to 2015”, Arts Council Korea, 2020, p.148**



▼ Invitation to the Korea Pavilion opening luncheon party (Venue: Peggy Guggenheim Collection, sponsor: Samsung Foundation of Culture), 2001. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

V



2003

V - 2003

Commissioner Kim Hong-hee turned her eyes toward the site-specificity of the Korean Pavilion, a structure that resembled the traditional Korean gazebo, or pavilion. The Korean Pavilion exhibition in 2003 focused on the transparent structure of the venue, maximizing the architectural characteristics so as to recognize the venue not as a mere container for artwork, but as part of the content. Inkie Whang's digital interpretation of the *sansuhwa* (traditional landscape painting), *Like a Breeze*, was a 28-meter-wide relief mural spanning the undulating wall in the main hall to the glass wall, overlapping with the outside view through the glass. Chung Seoyoung's *The New Pillar* transformed the cylindrical column in the semicircular space into a passive pillar using Styrofoam and cement. Bahc Yiso's *Venice Biennale* installed in the front yard of the Korean Pavilion featured a rectangular wooden frame, each of its legs standing on a basin containing water, pebbles, and tiles. On one corner of the frame, he carved all 26 national pavilions in the Garden and the 3 main exhibition halls of the Arsenale as a comment on the biennale's cultural hegemony. *World's Top Ten Tallest Structures in 2010* was a caricature of the world's tallest buildings, made cartoonish with seemingly careless construction from pipes and plasticine. It was a satirical jab at the exhibiting countries' competition to be the "best in the world."

The focus shifted from individual presentations to building upon specific details and differences in the Korean Pavilion. With that intention, the identity of South Korean art was conceptualized with the here and now of contemporary South Korean-ness, rather than by sifting through past traditions. Under the theme *Landscape of Differences*, the Korean Pavilion's structural, spatial, and local

characteristics and furthermore the aesthetic and ideological differences between Bahc Yiso, Chung Seoyoung, and Inkie Whang inspired multiple dimensions of difference that gave the exhibition and its curation a distinct identity.

The Korean Pavilion at the 50th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

Landscape of Differences

June 15–November 2, 2003

Commissioner

Kim Hong-hee

Exhibitors

Bahc Yiso, Chung Seoyoung,
Inkie Whang

Curatorial Team

Jun hui Byun (Coordinator)
Jeon Jeong-ok (Exhibition
Assistant)

Catalog

Joan Kee (Editor and
Translator)
byul.org (Designer)
Bak Hyon Jin (Photographer)

Exhibition Design and Installation

Youn Jae-won

Production Assistants

Um Sodong, Park Kyoung
Hwan, Lee Young Sun, Maeng
Jee Young, Yang Jae Yoon

Sponsored by

Samsung Foundation of Culture,
Ilshin Foundation, SSAMZIE Co.,
Ltd, Hermès Korea, Seokjoo
Arts and Culture Foundation,
Korean Air

Support by Galleries

Chung Seoyoung's work was
made possible in part by Kukje
Gallery.
Inkie Whang's participation
was made possible in part by
Gallery Hyundai.

Organized by

Korean Culture and Arts
Foundation



▼ Korean Pavilion exhibition souvenir,
T-Shirt (Bahc Yiso). Courtesy of ARKO
Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by
CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

Landscape of Differences

§ Kim Hong-hee

1. Like a Traditional Pavilion: The Korean Pavilion

As the core concept for this year's Korean Pavilion, the theme *Landscape of Differences* articulates many differences on multiple levels. In general terms, these differences are those that can be found in art and nature, between interior spaces and the external outdoors. On a more specific level, they can be found between the artists and their works. But because part of the curatorial agenda behind this exhibition is to distinguish the Korean Pavilion from other national pavilions as well as produce a *landscape of differences* encompassing multiple levels, the identity of this year's exhibition is based upon the site-specificity, that is, the specific structure, spatiality, and site unique to the Korean Pavilion.

Relatively small in actual physical size, the Korean Pavilion in the Giardini is located in the southeastern part of Venice. Unlike the larger pavilions of Russia, Japan, Germany, Canada, Britain and France which are situated parallel to the main thoroughfare of the Giardini, the Korean Pavilion lies in a more remote location diagonal from this main road, an unprepossessing location that does not readily draw the viewers' attention. The peripheral location of the Korean Pavilion, however, is unexpectedly advantageous in that, being located on the southeasternmost point of the Giardini, it is framed by trees and rich coastal scenery. As the viewer approaches the entrance, he or she also has the full benefit of being able to more fully appreciate the intimacy between nature and the Giardini grounds.

Largely composed of iron and glass, the structure of the Korean Pavilion exudes something of the chill of modernism, but these materials paradoxically lend themselves to the structure's symbiotic

relationship to nature. For not only does the skylight and the glass window/wall which surrounds the front and back of the structure immerse the pavilion into its natural surroundings, the sunlight that pierces the structure during the day does so in a way that seems to dissolve the structure into a state of non-materiality where only the landscape outdoors remains visible. The Pavilion interior is an irregularly-shaped space left intact that seems as if it were intended to coalesce with the natural characteristics of the pavilion site. As a condition precedent to the pavilion's construction, the previous brick building once used as a restroom remains untouched, but other parts have been added to the extent permitted to form a series of new spaces resembling squares, half-circles and other forms. The overall effect is one of organic irregularity. Almost in mimesis of this, the interior of the pavilion is also irregular and uneven with spaces shaped like right squares, rectangles, tidal waves, and half-circles laid out without any adherence to a particular system in mind. The height of the ceiling is similarly uneven. If one enters the glass door that sits at the southeastern end of the pavilion, one can see in a glance a long, square exhibition space with a high ceiling and a wall shaped like a series of waves to the right. The space located to the left of the entrance door, in contrast, is relatively sequestered and one must physically turn left in order to encounter the gallery shaped like a half-circle, which itself leads to a connected interior space left behind from the original structure built prior to the Korean Pavilion.

In an attempt to encapsulate the natural scenery of Venice, that quintessential city on water, Seok Chul Kim and Franco Mancuso, the architects, designed the northeastern wall of the pavilion wall in such a way as to allude to the tidal movements of the waves rolling onto the Venetian coast. In addition, the metal wires forming a conical shape on the rooftop of the building, as if they were mast ropes, lend the air of a ship's deck, while the entire structure is gradually raised from the rear so that the structure appears as a ship coming into port. By aligning the construction of the Korean Pavilion to these natural conditions, the pavilion is simultaneously a representation of environmentally intimate, yet contemporary architecture, and it is from this very point that the Korean Pavilion

can be compared to a traditional Korean pavilion. The glass wall that encases the front and back of the building and enables the surrounding outdoors to permeate the structure so that the inside becomes the outside and vice versa in a kind of circulatory dialogue, resembles the open-ended organization found in a traditional Korean pavilion where there are no distinctions between the interior and the exterior, the inside and the outside. Although located in the middle of nature, the Korean Pavilion neither seeks to alter nor ignore its surroundings and in this sense it is also like a traditional pavilion where one can enjoy the natural surroundings, a place where one can contemplate a dialogue with nature, as has been depicted in so many traditional Korean ink brush paintings known as *sansuhwa* (literally, mountain-and-sea paintings). The Korean Pavilion is also a structure that makes possible a communion, and a more empathetic experience with nature.



► *Landscape of Differences*, exhibition view, 2003. Provenance: Art in Culture.

2. Spatial Invagination Constructed from an Aesthetics of Permeation

Because of its intimacy with its natural surroundings as well as its open-endedness, the architecture of the Korean Pavilion has often been described as "an expression of the Asian spirit through Western architecture." Yet from the time of its construction in 1995, the unusual structural elements of the pavilion have been criticized by many within Korea as an inappropriate space for an exhibition.

Due to what was perceived as conditions unfavorable to the display of visual art, those involved in mounting previous exhibitions in the Korean Pavilion have tried to overcome its structural elements by covering the glass walls, obstructing the building's other walls and by remodeling the interior space itself. Hence this edition of the Korean Pavilion differs from previous editions in that it uses the pavilion architecture as a point of departure from which to develop the theme of the exhibition. The structural singularities of the building are actually showcased, rather than concealed. In other words, the concept and specifics of the exhibition are derived from the pavilion building, the surrounding vista, and the open aspect of the pavilion in order to invoke the singularity of the Korean Pavilion as a whole. Instead of constructing the identity of the pavilion from supposedly Asian, or traditional elements, it is the intention of this exhibition to construct that identity from the site-specificity of the pavilion.

Here, the original shape of the structure as conceived by the architects has been restored by leaving intact that part of the ceiling which obstructs the skylight, and by removing the temporary wall and the coating covering the glass wall that encompasses the pavilion. This allows the scenery outdoors to more directly penetrate the interior, and intensifies the natural illumination of the exhibition space. Subsequently, the outdoor vista is itself *drawn into* the exhibition space while the works installed within the pavilion appear to be thrust into the outdoors. This causes a kind of spatial invagination to take place, which in turn, initiates a dialogue between the inside and the outside and contributes to the making of an aesthetic of permeation. Furthermore, the exhibition space shaped like a half-circle along with the wave-like wall, both of which were once considered unusable, or "dead" spaces, are actively utilized in order to expand the total surface area for exhibiting the works as well as highlight the difference of the Korean Pavilion vis-a-vis the other national pavilions.

It is not surprising, then, that the selection of the artists and the creation of works were also based upon the specific structural and spatial demands of the pavilion. Upon opening the main door, one

is confronted with the oblong central space and a wave-like wall to the right. Directly across is a clear view of the Venetian coast and lagoon. So striking was this image that I felt it best leaveth front central space dramatically empty and have Inkie Whang place his large-scale installation based on a reconstituted computer scan of a *sansuhwa* painting upon the 17-meter long wall. For his part, Whang decided to extend his work in order to cover the adjacent glass wall so that the entire work spans a total length of 28 meters. Utilizing the glass wall in such a way that the actual landscape of Venice visible outside compels the reversal of what is considered as the spatial outside and inside, Whang's work exists as an allegorical landscape that acts as both a metaphor for a conceptual kind of *sansuhwa* and a metonymy for the site-specificity of this year's pavilion.

To the left of the main door is an exhibition space almost opposite to that of the central one. Composed of arched, square, and concave sorts of spaces, it was my sense that Chung Seoyoung's "closed" or insular objects would transform this area into a mysterious one. Chung decided to architecturally expand upon one of the existing aspects of the pavilion for one work, while the other work uses the architectural structure as a prop by placing another constructed object in its midst so that the result would be truly site-specific. Standing in the half-circle gallery is a large pillar, which Chung has falsified in such a way as to make it appear bigger, while she has redone part of the interior so that it appears as a visual conundrum or a visual fiction. In contrast to Whang's wall-based work that strikes up a dialogue with the landscape outdoors, Chung's surreal fiction takes place inside; however, like the portion of Whang's work on the glass wall, Chung also reveals the fiction of the so-called "interior" by placing an object in a rear doorway. Straddling the inside of the exhibition space as well as the outdoors, this object merges the interior galleries together.

Given that the Korean Pavilion is located in a slightly remote area, I thought there should also be works intended to draw the viewer to the pavilion. For this reason, I selected Bahc Yiso, and he fulfills

this intention not by making obviously spectacular outdoor work, but by making careless, disconcerting wooden structures located in the grounds outside, and small objects made of plasticine, a soft sculpting material, in a smaller exhibition space resembling a display window just inside the entrance of the pavilion. Linked together by their common use of miniature scale and their architectural model-like quality, these works also link the inside with the outside and reenact the spatial invagination of outside and inside first initiated by Whang. Bahc's miniature models challenge notions of size and power, and on closer inspection, posit an epistemological game that extends beyond the inversion of space.

All three artists engage in facilitating a dialogue between the inside and the outside and inverting the order implied by the two. Together, their works form a "landscape of differences" that catalyzes a process of becoming but one that is also deconstructive in nature: the digitized traditional landscapes of Inkie Whang, the fictitious landscape of Chung Seoyoung that gives material shape to an impossible language of expression through the expansion and condensation of form, and the cultural landscapes of Bahc Yiso that launch a critique of culture through a certain aesthetics of carelessness. In the name of art, the conceptual landscapes offered by the three raise another kind of landscape of differences that includes the intersection of, and the juxtaposition between, the Venetian coastline and an actual landscape. Consequently, the Korean Pavilion's structural and site-related specifics embrace a spectrum based on conflicts, communions, and missed connections between the exterior and the interior, art and nature, artist and artist. Coming together in an irregular union based upon aesthetic and conceptual differences, the works of the three artists enable a comprehensive and unique vision of a Korean Pavilion—they produce a "landscape of differences" that easily oscillates between the polar ends of contemplation and restlessness.

3. Inkie Whang's *Like a Breeze*

In recent years, Whang has recreated traditional Korean paintings by means of a computer, and for this year's pavilion, he has chosen to base his contribution on the *Muigugokdo* (1592) by the Chosun dynasty master Yi Sung Gil. Based on an imagined view of the Mui mountains in Fujian in southeastern China, Whang chose this particular landscape with its infinite number of mountain peaks, hills, valleys, boats, and houses because it seemed to correspond to the Venetian landscape. He also chose the *Muigugokdo* because of its dimensions at 36 centimeters wide and 4 meters long, it perfectly matched the proportions of the site at which the artist was to install his work. Measuring 2.4 meters in height and 28 meters in length, *Like a Breeze* is based on a scan of this painting which was then magnified fifty times. The work is part of a series that Whang describes as "digital *sansuhwa*" for they are made by first scanning the original image and then rendering that scan into a pixelated one without the gradations of black and white found in the actual image. Following this initial stage of binarizing the original image, the artist then converts the pixels into dots, which he later prints out on A4-sized pieces of paper. In *Like a Breeze*, the length of which spans two walls, Whang used almost 1,500 pieces of paper which were attached upon an immense expanse of carbon film as large as the actual gallery walls. Afterwards, he punched holes into



► Artists Inkie Whang and Bahc Yiso installing artworks, 2003.
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive,
Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

the white areas around the black dots, and the carbon film was covered with a hard sponge and directly attached to the walls. For the part to occupy the solid wall, the negative space of the work is filled with tiny mirrored acrylic squares, and the positive space, that is, the image, is represented by discarded black vinyl salvaged from nearby farms near the artist's residence in Okcheon. For the glass wall, the negative space is simply the glass and the positive space is filled by repeated lumps of sticky black silicon shot, or squeezed, directly onto the wall's surface.

Involving approximately 130,000 of these mirrored acrylic squares measuring about 11 to 12 millimeters on each side and 60,000 silicon lumps measuring 12 by 12 millimeters, the enormous labor and time demanded by this version of the digital *sansuhwa* practically renders meaningless the ease and efficiency of digital technology. The power that this work exudes comes not from the quality or quantity of the material, but from the intensity of manual labor, the repetitive task of shooting the silicon or attaching the acrylic pieces, the effort of which is comparable to the practices of a Zen master. In lieu of the rivets or crystals previously used in earlier works, Whang has selected reflective acrylic for the solid, wave-like wall to emphasize the non-materiality of the glass used in the pavilion structure itself. Stemming from architectural and aesthetic considerations, this selection of mirrored acrylic brings some very special effects; by reflecting its surroundings, these mirrored shards also reflect light in such a way that seems to transform the wall surface into the surface of water. The wall's surface appears to lose its claims to materiality. The tiny mirrors that cause this dematerialization render visible, and then invisible the nondescript pixels so that the abstract quality of Whang's digital aesthetic is intensified.

The epic scale of *Like a Breeze*, which occupies more than half of the circumference of the main exhibition space, also fulfills the imperatives of the digital aesthetic. The floating image made by the movement of the electronic pixels not only demands that the viewer contemplate the landscape produced, but also compels the



▼ Inkie Whang, *Like a Breeze*, 2003. Courtesy of the Artist. Provenance: Art in Culture.

viewer to appreciate the work by walking alongside it. The work is an installation, but one possessing a measure of the theatricality of performance to the degree that the work enters the realm of time art. Like electronic media that treads intermediate ground between two- and three- dimensionality, the introduction of a temporal element in Whang's work elevates the pixelated mirrored pieces on the surface to the relief-like quality of the mosaic so that the landscape approaches the level of three-dimensional art. As stated by the artist, "instead of faithfully communicating the text, I use the errors or variations generated by computer processing," and through this he is able to generate a new response. This dual evocation produces a synaesthesia beyond the visual, and this, along with the implied demand for a change in the system of perception, constitute the epistemological meaning of Whang's digital *sansuhwa*.

Whang's digital *sansuhwa* approach the level of allegory by recomposing old originals in a contemporary manner, not only through computer technology, but also through the use of such industrial materials as silicone, mirrors, discarded vinyl, and the like. His works become metaphorical enactments of cultural

legacies and metonymy-as-landscapes. In his determination to recreate the image, Whang borrows past images so that they can be resuscitated. In addition, the repetitive and linear arrangement forms a numerical sequence which follows the concept of intertextuality. This is aggregated into spontaneous fragmentation and deconstruction denoting a postmodern allegory, and *Like a Breeze* is true to its title as it overcomes boundaries between the traditional and the modern, past and present, East and West, analog and the digital, and the complex and the fragmented. It is an allegorical landscape that is meta-temporal, meta-spatial and meta-technological in nature. Along with its meditative quality, the work evokes a restlessness that argues for the redefinition of direct and straightforward ways of thinking.

Like a Breeze is a double landscape where the actual landscape of Venice is juxtaposed with the valleys within the formal work. This juxtaposition is a strategy that invalidates binaries such as the internal and the external, the real and the fake, appearance and reappearance. Like a traditional pavilion, the Korean Pavilion is not so much a building as a site that desires to be part of nature, and a place that immediately reveals its site-specificity. The pavilion itself operates as a landscape-like metonymy and rephrased, *Like a Breeze* functions as a visual hint that, instead of representing conflicts of nature, place, space, and positions, articulates a "landscape of differences" with the works by the other two artists in its visualization of an ideological, conceptual, abstract, deconstructive, meta-linguistic, and discursive landscape.

4. Chung Seoyoung's *The New Pillar* and *A New Life*

For her contribution, Chung Seoyoung presents works that humorously conflate the gaps and the incongruencies between images and concepts, as well as words and objects. In these object-like works resembling apparently useless pieces of furniture, they forge a relationship between the interior and the body in a strange and unusual way. These works share characteristics found

in interior design, but in this exhibition where the installation is symbiotic with the pavilion structure, that quality is emphasized and strengthened through the architectural codification of the works.

Directly to the left of the pavilion center in the half-circle gallery is *The New Pillar*, a gigantic, "fake" pillar measuring 2.24 meters in height and 1.1 meters in diameter. Made by adding extra material onto the original pillar standing in the pavilion, the body of the "fake" pillar is of a durable white cement. The resulting image initially looks as if it is part of the original intended structure. But this misconception, or rather, the optical fabrication immediately comes to light as the viewer notices that this massive body of a pillar seems to "float" about five centimeters above the floor. From the window of the gallery one can look out into the landscape outside, but this view conflicts with the "fake" pillar that has no apparent use other than its mere largeness. Within this disjunctive juxtaposition formed by the "real" outdoors and the "fake" pillar, and the surreal landscape produced by the unbalanced scale of the massive pillar that almost overwhelms the exhibition space, the viewer experiences a shock from the resulting concurrence of visual pleasure and discomfort.

A New Life is a multi-part installation that uses the cube-shaped space formed by the brick structure that was the previous tenant of the site upon which the Korean Pavilion now stands. As if to underscore the positional and stylistic isolation of this space compared to the rest of the pavilion, Chung unfolds a singular drama upon this unlikely stage. Her production begins with an architectural alteration of the space's interior. A small door, whose fluorescent orange color provides a shot of visual spark into the otherwise monochromatic environment, bisects the entrance to this isolated space. When opened, this door shuts almost immediately as a result of the force from its physical recoil. The door that closes almost as soon as it opens separates itself from the rest of the pavilion is an ontological symbol of this space. It also denotes the artist's doubled attitude that wants the works to connect with, but also distance themselves from the others included in the exhibition.

Furthermore, it implies the curatorial desire to both distinguish and conflate the works of the three artists which serve, in turn, as a representation of ambivalence and boundaries.

The orange door, which seems to guide the viewer towards a new world, opens into an empty space disturbed only by the intrusive presence of a single black motorbike standing in an exit. This space is a strange and anxious kind of environment where the viewer is unsure as to what could, or what might happen. The exit in which the motorbike stands was originally the rear exit of the pavilion which had been walled up for some time until Chung decided to re-use it by perforating a hole about 90 centimeters in width. In the exit, the front half of a mid-sized black motorbike (about 2.5 meters long) stands inside the doorway while the rear half remains outside. In order to more closely inspect this strange motorbike, viewers must walk along the floor, which will feel different in comparison to the flooring in the other galleries for their footprints will cause a slight creaking noise. Such a sensation is caused due to the overlay of the original floor with a makeshift one of unfinished wood.

As one draws closer to the motorbike, one further notices that the front half looks like a regular motorbike while the rear seat is a cart with two wheels. Upon even more scrupulous inspection, the cart, made of planks, is not really a cart. Its bottom is an assemblage that looks like a house whose roof in turn is made to look like part of an expressway. The highway-cum-roof is drawn with some consideration of perspective so that the viewer can absorb some sense of velocity and distance. The motorbike is a hallucinatory object that is only possible in dreams and recalls the surreal visions of Lautreamont and Magritte. Unlike the majestic Venetian landscape visible through the glass wall that serves as the background for Whang's *Like a Breeze*, the outdoors that is visible through the rear exit is an abandoned backyard full of weeds.

Like *The New Pillar*, the space in *A New Life* is fake, fabricated, and a fiction. Although many works of contemporary art increasingly approach duplication of the everyday and resemble what amounts

to the objectification of daily life, Chung's works attempt to create art out of that which seems like falsehoods. Her works are fictions that rebel without a cause, or simply put, are lies. Like the pillar that floats above the surface, the object that is neither a motorbike nor a cart happening to be a house is as blatant a lie, and as pure a fiction, for it exists solely as an *objet d'art*. It becomes art, is art, for this reason. Yet the point from which Chung posits her lies is not from somewhere within her own imagination but from how she sees reality. Virtual reality and surreal fictitiousness are concurrently produced. An illustration in point is the roof of the house made from what appears as part of a highway, as if there were a shortage of land for housing as is common in Southeast Asia and other "Third World" countries. It is a droll and surreal device, and the artist states that "it is a very particular means through which the Third World or Asia uses in dealing with the present." The work is a meta-landscape that concerns a surreally "real" one. As if to transport this peculiar "highway" house all the way to Venice, Chung has attached it to the motorbike, but the altered motorbike relates to Venice through the paradoxical fact that motorbikes cannot be operated through the narrow Venetian streets, although carts are often used as a method of transport. It is a site-specific, surreal object that itself is a means to overcome the constraints of geography and nature. Chung fulfills the exhibition's premise of site-specificity by her strangeness of object and method.

In addition, her objects are an embodiment of the non-lingual, or that which denies the possibility of expression through language or systems operating as languages. They capture the gaze of the internal eye, the vision of the *deja vu*. In lieu of historical, conscious, censorious, and totalizing language, or "discursive language," the artist uses "figurative language", that is, language that is of an ahistorical, unconscious, avaricious and ruptured sort. Like Joyce and Proust, who problematized the signifier and the signified, and evaded the identity of language itself, Chung substitutes the meaning of universalism and conformity with tropes that overcome both the boundaries of grammar and a discursive kind of grammar infused with figurative rhetoric. Like the metaphorical condensation

that exists within the condition of synonymy as well as a strategy of metonymic replacement contingent upon the spontaneous which produced the complex, non-linear form of the "new essay," the rhetorical resistance expounded by Chung's works is actually the point from which the operation of metaphor and metonymy originates.

From this rejection of reality through metaphor and metonymy, Chung's objects possess the same allegorical quality as Whang's digitized wall works. But if Whang's works could be described as "hot," Chung's fictions are decidedly "cool," and in contrast to the more immediate reaction one supposes a viewer will have upon seeing the former, the latter has a very low degree of interaction with the viewer. In contrast to Whang, Chung replaces descriptive prose with abbreviated stanzas, and instead of narrative, she expresses herself through symbols. "Instead of alluding to a complex route, in the end it is my desire to express only a living kind of concentrated meaning and tension," she asserts. To Chung, communication is but a secondary problem. Her difficult objects, which concurrently demand insightful tension but also the mental respite found in contemplation, are mysterious ones and the allure of her works can be found in the fact that they do not simply remain within the domain of "objecthood," but resonate instead as "art."

5. Bahc Yiso's *Venice Biennale* and *World's Top Ten Tallest Structures in 2010*

Charged with the task of creating outdoor works for this exhibition, Bahc Yiso has installed *Venice Biennale* on the front grounds of the Korean Pavilion. If seen from a distance, this work appears simply as a quadrilateral wooden frame whose size approximates that of a small room. But if one were to look more carefully, one discovers that a corner of this frame supports two rods of wood which in turn are made of tiny sculpted forms. These two rods are at the heart of this work carved out of the longer of the two rods are miniature replicas of the twenty-six national pavilions while the three Arsenale

buildings are similarly carved from the smaller rod.

Supporting each leg of this quadrilateral frame are four plastic basins, all of which are lined with either colored tiles or white pebbles. Bahc explains that the water filling the basins represents that of Venice, and it could be said that the wooden frame supporting the replicated models of the national pavilions is the city of Venice itself where the biennale is also held in one corner of the city. Bahc has recreated the national pavilions and the Arsenale structures almost as if in response to the need to have the work perform the role of a site-specific outdoor work. Through a reconstruction of the city and the *Venice Biennale* itself, Venice Biennale could be described as a *site-representational* installation. Moreover, by satirizing the biennale structures through their miniaturization, the artist lightheartedly questions the authority of the biennale, as well as the conventional role of the outdoor work as being necessarily monumental.

Although Bahc's miniature pavilions are not meticulously crafted, they faithfully copy the appearance of those pavilions so that the viewer can easily recognize them as such. But the artist has disregarded the differences in scale between the pavilions so that all are each approximately two to three centimeters in size. He has simplified and reduced the differences and multiplicities of each of the national pavilions which otherwise contend with each other for the viewer's attention. By making the national pavilions more or less consistent with each other, Bahc emphasizes the triviality of differences as well as the evanescence of human accomplishment. As an international venue for the promotion of national culture and as an arena where national identity and cultural power may be asserted, the Venice Biennale is a site where each nation can indulge in their desire to make their pavilion the biggest and best site possible. The national pavilions become an outlet for this desire as well as a representation of hegemonic conflict. This said, *Venice Biennale* may be seen as a parody of the Venice Biennale whose history is saturated by a history fraught with the remains of battles for cultural supremacy, as evidenced through the persistence of the

national pavilion as the basic unit of organization. Although Bahc's critique of the biennale should be more pronounced because of his status as a participant, the intentionally careless or frail aspect of his work makes it difficult for the viewer to read it as a simple institutional critique. As seen in its size, format, and materials, this work, however, is non-authoritarian and non-monumental in nature; in fact, its initial appearance as a plain and tranquil landscape of a small town allows it to be read as a description of, as the artist states, "a future world without competition where everyone can live in peace."

Inside the pavilion, Bahc presents the grandly titled, *World's Top Ten Tallest Structures in 2010*, in a space resembling a display window. This work aligns plasticine models of the top ten tallest structures as of 2010 on top of a low table, including the Sola Tower in Australia at number one, the CN Tower in Toronto at number two, the World Gardens in New York at number three all the way down to the Oriental Pearl Tower in Shanghai at number ten. The tallest structure, which is almost twice the height of the others, is represented by a sewage pipe of 1.3 meters set upright with white plasticine applied to the pipe so that the actual structure's cylindrical shape is replicated. Distinguished only by the smallest of margins, the other nine structures are fairly similar in height, and the artist has replicated their forms by creating caricature-like models with hand-molded white plasticine. Because of the pliability of the plasticine, these architectural models look like props on a movie set, and the effect is both funny and strange.

The artist almost seems to be mocking myths of greatness and vertical desire which have persisted throughout history by rendering the tallest structures in the world in such materials as sewage pipes and plasticine. He also appears to reduce the scale of human accomplishment and historical legacy into miniatures so that they appear non-virile and anti-heroic. This is made possible by the artist's interest in the peripheral, the useless, the lacking, the empty, and the weak, his preference for cheap and everyday materials like plywood and concrete and his artmaking process where works

seem carelessly produced without deliberation. Like Chung, Bahc's works are visual jokes through which he reveals how we can laugh at the objects or works, but their appeal does not come from any central intensity or dramatic tension, but from a sense that they are, (to use the American colloquialism), "lame." It is the aestheticization of the shabby that separates Bahc from Chung.

While Inkie Whang and Chung Seoyoung create art by using materials and techniques not ordinarily used according to either the conventions of artmaking or those of tradition, Bahc Yiso wants to escape art through a lighthearted treatment of everything and anything. He attempts to escape the codes of "high" art or institutional art by pursuing a strategy of satire that gently tweaks the gravity of portentous themes. Familiar realities and real objects become strange to the viewer as Bahc depoliticizes notions of anti-artistic resistance and cultural critique through non-confrontational and non-dramatic ways. If Whang's allegorical landscapes and Chung's false dramas transcend reality through artistic directness, Bahc's unfamiliar realism could be said to alter reality through artistic irony. Despite the conceptual, formal, aesthetic, and strategic differences found in their works, however, there is common ground from which the artists can come together in one landscape: their abstract and conceptual approaches towards reality. What is consequently produced is a singular "landscape of differences" composed of multiple dimensions that these three artists represent, plus a meditative and dynamic spectrum of differences, as well as contemplation and provocation.

6. Escaping the Constraints of Identity

Having lived in the United States and Germany, respectively, Inkie Whang, Bahc Yiso, and Chung Seoyoung have all experienced the life of immigrants and the conflicts surrounding the problem of identity. Beginning in 1975, Whang lived in New York for ten years where he experimented with Minimalism and hard-edged abstraction, as well as Abstract Expressionism by painting the

gaps existing between unraveled strands of linen. But gradually he realized that the sensibilities of the West were different from his and decided to return to South Korea in 1986. At that point, he began to produce gestural drawings with his fingers, based upon the vigor of the natural rhythm of the body's movements. From these works, Whang began to find his own sensibility, and while identity was not directly articulated, his sensibility and excitement are palpable in these finger paintings.

After his return to South Korea in 1986, Whang purchased a studio in Paju, and later in Okcheon, where he enjoyed the comforts of rural life. He began to make works that reflected the scenery of these surroundings, while also making works that reflected his experimentation with different subject matter like honeycombs, staircases, and other alchemical signs and languages. Through this, he acknowledged that Western artistic legacies did form a part of his identity. In the mid-1990s, however, Whang started to make unexpected versions of *sansuhwa* by affixing Lego blocks or rivets onto the works and in 2000, he unveiled a new series of digital *sansuhwa* by pixelating these scanned paintings. This combination of tradition and digital technology enabled him to reach a happy compromise between his allegorical spirit and the techniques he had learned. It was from this point that Whang was able to escape from the constraints of identity by working in a method that was based upon his own nature and temperament.

From 1989 to 1996, Chung lived in Stuttgart, Germany, and she too was hardly immune to the problems posed by identity. But as implied by her works which make motifs, or derive inspiration from the Third World-like surreal landscapes, she compresses problems of the self and of racial identity into those of art and the identity of the artist. For Chung, art is more important than politics, form more than theory, aesthetics more than philosophy, and fiction more than reality. The problem concerns the essence of art; the question lies in how art differs from objects or reality. Where can we locate the meaning of art? What should art be? In order to separate art from non-art, the artist has created fictions of high intensity, dimension,

and density that reject reality. They are, however, fictions of, and created by, the object. That which is produced from an alchemical transformation of a confusion of identities, which in turn are produced from navigating the divide between art and the object, and art and non-art, defines Chung's fiction as much as the art itself.

As a producer of fiction, Chung is an artist that expresses through forms that cannot be expressed in language to produce experiences of profound unease. Her works are familiar to herself but for the outside viewer, they comprise a strange formal language that wants to establish communication with the viewer but must also contend with the artist's doubled psychology and doubled identities. Despite the futility of such communication, Chung tries to start a conversation with the viewer. Through a matrix of complicated meanings that can be interpreted on many different levels, the artist attempts to comment upon the chasm between the signifier and the signified, or in broader terms, to attempt a critical comment on both existential absurdity and structural irrationality.

While Chung's interest in identity operates on psychological and aesthetic levels, Bahc expands this interest with regard to societal issues. During his time in New York from 1982 to 1994, he produced work that expressed the experiences of immigrants along with related linguistic and cultural conflicts through black humor and cynicism. In addition, he raised issues pertaining to minority artists and problems relating to the Third World through the self-directed alternative space "Minor Injury." In 1995, however, Bahc returned to South Korea: "I became uninterested in themes of identity or cultural diversity and more interested in the lives of people, the frailty and transience of objects, the shabbiness of the great, and the triviality of accomplishment."

If we consider the apolitical, non-ideological and unconscious nature of Bahc's works made after his return to Seoul and the critical tendency of those works made prior to that return as double sides of a single coin, it could be said that a will to change

is still embedded somewhere. The artist's skeptical gaze is still concerned with the proclivity of others to exoticize, along with the self-peripheralization brought about by an internalized kind of Orientalism, as well as the trap laid by the kind of traditionalism or regionalism promoted in the name of globalization. But instead of the epic narrative, Bahc looks at the smaller narratives, the gaps no one else pays much attention to. Although his works do not reproduce identity per se, nor give voice to identity or use "Korean motifs," they argue for an aesthetic of the gap or abyss that corresponds with Asian notions of the void, and of irregularity, and the indeterminate.

Through an investigation of Chung's aesthetic and meaning, both of which transcend region-specificity, we can see how she reflexively and intuitively skirts the issue of Koreanness in a witty manner, while Whang and Bahc instinctively absorb themselves into this problem. In the case of Whang, this is addressed through the incorporation of his temperamental affinity towards nature, while Bahc expresses an interest in Koreanness through an attitude marked by its unchecked antipathy. In addition, the former strives to be faithful to his own nature while the latter escapes the oppressive constraints of identity but also resolves in an unforced manner, the conflict between globalization and region-specificity. However, both Whang and Bahc consciously maintain an endless dialogue with the traditions of the past and through a re-establishment with the past, they attempt to secure an identity that cannot be Other-ed. As Whang states, "what I've learned in my ten years of living in America is that you have to keep your principles. This is not only so that one can preserve one's dignity, but it's the only way to avoid becoming subordinated to the West." Or as Bahc notes, "globalism is an order which allows the strong to impose on the weak" a notion which he thinks should be substituted with "worldism, in which the weak can tell their own stories and if they later become tired of them, are free to talk nonsense or simply poke fun at the world."

7. Towards Glocalism Through a Landscape of "Dreams and Conflicts"

The theme *Landscape of Differences* not only pertains to the identity of the Korean Pavilion, but is also a key thematic notion that expresses a present-tense kind of Koreanness. Put otherwise, the identity of the Korean Pavilion is not found in regional traditions or Other-ed Orientalism, but in a state of the contemporary that is always produced so that the "here and now" is made visible. Through this, an aspect of contemporary Korean art that can be seen is one that is traditional yet modern, Korean yet international.

Through *Dreams and Conflicts*, the overall theme of the biennale set by Francesco Bonami, the task of the biennale lies in the "internationalism-versus-regionalism" issue that contemporary art is faced with today. What is needed now is a survey of international artists that can unpack a global vision that opens national and racial identities, and *Dreams and Conflicts* endeavors to be this survey. From this perspective, Bonami's *Dreams and Conflicts* reflects the artistic, historical, and social frames of today that are in turn produced in contemporary art. He seems convinced that it is from these dreams and conflicts that future issues will be resolved.

By comparing *Landscape of Differences* with *Dreams and Conflicts* an analogy can be drawn between landscapes and dreams, and differences and conflicts. When differences and conflicts are interpreted from a Derridean view of *différence*, it can be said that the conflicts and contradictions generated by difference result in the creation of an imagined, non-existent landscape. Thus, *Landscape of Differences* evokes a deconstructive landscape that embodies meaning through the difference of the signified, and through the chain of those differences. What is important here is not the deconstruction itself, but what comes after it, that is, the new landscape that emerges from, and after, that process of deconstructing. This landscape goes beyond the binaries of East/West, tradition/identity, or international/regional and instead aims at a more catalytic integration via the merging of differences

between nature and art, art and its environment, as well as the difference between the artists, and the difference between the works. Revolving around the axis of difference, *Landscape of Differences* not only acts as a strategic curatorial premise intended to distinguish Korean identity, but also serves as a blueprint for a new globalism and a new regionalism—it is a landscape of dreams and conflicts directed towards “glocalism.”

To many non-Western artists who, in postcolonial contexts, associate modernization with Westernization and understand modernism as imperialism, and especially young contemporary Korean artists who are particularly sensitive to the demands imposed by globalization and international activity, perhaps the most urgent issue is the task of having to resolve or symbiose region-specificity and globalization. Notions of a new globalism, or a new region-specificity, offer one solution to this problem. Instead of a globalism that forces under-developed countries to meet Western standards, this would be a new globalism based upon equality of gain and loss which draws awareness to the means used and the roles played in Western society. Likewise, this will contribute to the formation of a profound and intellectual type of glocalism that puts aside the kind of regressive traditionalism and regionalism that breeds collectivization and exoticization derived from colonialism in favor of a productive tradition that will, through a dynamic new regionalism, aid in the development of a cultural perspective in the non-West that is open to other cultures.

The site-specificity upon which *Landscape of Differences* is based is deeply rooted in considering these problems. In lieu of egocentric and egotistical works that reject any relationship with reality, through an architectural, environmental, and natural collaboration between the pavilion structure and surrounding environment and landscapes, one can expect that this will be an intertextual and interconnected exhibition able to actively engage with daily and social realities. In addition, site-specificity makes this an exhibition that is conceptual and progressive, as its emphasis is not on the external but on the internal complexity and the necessity of process.

It is hoped that this will be a contemplative and proactive exhibition where a singular image of the Korean Pavilion will be produced. In conclusion, it is an exhibition that transcends the format of a regular solo show where the exhibition space is merely an individual venue for each of the participating artists by functioning as a site where the curator may introduce social issues or problems and encourage the artists to respond in a shared process. The pavilion offers a new exhibition model whereby critical perspectives and timely discussions are included together.

While I have tried to create a landscape of differences through this curatorial proposal and the active participation of the three artists by basing this exhibition on the Korean Pavilion itself as well as the site of Venice, I have also tried to consolidate their differences into one consistent landscape. Using the nature-friendly aspect of the Korean Pavilion as a point of departure, the landscape of differences that emerges is one that originates from the site-specificity of the Venice Biennale within the Giardini grounds and Venice itself so that the end result will be, as implied by Whang's Venetian landscape, Bahc's *Venice Biennale* and Chung's Venetian motorbike, is an exhibition that can best be described as "Things That Happened in Venice, Circa 2003."

The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 is republished here.

*Original text: *Landscape of Differences*,
Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, pp.60–83. 2003

Joan Kee_Editor of the 2003 Korean Pavilion Exhibition Catalog

“To be a participant in the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale is to forfeit some measure of one’s reflexivity. One reason is because the artists’ roles are pre-scripted to some extent by the basic function of the pavilion as a site of representation built to showcase Korean art to the world. Another, and more significant, reason lies in how the viewer perceives the works. Within Korea, this perception is inflected by a nationalist discourse focused primarily on locating what is “ours” (urigeot). Often this perception accompanies a concerted desire to avoid what is categorically thought of as Western.”

***Original text: Exhibition Catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003, “Neither Ours Nor Others”, *Landscape of Differences*, p.122**



VI

2005

VI - 2005

The exhibition title was taken from Fritz Lang's 1948 namesake film. Breaking the conventional way of including the minimum number of artists, commissioner Sunjung Kim invited the largest number in the Korean Pavilion's history. Kiwon Park transformed the walls of the pavilion into jade-colored fiberglass-reinforced-plastic partitions, and Nakhee Sung's mural painted directly on the pavilion's wall changed the overall atmosphere. Gimhongsok's *Oval Talk*, installed before it, resembled a large red egg. To the left of the red oval was Sora Kim's video installation, and on the wall were Kiwon Park's works, as well as photographic portraits of girls by Heinkuhn Oh. On the structure connecting the indoor exhibition space to the rear exit was Nakyoung Sung's mural, and on the second floor was ChoiJeong-Hwa's large installation *Site of Desire* made by stacking red rectangular plastic colanders.

Bahc Yiso made a posthumous return to the biennale with *World Chair*—too spacious for a single seat, yet uncomfortable for two. *World Chair* was not so much a tribute to the artist as it was a symbol encouraging contemporary artists to seek emotional connections and share their conceptual attitudes. Jewyo Rhii did, however, commemorate his senior and advisor Bahc Yiso by daring herself to draw at the highest point of the Korean Pavilion, on the upper edge of the column and on the ceiling nearby. Kim Beom showed a reconstruction of TV news, and Ham Jin presented a miniature installation on the balcony, viewable through a magnifying glass, which drew curious visitors. Painter Sungsic Moon exhibited *Rectangular Garden*, while Park Sejin showcased *Landscape*. Bae Young-whan presented a work from the *Pop Song* series, which had already been introduced at the 2002 Gwangju Biennale, and

Yeondoo Jung displayed *Evergreen Tower*. Additionally, Nakyoung Sung took the stage as a DJ during the opening party and delivered a music performance.

The Korean Pavilion at the 51st International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

Secret beyond the door

June 12–November 6, 2005

Commissioner

Sunjung Kim

Exhibitors

Kim Beom, Sora Kim,
Gimhongsok, Sungsic Moon,
Kiwon Park, Park Sejin, Bahc
Yiso, Bae Young-whan,
Nakyoung Sung, Nakhee Sung,
Heinkuhn Oh, Jewyo Rhii,
Yeondoo Jung, Choi Jeong
Hwa, Ham Jin

Assistants to Commissioner

Jang Un Kim, Heejin Kim,
Sunnyoung Oh

Administration

Mikyung Lee

Coordinator in Venice

Jun Hui Byun

Installation and Technical Support

Woosuk Hwang, Uimook Jung

Designed by

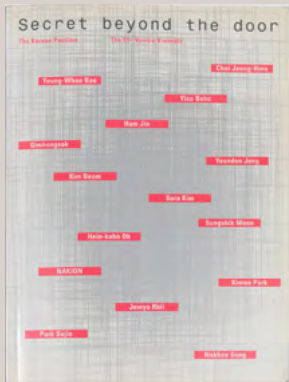
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Biennale di Venezia



▼ Catalog *Secret beyond the door* from the Korean Pavilion, 2005. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

Secret beyond the door

§ Sunjung Kim

1. Memories

Memory: "I see us still, sitting at that table."

But have I really seen the same visual image or one of those that I had then? Do I also certainly see the table and my friend from the same point of view as then, and so not see myself? — Ludwig Wittgenstein

Time passes by. Moments of the present are transported to the past, and the future takes over as "now." Everything changes in time, irreversible and unstoppable. "Now" encompasses yesterday and tomorrow. To speak of "now" is to speak of the past "nows" and the upcoming "nows." Now I am about to talk about the "now" of Korean art, numerous "nows" of the past years, particularly those of the 1990s. The irrecoverable "nows" of the past only come to me as memories, traces of lived events.

The 1990s were the years of drastic changes in the South Korean art scene as well as in the larger culture in general. A number of significant phenomena characterize these changes. Collective movements and trends were replaced by the individual efforts of artists and artist groups. These efforts were most visible in performance, new media, and hybrid forms. New exhibition spaces were created, as international biennales and alternative spaces were established. Heightened demands for and widened reception of diverse cultural forms stimulated collisions, changes, and diversification of charged energies.

Such a surge of energies was ignited by what had little to do with art, more with larger socio-political changes like liberalization of overseas tourism and the 1988 Olympic Games, and their deep influences on culture in general. Traveling overseas that used to be

reserved only for the privileged few has finally become available for all citizens, thereby a close observation and direct viewing of prestigious foreign events offered sources of inspiration and ideas to Koreans. The impacts of the Olympic Games on national politics, economics, and culture were far-reaching and profound. Large-scale art events such as the *International Outdoors Sculpture, A Retrospective of Nam June Paik* (1992), and the *Whitney Biennial in Seoul* (1993) were the fruits of these changes. It would not be too exaggerated to say that before the 1990s, information channels to the South Korean art community from the outside only restricted to less than a handful of art magazines and artists studying or working abroad. The kinds of information distributed through such channels tended to be not only inaccurate but also dated. The art events inviting art from overseas in the 1990s offered direct and up-to-date information about the currents of international art. These events were immediately followed by a number of systematic efforts to establish new channels of exchanges, most notably, the initiation of the Gwangju Biennale and the establishment of the Korean Pavilion in Venice in 1995.

The ones who were most sensitive and responsive to these new social conditions were artists. It was the individual efforts of the artists, I am convinced, that brought changes to the South Korean art scene. The most outstanding, undeniable example of this is Nam June Paik, who had not only been active internationally, but also influential towards South Korean local artists despite the early lack of general recognition in the homeland. By offering considerable advice on the government's art policy making, and later directly being involved in many international art events, Nam June Paik was no doubt the figure who anticipated and made a tremendous amount of impact upon the South Korean art scene in the 1990s. Other parts of the South Korean art world besides the individual artists went through a series of hardships and conflicts in the process of adaptation to the changing conditions throughout the 1990s. The structural weakness and unbalance among the sectors could not be easily overcome by the government's reformative efforts made during the later half of the 1990s. Many possible

reasons for this, I presume, were found among the new revisions themselves: Those foreign imports could not meet the demands of the people.

Currents in the 1990s

Changes in Attitudes and Positions The South Korean art scene before the 1990s was largely divided into Modernism and Minjung art (People's Art). This division, adding to a difference in their ideologies, reflects their different attitudes to forms and contents as a primary concern in art. Young artists who studied under such a climate began to respond to the dual opposition in their own ways. The most decisive momentum for this development was made by the *Whitney Biennial in Seoul*. The exhibition featured works that dealt with social and political issues, granting the South Korean artists confidence to incorporate forms and contents.

The joining of formal concerns and conceptual approaches also helped resolve the conflict between high art and popular culture. Artists like Choi Jeong Hwa and Lee Bul, who had been working outside the commercial gallery system and within the underground cultural scene, started gaining recognition through exhibitions like *Plastic Spring* (1993) and *Ssack* (1995). Having produced performance, gallery exhibitions, and stage works that challenge socially preconceived ideas and social taboos, these two artists were already known for the subversiveness of their works. Previously separated disciplines, namely paintings, music, films, and dance, were bridged in single-night happenings. These events were the results of autonomous and collaborative efforts, often made by artist groups. Liberation of free overseas travel and demilitarization of the political regime in the 1990s allowed artists' interrogation of previously repressed or neglected social issues such as popular culture, feminism, and homosexuality. It was around this time that a small number of cultural theorists and artists with diverse backgrounds started interacting with one another in the club district near Hongik University in Seoul.

Structural Changes A series of notable changes occurred in the art scene of the 1990s that was still much to be diversified and specialized. Firstly, the emergence of art professionals such as curators began to take part in organizing exhibitions that used to be put up by artists themselves. It could be said that South Korean art had been operating through artists, and "curators," if there was any, were like assistants taking care of administrative details. But curator and critic Young-Taek Park introduced alternative forms of exhibitions and a writing style sharply distinguished from that of his predecessors. Independent curator Young-chul Lee organized a series of government-funded large-scale projects including the two biennales at Gwangju and Busan and *City and Media* (1998). Lee's most notable accomplishment was the 2nd Gwangju Biennale in 1997, in which he combined an international form of exhibitions and East Asian concepts. Yongwoo Lee made successful results from *Plastic Spring* and the first Gwangju Biennale before he took the responsibility for Gwangju Biennale again in 2004. Besides, a number of independent curators emerged and worked on smaller-scale exhibitions. This sudden increase of curators was partly due to the changes in the academic system, by which many curators could be academically trained at universities.

The second significant change is the central role of institutions. What propelled South Korean art previously had been the network of commercial galleries rather than national, public, and private



► *Secret beyond the door*, Exhibition view, 2005.
Provenance: Art in Culture.

museums. The key players in the scene all changed drastically in the 1990s when museums and alternative spaces started assuming major roles. The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Gwacheon was geographically distant from the center of Seoul and too large, which made it very difficult to promptly respond to current tendencies and issues. On the contrary, private museums located within Seoul were much more sensitive to the changes in the field and quick to establish their own distinct identities. While national and public institutions were rather obscure in their directions owing to their multiple layers of decision-making processes, private ones were very clear about their positions and characteristics, as manifested in their special exhibitions. In the art scene of the 1990s, Kumho Museum of Art took a critical role by introducing influential political works that used to be alienated by commercial galleries. Its function as a supporter of socially conscious artists of the period seemed to be weakened, after it moved to a different location with enlargement of the scale. Whereas Kumho was keen on reflecting local trends, Total Museum of Contemporary Art could be said to focus more on international networks by interacting with foreign art councils in South Korea, presenting foreign artists and South Korean artists studying abroad.

The middle of the 1990s saw the foundation of Sungkok Art Museum, followed by Art Sonje Center, which specialized in supporting new productions of interdisciplinary projects, and Ilmin Museum of Art, which aimed to maintain the aesthetic continuity from ancient tradition to contemporary art. Samsung Museum of Art, which later founded Leeum in 2004, has been dedicated to build their permanent collection of ancient Korean art, along with its efforts to support the role of education and communication in art. Overall, all private museums, with the sole exception of Samsung, tended to concentrate on special exhibitions rather than permanent collections. This means that the private museums were eager to define their own identities by being sensitive to what is current and new.

Another significant change in the South Korean art world of the 1990s is the emergence of alternative spaces, which became the

nurturing ground for many artist groups to be formed according to their distinct spatial characteristics. Project Space SARUBIA launched a number of site-specific projects; Art Space POOL was actively supportive of politically-oriented artists, providing the artists with not only the exhibition space but also the means of communication and debate, most notably *Forum A*, a periodical providing an open forum for discussing art theory and criticism to critics, scholars, and artists; Alternative Space LOOP was committed to the discovery of new young local artists; and SSamzie Space offered a residency program, through which many emerging artists exchanged ideas and generated collaborative projects.

The major force behind the emergence of new opportunities, spaces, and artists was the increase of public funds. Reasons for the weak structural base of the South Korean art community could be found in many directions, among which, however, poor activities of commercial galleries would be one reason. Compared to foreign commercial galleries who perform professional management and promotion of artists, South Korean commercial galleries could barely provide such services due to their weak financial bases. This weak gallery structure endangered the existence of artists in post-capitalist society. Artists had to rely on individual sponsorship or other sources of income. As the political changes of the 1990s induced more international exchanges, however, South Korean artists came to be more frequently invited to international exhibitions, and more international programs were presented in South Korea. In this sudden increase of international activities, more government funds became available to artists and coordinators who were internationally active as a way of national promotion. Especially coming to the late 1990s, interests in neighboring Asian countries like Japan, China, and Southeast Asian countries increased much more, realizing networks of artists and international collaborations.

2. The Artists

I don't want my house to be sealed in all directions and windows locked completely. I want all cultures to float in, out and around my house. But, I don't want any culture to force my feet to be lifted above ground and float. — Mahatma Ghandi

The central role of production in the system of art belongs to artists. In South Korean art, the artists have made not only art works but also changes. While the artists of the 1970s struggled to bring a formal change in the South Korean art world, the artists of the 1980s directly engaged themselves in social and political movements, which left the binary opposition between tradition and modern reformation, between purism and realism. It was in the midst of such changes of the late 1980s when the South Korean art communities faced globalization, and it was, as mentioned earlier, partly thanks to Nam June Paik who brought home international art through various channels.

While Paik encouraged changes of the scene from outside, the ones who activated the changes within were Bahc Yiso and Choi Jeong Hwa. The late Bahc Yiso went to the United States after his undergraduate education and stayed there until his return in 1994. While working in the US, he introduced major art issues, events, and artists to the South Korean art communities by contributing his articles to local Korean art magazines. Once back in the homeland, he began to extend his influence as a conceptual artist, cultural theorist, program organizer, and art critic. In my understanding, Bahc was the figure who achieved the hard task of bringing the conceptual approaches to the emotional and narcissistic tendencies of South Korean art. Conceptual approach could be found in the traditional Korean literati paintings, but it lost its continuity in the pre-modern era when the inflow of the western art underscored only the formal aspect. Bahc sought to recover the tradition of thoughts and ideas in Korean art history by using the strategies of western conceptual art of the 1970s. For him, this was ultimately to compensate for the comparatively narrow choice

of contents in Korean art caused by the lack of information and artistic vocabulary. By utilizing cheap construction materials in his installations, thus, reminiscent of some buildings still in progress or architectural waste, Bahc denoted his criticism towards the human civilization which is operated through "producing, endeavoring, and accomplishing."

Choi Jeong Hwa has worked as a designer, visual artist, architect, landscape architect, and event manager. Continually blurring the boundaries and integrating the areas of popular culture and fine art since the late 1980s, his works have dealt with social changes induced by rapid industrialization. He is accredited to have created "Korean pop art," transposing the phenomena of mass production and mass consumption into the signs of excess in desire and expenditure. The act of repeating, piling, and accumulating in his works paradoxically suggests vulnerability and collapse of structures built during the rapid industrial growth. The signs of accumulation in the context of less developed countries point to disintegration and falsity.

Bahc and Choi are not only artists, but also thinkers and philosophers. They played their roles as practitioners in the age of rapid inflow of foreign theories, proposing South Korea's own distinct discourses to the art community immersed in west oriented art history. Their approaches were unprecedented in a way that they were direct, yet paradoxical in dealing with the collective memories of the rapid industrialization.

Other artists also reveal the structural problems brought up by the rapid industrialization, dealing directly or indirectly with such problems as the loss of individuality and urban environment. For those who experienced the loss of individuality, the boundary between everyday reality and fiction is blurred. For those whom the world may appear unreal or even surreal, the history and social conventions even seem insignificant, at least not so significant as to their predecessors, and try to deal with the reality with a sense of humor and irony, as if playing a game. For these artists,

the very process of industrialization or historical reality becomes the very material for art-making. Whereas the culture of the 1980s encouraged collective or communal efforts, individual approaches were preferred in the 1990s, often demanding tenuous forming of artists' project groups. The everyday reality holds signs for an improved society for them, and their visions for utopia are highly private and discrete. The individual problems of those who used to be alienated and ignored in the collective communities surface in their works.

For instance, Gimhongsok works on the ideas of uncertainty, mobility, hybridity, deconstruction/reconstruction, individualism, the need for cultural appropriation, translation, and the inaccessible authenticity.¹ He observes the relations between art and society in the net of consumerism. Coming from the generation for which individual freedom was sacrificed for national gains, he renders the conflict between collective identity and post-identity politics mocking such public slogans as "I'm gonna be a number one" which he used for a title of his solo exhibition. In the performance piece, included in his recent two person exhibition, *Antarctica* (2004), he portrays human figures as helpless beings by having real amateur actors play the roles of middle-aged man in love, victims in bloody massacre, and a sexy super model. Sora Kim, whose interest is in the operation of various social apparatuses, recycles the preexisting social systems through unconventional means. Such works as *CapitalPlus Credit Union* (2002) and *3M Project* (2002) comment upon the question of "value," while *Orbit Lounge* (2004) and *Cry Hard: Recycling 'Sad Laura'* (2004) reinvents the ideas abandoned by other artists.

Photographs of Heinkuhn Oh show the confrontation of an individual against collectivism and militarism in South Korea. Using the style of documentary photographs and juxtaposition, Oh documents certain groups of people like *ajumma* (middle-aged married women) and high school girls as the object of human topography. Oh sharply captures the subtle details of ornaments and gestures of each individual, and such minute details ironically

enhance the effect of the photographs as constructed signs. While the images appear faithful documentations of actual groups, they are actually dramatized representations of assumed roles by amateur actors. *The Story of Gwangju* (1995), furthermore, records the amateur performers and bystanders participating in or observing the filming of the feature film *Petal*, a fictional narrative that deals with the Gwangju Uprising. The series of *Gwangju* eventually questions the boundary between fiction and reality. Bae Young-whans affiliation with the sub-culture is expressed through this distinctive style with excessive sentimentality and "loud" narratives. He makes visible the excess of fetishism through overlapped layers of materials, repetition of signs, and exaggerated exhibitionism. The youth culture that resists the oppressive power of the military regime is linked with sentimentalism and violence of the popular culture.² What adorns the landscape created by Park Sejin includes helipads, residues, a green table in *Panmunjom*, and a North Korean soldier. From the memory of her trip to DMZ during her high school days, the appearance of the unreal, yet too realistic sight of DMZ in her works reflects imagination that the artist has created thinking of the unexplored territory. The repeating motif of open horizon and obscured view of distant objects suggest the nostalgia for "way over there," which has been a source of imagination for Park.

Jewyo Rhii focuses on the lives of the individual by taking care of her own minute personal problems. In *Screaming on the Street—Back of Elbow Becomes Silence* (2001), she escapes from the banal, passion-less, and hopeless everyday reality through her own imagination. *Bewitched* (2001–) by Yeondoo Jung enacts dreams of young people whom he interviewed through sequences of photographic images. In another photographic project *Wonderland* series (2004), Jung reenacts children's drawings. The space that he creates in his works is another world, a dream-like arena filled with hopes and purity that can also be shared with adults. *Evergreen Tower* (2001), with thirty-two family photographs, takes us to the interior of typical rental apartment buildings, in which the rooms with the same structure and size are decorated differently according to the personal tastes of residents. The repetitive and



► *Secret beyond the door*, exhibition view, 2005. Provenance: Art in Culture.

banal basis of everyday life is reconstructed as private arrays of revitalizing and affectionate details.

Kim Beom points out presumed values and standardized categories of thoughts deeply rooted in education, social institutions, and individual experiences. His objects, drawings, and videos expose the process where perceived data turns into social recognition and structured conception. The reality in his works is sharply distinguished from the artist's representation while he points out the "real" situations.

What these artists have in common is their pursuit of individuality within the collective environment in which they all grew up. It is in this dual opposition that they deal with urban problems, social issues, and unrealistic experience of space and time. The social and political changes as a result of rapid industrialization function as an integral aspect in their works, although individual approaches to deal with them vary among different artists. Diverse attitudes and methods in resolving individual situations characterize the current mixture of artists.

3. Secret beyond the door, the Korean Pavilion

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from Fritz Lang's film made in 1948, *Secret beyond the Door*, a Freudian version of the Bluebeard tale, which tells a story about wives murdered by their manor lords for opening the forbidden door. The association that I tried to make does not necessarily establish a direct connection to the content of the film; I am simply hoping that the viewers would find the contents or apparatuses beyond the door hidden by the artists by interpreting the elements presented within the works. What is carefully concealed does not actually exist, however. The "secret" signified by the title is both present and absent. It is buried inside the works, as each word of the title evokes multiple meanings. "Door" implies the unknown or death, the beginning and end of another world. The "secret" is that which is not seen, yet wants to be known; it connotes a limit, for what is concealed is precisely bound by the possibility of being exposed. It is this limit from which "beyond" begins. Knowledge of and a will to overcome the limit is this "beyond." This will encompass time and space.

This exhibition is conceived along two axes: that of time and that of space. The temporal axis of the concept is the historical context and contemporary situation of South Korean art, and the spatial axis is the given particular space of the Korean Pavilion. South Korean artists have been introduced to the international art scene since the 1990s, but such large-scale events as biennales have presented only small sections of them. This exhibition aims at a more comprehensive exposure of South Korean artists as well as creation of multiple accesses to the history of South Korean art. Because of the physical limitation of the exhibition space, however, the temporal span of the exhibition has to be limited from the point when modernism and Minjung art merged to the present.

Partly from practical efficiency of preparation and partly from my historical viewpoint, this exhibition sets two artists, the late Bahc Yiso and Choi Jeong Hwa as starting points of conceptual layout. Arguably they were major presences who brought new

attitudes and methods in the South Korean art scene, which, I consider, distinguished the culture of the 1990s from that of before. Compared to the spectacular and luxuriant style of Choi's works, Bahc's are devoid of any existential weight. Despite this wide difference, their works share the ironic view towards the problems and turbulences hidden behind the industrial growth, addressing the specificity of the South Korean society.

Along this line of thought, this exhibition develops and evolves itself including other artists who also have lived through the social changes with these two artists and have struggled to come to terms with different points of view and to find new positions. The exhibition aspires to create a landscape that includes elements both inside and outside art, a landscape more as a set of signs that reconstruct the historical processes through stories than a naturalistic reflection of the real. Our environment consists of different kinds of landscapes, such as the landscape of reality, the landscape of lives, the landscape of mentality, and the empty or full landscape, which all can be encompassed in the Korean notion of *chakyung*, that means "a view through appropriation." *Chakyung* is a Korean way of perceiving the external reality and an attitude of acceptance. "To appropriate a view" in this sense is to break the boundary between artifice and nature, and to create a new incoherent and uncertain landscape by incorporating all external elements. This attitude characterizes the way the South Korean art scene adopts culture and the way through which South Koreans interpret space. In a way, the Korean Pavilion thus mimics *seowon*, the ancient form of school in Chosun Dynasty, by following the principle of *chakyung* and connecting its inside and outside.

This attempt to create the pavilion as an art object begins with the works of Kiwon Park on the façade and Choi Jeong Hwa on the rooftop. Choi's piece is a gigantic structure made up of a pile of mass-produced plastic bamboo-baskets. Park coats the pavilion with semi-transparent jade green FRP1s, transforming the physical façade of the functional structure into a mysterious body. It nullifies the boundary between inside and outside while reflecting the time

zone of the past, present, and future. The work is also extended to the interior of the pavilion, of which the organic balance is maintained by wavy walls and other architectural elements like columns and windows. The interior space is partitioned by Park's extended structure, which then creates new spaces and reproduces the sentimentality of typical backstreets of South Korean big cities. Upon entering the pavilion, one encounters Sungsic Moon's landscape paintings, which mimic the artificial structures of computer games or digital graphics. The paintings document the process through which spatial elements are reconstructed as new architectural structures. At the next showcase-like space, Yeondoo Jung's *Evergreen Tower* is projected. A slide presentation of images of middle-class South Koreans residing in box-like apartment buildings turns the exhibition space into a similar residential structure. Seen behind the columns is Nakhee Sung's mural flowing on the curved wall. Reminiscent of action painting, Sung's piece fills the space with dynamic musical rhythms.



▼ Sungsic Moon, *Rectangular Garden*, 2004. Courtesy of the Artist. Provenance: Art in Culture.

A narrow corridor leads to an open space with a window. Interacting with the outside view that the window opens itself to is Sora Kim's video piece that attempts at a music video solution to the problems of cultural reception and interpretation, Kim's video is adjoined by one of Bahc's early paintings, *Even Weeds Grow* (1998), which depicts dilemma of industrialization. Gimhongsok's egg-shaped object, lying on the floor, leads us to recognize the limit of translation by telling a Korean mythic narrative translated into English. Paintings by Sungsic Moon and Park Sejin occupy

the adjacent wall. Their landscapes delineate non-realistic views symbolizing a view of South Korean contemporary art towards the outside world. Heinkuhn Oh and Bae Young-whan present different attitudes towards the same historical event through photographic and video images. The gap between fiction and reality is put in question in their works, as Oh reworks the fictional characters of the film about actual historical events, and Bae interrogates the historical event through his very own private perspective. Collective memories represent traces of time as reality, and the memories themselves are constructed representations that are circulated within our signifying chains. The irony that these works play with is in the fact that these constructed memories reproduce another truth. The high rotunda ceiling and around column host Jewyo Rhii's installation. Rhii's inscription of the memories and influences of the late Bahc transforms the most dramatic space in the entire pavilion into an intimately private one. Interacting with the light coming through Kiwon Park's outside installation, the piece further presents a chance to meditate on the possibility of forming relationships between humans and the landscapes. Another enclosed space within the pavilion is for Kim Beom's work. Having worked on imaginary landscapes, Kim reconstructs a landscape through objects and a narrative.

While these artists' works create meanings that are specific to the sites, NAKION and Ham Jin challenge the physicality of the space. The barely visible tiny objects created by Ham and the paintings by NAKION add to the pavilion elements of surprise through the imaginations of low culture. NAKION will perform as a DJ at the opening party.

At the end of the exhibition, Choi's *Lotus* greets viewers. Coupled with Choi's *Site of Desire*, the huge kinetic flower provides another context through which we can observe South Korean culture. Lotus nearly obscures the notion of boundaries by using a signifier that generates its own meanings in both Eastern and Western cultures.

4. The Epilogue

The Korean Pavilion shows the present outlooks of South Korean artists who have lived through structural changes in history. What are exactly the changes that they went through and adapted themselves to? How do we communicate our experiences of those changes? This exhibition is designed to raise these questions. The artworks shown here are clues to understand the changes, and vice versa. It may be difficult to have a full grasp of any individual artist included in the exhibition, which can be a problem of a group show like this in any case. I hope, however, that the relations, correspondences, and interactions among different artists will generate and enrich new meanings.

The artists tell stories about everyday life, and their modes of storytelling differ from one another. They speak about social institutions and unrealistic reality, which then become bits of everyday reality precisely through their speaking. They propose a view on how the entire society operates through bits of everyday reality. What do we see in the landscapes that resemble the flashing dreams of the artists deeply immersed in reality? Perhaps the answer lies in the rift between reality and the imaginary landscape. Kim Beon's *Hometown* (1998) is dedicated to "those who have forgotten their hometowns, those who want to forget their hometowns, and those who imagines nameless little villages as their unknown hometowns." His work contains detailed information about a certain small village in mountains as a hometown, uncharted and unmarked. This is perhaps the virtual hometown in everyone's heart that the visitor to the Korean Pavilion can encounter.

The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005 is republished here.

*Original text: *Secret beyond the door*,
Korea Culture and Arts Foundation, pp.12–36. 2005

Choi Jeong Hwa_Artist for the 2005 Korean Pavilion

“Personally, apart from the opportunity to experience new places, the Venice Biennale holds no special meaning for me. Like a diplomatic war between countries, the biennale requires political maneuvers and challenges by curators to seize the possibilities. From the perspective of pursuing art without artists, art that does not belong to artists, the biennale appears merely as a feast of heroism. Even the historical context of the Giardini, built by Napoleon, alludes to the grandiosity of the biennale. In that light, I would rather pay attention to non-art elements of the event. For example, the Nordic Pavilion designed by Norwegian architect Sverre Fehn is spectacular. The architecture is simply covered with plywood when the exhibition is not on, minimizing the cost of maintenance. It is worth considering how to improve the Korean pavilion’s maintenance, which costs about 100 million won a year.”

*** Interview with Binna Choi “Perception invites participation, participation requests contemplation,” *Art in Culture*, July 2005 issue, p.113**

VII



2007

VII - 2007

Commissioner Soyeon Ahn chose Hyungkoo Lee, introducing the artist as “a highly conceptual sculptor who still believes in the value of handiwork and hard work.” The Korean Pavilion opened with the title *The Homo Species*, with its exhibition space modified to resemble a museum of natural history and a scientific laboratory. To create dramatic spatial effects, the exhibition space was divided into a completely darkened black room and a contrasting bright white room. Hyungkoo Lee presented a series titled *The Objectuals*, which distorts the human body utilizing optical devices, and the *Animatus* series, where personified imaginary cartoon characters are reconstructed into three-dimensional skeletons. Dimly lit corridors lead to a central hall where a bone sculpture depicting the chase scene from the cartoon *Tom and Jerry* is installed against entirely black walls, ceilings, and floors. Furthermore, he also exhibited a five-minute 19-second performance video in which he wandered around Venice wearing an optical helmet from his *The Objectuals* series, and staged a performance in a glass-walled exhibition space on the opening day.

Ahn oversaw the *Tiger's Tail* exhibition held in Venice more than a decade ago in 1995, and Hyungkoo Lee was known in the community as an assistant under Ik-Joong Kang and hyung woo Lee at the 1997 Venice Biennale. As returnees to the Venetian venue, the commissioner and the artist focused their efforts on overcoming the limitations of the relatively small space and complex structure while maximizing the effects of the exhibition. Their answer was to completely block out all natural light into the exhibition space to create a lab-like ambiance. The artificially secluded space presented an uncanny contrast with the bright, natural setting

of the Giardini. The agenda of "selection and concentration" corresponded to the commissioner's appointment of Lee as the first sole exhibiting artist at the pavilion.

The Korean Pavilion at the 52nd International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

The Homo Species

June 10–November 21, 2007

Commissioner

Soyeon Ahn

Exhibitor

Hyungkoo Lee

Production Coordinator

Jee H. Lew

Coordinator in Venice

Eun Jeong Kim

Construction Consultant

Jae-Won Youn

Technical Support

Cheol-Gyu Choi

Designed by

Sulki & Min

Supported by

Samsung Foundation of Culture,
Arario Gallery

Organised by

Arts Council Korea, Fondazione
la Biennale di Venezia



▼ Hyungkoo Lee, *The Homo Species*, exhibition view, 2015. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.

The Cabinet of a Pseudo-Scientist

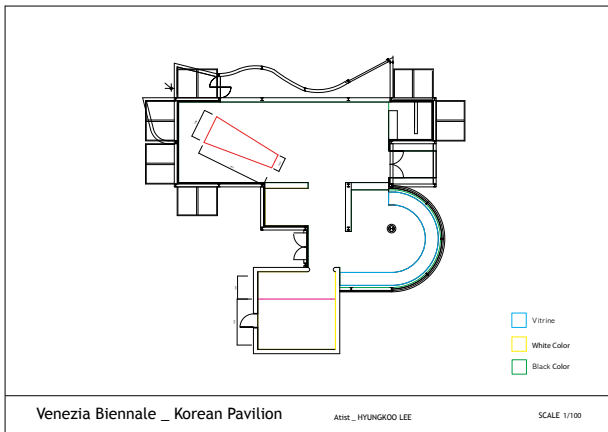
§ Soyeon Ahn

The eerie instruments seemingly lifted from a human physiology laboratory, and the palaeontological fossil skeletons apparently exhumed from earth—while belonging to different times and spaces, they nonetheless occupy the same place side by side. Creating, on one hand, a room of a natural science museum where things are barely visible through fully dilated pupils, and, on the other hand, a dazzlingly white space of a laboratory, they lead our mind to the past and the future, clearly contrasted just like the black and the white of the chambers. At a glance, these two rooms seem to methodically embody a symbolic summation of human intellect from the past to the future. Upon closer examination, however, the impression of order and precision becomes increasingly eroded. The medical instruments turn out to be gewgaw objects made of stray items, such as translucent plastic lamp shades, PET bottles, and shot glasses; what look like authentic fossil bones are in fact fictional skeletons of Tom and Jerry, neither of which has ever existed in reality. One cannot resist laughter: What is going on in this cabinet of a pseudo-scientist?



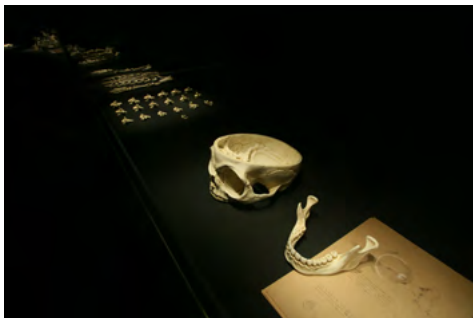
► Opening performance at the Korean Pavilion, Hyungkoo Lee, *The Objectuals*, 2007.

©Hyungkoo Lee. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.



▼ *The Homo Species* exhibition floor plan, 2007. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.

The work of Hyungkoo Lee, both comic and uncanny, reflects a sense of “cultural inferiority complex” widespread in the periphery of the First World, including South Korea. According to Deng Xiaoping’s clear classification—proposed at his 1974 UN speech—Korea, given its political and economical status, should be regarded as a part of the capitalist, imperialist First World, championed by the United States. Culturally, however, South Korea as a non-Western country still remains in the Third World, complicating the people’s collective mental image of their own identity. While proud of their cultural heritage and rapid economic growth, and despite the recent popularity of South Korean cultural products in East Asia (*Hanryu* or Korean wave), many South Koreans still have not freed themselves from the Western cultural influences. The beautiful South Korean celebrities are still the ones who conform to the Western standards of beauty, and the values, widespread in many areas of life from economy to culture and entertainment, as well as visions for the near future, are all closely following the opinions of global standard-setters. There are, however, indications that this compound of the sense of pride and of inferiority, and the oscillation between acceptance and rejection, identification, and differentiation, can be



► Hyungkoo Lee, *The Line of Three Kinds*, 2007.
©Hyungkoo Lee. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

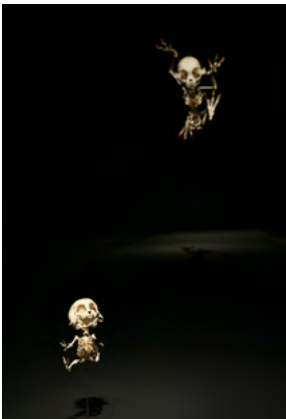
subtly exploited. Hyungkoo Lee, for instance, attempts to overcome the complex by altering reality or creating the originals of the nonexistent in a pseudo-scientific manner.

Born and raised in South Korea, Hyungkoo Lee experienced an “undersized Asian male complex” while he was studying in the US. An Asian man, having internalized the notion of male-superiority, is doomed to be frustrated when he comes face-to-face with his “bigger and stronger” Caucasian counterpart. One day, Lee was standing in a subway train next to a white man of roughly similar physique. Then, he realized that his hand, holding on to the handle, was significantly smaller than the Westerner’s next to his. Returning to his studio, Lee created *A Device that Makes My Hand Bigger* (1999) with a water-filled PET bottle and some shot glasses. Thus began a series of body-transforming—usually enlarging—devices: among them are *Satisfaction Device* (2001) and *Enlarging Breasts* (2002), which look like pornographic props. Along with these, he also developed the Helmet series, combining interest in physiognomy with optical instruments to exaggerate and distort facial features. These objects, which might be called “self-satisfaction devices,” function as pseudo-medical instruments for plastic surgery as well as a psychological therapy to heal the artist’s mental problems.

Having started from the sense of physical inferiority to Westerners

and an attempt to mimic and outdo them, these devices have come to suggest the post-human perspective of transforming the body as a self-discovery process. In recent years, there has been a broad discussion over body politics, which extends to a wide range of areas from gesture to laughter and violence, from tattoo to torture, from cosmetics and health management to immortality, from feminism and liberal theology to racism. The focus here is on the fact that the human body can be reconstructed and manipulated just as we want, thanks to the stunning progress in computer science and genetic engineering. The prospect is reinforced by the many available body-rebuilding techniques including plastic surgery, as well as the science fiction imagination of the mechanical extension of the body and the manipulation of genetic attributes.

What is unique to Hyungkoo Lee's work, then, is the playfulness with which various attempts at instant metamorphosis are made, and that with very simple optical instruments such as magnifying glasses. Confronting the grand promise of scientific body-transformation, his visual mimicry of plastic operation attempts to derange the legitimacy of science. Furthermore, it challenges the order of "the politics of gaze" imposed on the others, by "objectualising" both the subject and the object of his instruments.



► Hyungkoo Lee, *Mus Animatus, Felis Catus Animatus*, 2006-2007. ©Hyungkoo Lee.
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

Wearing one of his devices, thus allowing himself to become an object to be seen through the lenses, the artist also acquires a unique, subjective view of the world. By the title of this series, *The Objectuals*, Hyungkoo Lee suggests a process by which both the object and the subject of gaze can be transformed to "the objectuals." With his helmets, he seeks to actively subvert and return the gaze on the cultural minority.

The mechanism of instant metamorphosis and the pseudo scientific attitude challenge the fixed notions of beauty and cultural authenticity. The longing for the large eyes of Westerners is pushed further beyond mere imitation to exaggeration and caricaturization: The apparently clinical laboratory turns out to be nothing else but a fake theatrical set, and the instruments mere props, all irreverent of the rationality of science and the solemnity of medicine. Turning his inferiority complex to humor, and making the postures of (medical) science to laughing stock, Hyungkoo Lee questions the widespread Western values and standards.

The appearance of the deformed bodies from *The Objectuals* series is not so far from that of personified cartoon figures. For instance, the optically enlarged eyes readily remind us of animal cartoon characters: They are meant to represent human beings in their extreme and exaggerated forms, and, in that respect, can be regarded as the prototypes of "post-humanity" that has attempted to embody individuality, supernatural capacity, or immortality by emphasizing and distorting body parts. Interested in decoding cultural values inscribed in the human body, Hyungkoo Lee began to create fictitious skeletons of the familiar yet merely imaginary cartoon characters as if they had always existed in the real world. In re-staging the drama of, say, a chasing scene and the exaggerated bodily movements involved, Lee's imagination is fully informed by his thorough anatomical studies. For instance, he presents a convincing representation of a deformed tetrapod vertebral column, just as it would have been if the tetrapod walked like an upright biped. Or, consider how he anatomically reconciles the abbreviated number of fingers and toes, or the wings of birds that are often

portrayed as arms, both commonplace in cartoon characters. Based on his imaginative drawings, each bone is first created as a clay model, from which cast resin molds and silicone parts are made. These parts are rubbed, colored, and then combined, and the finished "creature" is even given a Latin zoological name—as if the creator announces the discovery of a new species. Hence the *Cards Latrans Animatus* (Wile E. Coyote), *Geococcyx Animatus* (Road-runner), *Felis Catus Animatus* (Tom), and the *Mus Animatus* (Jerry). Thus, Hyungkoo Lee's work of "exploring hypothetical anatomical possibilities of beings without existential evidence," as he puts it, is not so far from the proper palaeontological process of reconstructing fossil pieces into a coherent structure, which is essentially based on simulation.

The fact that Lee chose Hollywood cartoon figures for his work is suggestive in terms of perceived cultural disparity between South Korea and the West. Although South Korea nowadays is no less than a little empire of popular culture, and a major exporter of animated films, generations of South Koreans have been under the influence of Bugs Bunny and Tom and Jerry. As vanguards of multinational culture, the American cartoon characters have been dominant in South Korean TV for over half a century, never aging let alone dying despite innumerable falls and flattening hammer-pounds. The idea of bringing out the virtual to reality might be in part a comment on today's blurred distinction between the two, but it also points to an interesting way of overcoming the sense of cultural inferiority by introducing an inverted chronology that replaces the present with the past. It achieves historical quasi-legitimacy by producing the origins and realities of what are neither original nor real, thus creating the illusion of history. There is a unique sense of optimism and sincerity, if not without irony, in this proposal of "the fakes of the fakes."

Embracing the past and the future, the virtual and the real, Hyungkoo Lee's body of work speaks of new possibilities of the human body as well as diverse issues of contemporary discourses and cultural hegemony. However, if the role of an artist is to present

different responses to the questions confronting contemporary life and, in so doing, to prefigure the future, Lee concentrates on appropriating art as a tool for exhilaration rather than problem analysis. For he believes that the only hope for the future lies in an optimistic attitude and a good laughter.

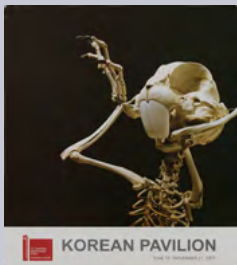
The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 is republished here.

*Original text: *Hyungkoo Lee: The Homo Species*, Specter Press, pp.7–12, 2007

Choe Jae Chun_Ecologist

“The scene in *Jurassic Park* in which T. Rex chases the jeep, arguably the most magnificent scene in the movie, has stirred up a heated discussion about whether T. Rex was actually capable of running so fast. Before making the film, Steven Spielberg actually hired leading dinosaur specialists to estimate the potential speed of T. Rex based on its anatomy. The debate about the realism of the film is ongoing, but it is clear that the detailed investigation of skeletal structure and muscular function was an essential step in Spielberg’s creative process. Fantasy and reality exist side-by-side in the world of Hyungkoo Lee, and the chasm between them is filled by science. There may still be people who think that science diminishes artistic inspiration, but art history proves otherwise. Music, western art music in particular, was created on the basis of Pythagorean mathematics, and the contribution of Da Vinci to the arts is incalculable. Art, which is creative human activity, belongs in the realm of the humanities, but art can only move forward through productive interaction with natural science, as Edward Wilson so forcefully argues in his book *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. An appreciation of the connections between apparently disparate endeavours and the destruction of artificial barriers between ‘science,’ ‘life,’ and ‘art’ is the right direction for the pursuit of truth in the 21st century.”

***Original text: Exhibition Catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, “Neo-Cambrian Imagination”, Hyungkoo Lee: *The Homo Species*, pp.57-58.**



► Korean Pavilion exhibition souvenir, fan. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.



VIII

2009

VIII - 2009

For the first time, the Korean Pavilion appointed a non-Korean as its commissioner: Eungie Joo, a Korean-American expatriate. Haegue Yang, who had been active primarily in Europe and Korea since studying abroad in Germany in 1994, had already garnered much attention through international exhibitions such as *Manifesta 4* (2022) and the *Carnegie International* (2008), and domestic exhibitions such as the *Hermès Foundation Missulsang* (2003). When Eungie Joo initially selected and invited Haegue Yang to represent the Korean Pavilion, the artist reportedly declined participation due to doubts about whether art should represent a nation. Afterward, they tried to approach the exhibition differently and started by working together on a plan to execute part of the project in Korea for Korean audiences who could not travel to Venice.

In this context, as a preliminary step to the biennale, the commissioner and artist framed a pre-project titled *An Offering: Public Resource*, for which they received donations of various books and archival materials from acquaintances in the art world. The collected materials, including 1,500 books and records, were showcased in the lobby of the Art Sonje Center from March 2009, preceding the exhibition in Venice, until December, following the conclusion of the Venice exhibition. Artist Choi Jeong Hwa was in charge of space design, and Sunjung Kim, the commissioner of the Korean Pavilion in 2005, collaborated on the project. Bae Young-whan, Doryun Chong, Gimhongsok, Im Heung-soon, siren eun young jung, as well as Reality and Utterance, alongside other young artists and students, participated in this project, expanding the format of the national pavilion exhibition held in Venice.

Haegue Yang and Eungie Joo sought to create a supportive environment surrounding artistic production and explore innovative approaches to their work within the limits of the biennale's spectacle. They also aimed to restore the "dignity" of the Korean Pavilion's architecture. They broke down the temporary walls, repaired damaged floors, and replaced leaky ceiling glass. This restoration was an essential part of the exhibition preparation. In this space, the artist led explorations of wind, natural light, the kitchen, the absence of locals, and mysterious scents.

The Korean Pavilion at the 53rd International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

Condensation

June 7–November 22, 2009

Commissioner

Eungie Joo

Exhibitor

Haegue Yang

Korean Pavilion Coordinator

Eun Jeong Kim

Exhibition Coordinator

Jinjoo Kim

Exhibition Installation

Pattara Chanruechachai, Taro
Furukata, Jun Hui Byun

Graphic Design

Baan (Sungyeol Kim)

Publication Coordinator and

Korean-language Editor
Yumi Kang

English-language Editor

Michelle Piranio

Web Programmer

Byung-Guk Jang

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New Museum (New York)

Organized by

Arts Council Korea, Fondazione
la Biennale di Venezia



▼ Invitation to the Korean Pavilion opening ceremony, 2009. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

A Conversation

§ Haegue Yang & § Eungie Joo

Haegue Yang: I remember how from the very beginning of the discussion we both felt gratitude as well as pressure to be involved in the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. It seems to me that you are searching for a way to turn this opportunity and privilege into an occasion to expand your engagement with the art scene in South Korea, by initiating the project *An Offering: Public Resource*, for example. I would like to take this conversation as an opportunity to hear about how you, as a curator, see this as a kind of momentum.

Eungie Joo: The “side project” you mention is an informal, unofficial, but central part of the project for the Korean Pavilion at the biennale this year. And though you have been a kind of silent partner in its development, you have been my co-conspirator in every aspect of conceptualizing and realizing *An Offering: Public Resource*. It is basically a self-organized library, where the “self” includes colleagues, friends, and institutions that responded to a call to donate books (and LPs) as an imagined public resource on contemporary art, criticism, and related fields, installed from March through December 2009 in Seoul and then permanently donated to a library, school, or arts organization in South Korea. Together, colleagues from around the world have chosen to share their ideas through publications and records as a kind of investment in the South Korean contemporary art scene. Over the past five years, you and I have had the opportunity to meet at many biennales, triennales, and otherwise “international” art events, where it seemed that questions of motivation, audience, relevance, and engagement surfaced many times and began to take a kind of form. Meanwhile, we have been having a separate but related conversation about how we engage with the contemporary art scene in South Korea as “outsiders.” Although my practice as an “American” curator is

obviously quite different from your experience as a "South Korean" artist living in Germany and South Korea, but having been raised and trained in South Korea, our concerns and strategies are related. We both are privy to a lot of information about exhibitions, trends, and discussions in contemporary art, and I wanted to share these ideas with our colleagues in Seoul, simply because the information is hard to find there, expensive to get a hold of, and sometimes just obscure. Over the years, artists in Seoul have expressed to me their concern about the quality of criticism and discourse, the difficulty of obtaining books, and the lack of a proper contemporary art library for the public. We cannot solve these issues, but perhaps we can make a gesture that contributes to a solution by demonstrating a minor possibility. I feel that sometimes we need to pursue small ideas and gestures, to ask for help and see if something can develop that takes us elsewhere. The project *Public Resource* is the culmination of these conversations and concerns and a response to our trepidations about the challenges of participating in a system of national representation. Both of us wanted to find ways to think about presence and communicative acts as we prepared to represent "South Korean art" in/to Italy. Notice that I am implicating you fully, since I would never have gotten into this mess without you!



► Haegue Yang, *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements – Voice and Wind*, 2009. Courtesy of Studio Haegue Yang.

HY: The same goes for you, in that I was simply surprised when

you came up with the idea of initiating a self-organized library, even though we had discussed the idea of an expanded framework for our participation in the biennale at length. But I knew immediately that the project would empower me through a social and contextual extension, and in this way I would finally feel confident about situating myself in the national pavilion. Without such a contextual and curatorial effort, a landscape/environment that stretches beyond the national and the international would not be possible. Anyhow, the project has turned out to be amazing, with numerous friends and colleagues supporting it and collaborating by sending their books. The second stage was the encounters in South Korea with art professionals at Art Sonje Center, which added another aspect to *Public Resource* as a serious, yet self-organized platform for another form of sharing.

EJ: Yes, currently we have books from about 150 participants who sent more than 1,500 books and LPs. And for the inauguration of the space, we organized five days of "Conversations" that featured about a dozen artists, writers, and curators presenting on recent projects in the informal setting of the Art Sonje Center's lobby, designed by artist Choi Jeong Hwa and coordinated by SAMUSO: Space for Contemporary Art and Sunjung Kim.³ At some level the project is about doing something to develop our own level of engagement with the biennale that extends beyond the festival atmosphere of the exhibition itself. It is also about using the occasion of the biennale to imagine something more than the final project manifested as a press release, an exhibition, and a catalog. I guess it is primarily about engagement with the absent audience for the biennale. Most of the South Korean artists who participated in the discussions and the people who will access *Public Resource* itself will not see the exhibition in Venice. But they remain a vital audience for us long after this summer. At the same time, I felt the project would complicate both our interactions and the development of the exhibition in fruitful ways, which it certainly has. I think it relies upon the ideas of subjectivity, investment, and resonance that are central to your work. But now we have just come back from Seoul, and I have to say, this little experiment was a much more profound

experience than I had anticipated. So many young people were at the conversations night after night. Since the education system is so different there, I had suspected that our colleagues in Seoul did not have many opportunities to discuss their work, but I was really surprised to learn that several had never spoken about their own practice as artists or curators in Seoul before.

HY: Well, it is not easy for me to make an evaluation of that weeklong marathon of talks and discussions in Seoul, since I lack a certain knowledge that would allow me to generalize the situation in South Korea. Also, as far as I know, many of the speakers had never spoken in public before not because they never had the chance to do it, but because they chose not to do so. Somehow the fact that they did speak is of course evidence of your credibility as a curator and of the generosity on the part of the artists and art professionals who were willing to support us by contributing to the conversations. I often take the position of an observer, whereby I can better recognize and receive signals from others and reflect these in my own tempo. This time I was again more or less in the same position, except for the screening of my video trilogy.⁴ So at each talk I was sitting in the crowd as one of them and observed interactions between enthusiastic young people and respected art professionals in South Korea, which were moving and honorable mini-spectacles. Starting with Choi Jeong Hwa, who not only designed the space but also spoke on the first day, we witnessed an impressive display of generosity. I must say that some aspects of what he revealed in the talk were unknown to me—that he is considered such an outsider in the South Korean art scene because of his interdisciplinary practice, despite his enormous reputation. He is certainly noteworthy for his consequential and genuine practice as well as for his straightforward devotion, which remains unphased by how he has been treated as quasi-taboo. Even the way in which he gathers young people into his studio seems to be an almost social act of pedagogy. On the second day, we both encountered a totally different generation of South Korean art history. Reality and Utterance (현실과 발언, 1979–1990) is not only significant historically as a collective of artists and critics but also relevant currently.⁵ We all became

witnesses to their momentum in reorganizing themselves after not being active for nearly 20 years! After the presentations of Lee Tae Ho and Lim Ok-sang, I was impressed by Jung Hun Kim's short remarks on "reconnecting," which acknowledged their ongoing agony and struggle to survive the path of history in the wake of their recent engagement with reality, which has been primarily rather individualistic. On the date of my screening, there were brilliant presentations by two women I had been very curious about (and it was almost selfish of me to encourage you to invite them). Artist siren eun young jung^b and curator Heejin Kim described their respective practices with extraordinary articulation. There are many artists whom we could not invite because of time limitations, but as much as we could, I feel that we mobilized this opportunity to satisfy our own curiosity and by extension the curiosity of others. Their input was unexpectedly strong—something I had previous assumptions about but no precise knowledge of. I often think that in fully offering my blind optimism as a witness to support these moments of creative force in others, it simultaneously inscribes an impression on me that has an almost painful effect. I felt that we agonized in the most delightful and pleasant encounters with each other, and it confirmed many things for me. After the official events, there were gatherings and passionate discussions on various issues ranging from the future of some alternative spaces in Seoul to specific works by artists. What do you think about our intensive week in Seoul?

EJ: I agree with you that the conceptualization of *Public Resource* was driven primarily by the momentum of a shared optimism and curiosity. I also think that the project, in its effort to engage with our colleagues in Seoul, relates to our reliance on many voices in order to begin to grasp the history and development of contemporary art in South Korea. The series of conversations at Art Sonje Center might be understood as a kind of naive gesture to bring together disparate voices and attitudes, and in fact it was. But the gesture was grounded in genuine interest, empathy, and desire and can be understood as an intervention into a system with which I interact while remaining outside of it. As you know, the choice of

participants was well considered, even the pairings of speakers, and was in fact not so naive. You discussed Hyun Bal (the abbreviation of Reality and Utterance), Jeong Hwa, Heejin, and Siren, so maybe I will mention the others. Since last summer, when you reintroduced me to Bae Young-whan and Park Chan-kyong, I have been a little obsessed with their work and thinking, as you know.⁷ We have had several amazing conversations about ideas, society, the art scene, and such, but I was really interested to see who they were in public, since this is something that is very hard for an outsider to grasp. They are of course major figures in the art scene, and each has at times suggested to me a kind of cynicism that I would attribute only to a true optimist. So I had to see them perform for the public. Young-whan's introduction to his talk—the way he defined a kind of cosmology for approaching his art that involves philosophy, ideology, spirituality, family, and nation—was intense. Of course I was really shocked to hear that he had never done a public presentation on his work before. By contrast, Chan-kyong is often called upon to perform the role of critic/theorist/curator. But it was a unique experience to hear him combine these knowledge into an informal presentation on *Sindoan* (2008) and the research he conducted for the film and exhibition. We invited several artists, such as Im Heungsoon and Sangyoun Kim, whose work and ideas I had only briefly encountered but which immediately captured my imagination. Most people I know in Seoul were not aware of their work, so I thought it was amazing that Heung-soon went over his recent works so thoroughly and thoughtfully. His investigation into the Vietnam War as it relates to South Korean modernization is fascinating. Sangyoun was really inspiring to the young students, encouraging them to be curious and demanding with an energetic and contagious sense of humor. Doryun Chong gave a great presentation on the idea of internationalism based on his recent curatorial work on Huang Yong Ping and Tetsumi Kudo as well as his contribution as one of the curators of the 2006 Busan Biennale. I felt like the projects Hyunjin Kim presented were very intelligent and creative—her *Plug-In* project at the Van Abbemuseum was a serious and poetic institutional test—and I was so pleased that she took the time to share this with the audience, many of whom were

young artists, writers, theorists, and curators who could not be aware of her practice outside of South Korea. We knew Gimhongsok would be the perfect closer, and he did not disappoint.⁸ The variety of his works and his witty but serious mode of presentation were the mark of a master. He must be an excellent teacher. It was a great overview of his recent activity, and the way in which he is able to convey it all as a larger practice was powerful. Many of the presenters revealed their own kind of blind optimism by participating in a project organized by someone they did not know well, without any compensation. And the ones with whom I have been in dialogue for some time demonstrated a different level of faith and generosity. This is the kind of activity that we really needed to spark—not a well-organized symposium from the angle of alternative spaces or museums, but something loose—an experiment from the positions of practitioners and artists. Through these kinds of efforts, I hope we can work together to challenge the institutionalization of art practice and deformalize a small zone from which we can continue to act. Also important, through the remarkable generosity and openness of the conversations in Seoul, we came to reorganize this publication into its current form, citing several artists and thinkers who could be considered foundational to your work—as influences, context, and peers. Can you comment on the significance of including these kinds of contributions?

HY: As you have already addressed, this publication is a consequence of our trajectory—our observations, debates, encounters, expectations, and so on, rather than the result of a rigorous concept. Inviting and implanting different voices from various contexts and times in the publication feels to me transparent, revealing an interdependency I desire and rely on with other creative contemporaries in South Korea, whether they stay in relation to me more immediately or remotely. I hope this book will be more than a usual patchwork of different voices because there is more to it than that. For instance, if I accidentally meet someone who becomes a significant influence in my life, I would not call it chance, but destiny. Concretely, I feel honored that the authors and artists willingly contributed (mostly republishing their existing

output) to this publication. Personally, I am interested in hosting “non-collective” voices in this book with speculation that something unexpected might emerge from it. Here again comes the blind optimism (different from naive optimism) that a certain agreement can be found in a most dispersed way.

EJ: I propose we back up to a kind of beginning—to your work *Sadong 30* (2006). I know that was your first “solo” exhibition in Seoul and was purposely an intervention in a non-institutional setting, but can you discuss the genesis of the project as a kind of public and private intervention in space and time?

HY: There were many different desires and necessities that collided at that time in 2006. On the one hand, I was growing dissatisfied with showing my works in South Korea in only fragmented ways. At the same time, there was another type of dissatisfaction and skepticism about the mechanical way in which I was practicing my profession: I carried out my job by accomplishing one exhibition after another without any possibility of independent production, due to my institutionally dependent career. Somehow I was considering the idea of organizing an exhibition on my own evolution and development, to present my current artistic interests and create a challenge for myself that allowed for self-examination regarding autonomy in the art enterprise. At that very moment, I encountered the curator Hyunjin Kim, who felt a similar urgency in her work, and this mutual acknowledgment of each other’s desire crucially accelerated the process of realization. Talking about the timing, it seems uncanny to me that I simultaneously came to find out that my grandmother’s place was still closed up, abandoned since her death. Due to the extreme discretion of family members, who were worried about me confronting this news from far away, I only experienced the state of that place long after her death. The existence of that abandoned house provoked in me an unusual courage and determination to visit it. I was less nostalgic about seeing the house again, where I had partially grown up and of which I have many memories, than I was driven by the desire to demonstrate to my guilty family that abandonment is not the

best way to avoid confronting family tragedy. Regardless of the motivation for my visit, I was struck by the state of the house, and afterward, that visit was narrated in my third video essay, *Squandering Negative Spaces*, completed in April 2006. I guess the process of elaborating that visit in a video narration was a kind of preparation, as I had been carrying the idea of an independent solo exhibition in South Korea before I was able to make a real commitment to it. There was somehow a time delay, a period of time waiting for all the necessary conditions and desires to mature.

EJ: As you know, that installation both moved and unsettled me, and in many ways came to shape our relationship as cultural producers. I think this is because *Sadong 30* projected the personal as an allegory for a national or cultural upheaval.

HY: If I look back on my environment growing up in South Korea, I remember the harsh confrontation between individuals and society. In the intense struggle for freedom and justice, many people could not live in peace, and the heavy political suppression wore people down. Even if I fully recognize and respect as well as aspire to this type of restless life in constant battle as a valuable and valid form, I am deeply pained by the harsh circumstances people had to suffer to make this kind of devoted life possible. I was looking for a “place” to accommodate my thoughts. My yearning for a specific form of reconciliation and peace for my culturally split mind was what pushed my search—the pursuit of a place that offered a state of rest that could be achieved without negotiation: a place where concern remained without aspiring to solution. In other words, I was looking for an ontological space where a continued state of struggle, agony, or concern might not be a problem. Instead of relying on what might be called “correct” or “solved,” I wished to find a site where my concern could be accommodated as it was. Somehow, the *Sa-dong* house seems to me a metaphorical historical site for those lives in rupture as well as for my own. At the same time it is an abstract site that locates itself outside of the tangible socio-political framework, which is definitely another type of non-space.

EJ: You said your mother was the one who got you to read the *Sadong 30* visitor comment books, which you at first kind of disregarded but quite recently revisited.

HY: Yes, when the project was over, I was happy and proud but somehow critical of all the positive reactions. Not only was unexpected success unfamiliar, but the project also seemed too popular to me, and I became skeptical and silent about it for a while. We received letters and many comments in the guest books that had been placed in the house over the course of the exhibition. In fact, the books were offered without any expectation or concept of what purpose they might serve, yet the received letters and the guest books became an object-site that I had to revisit. Initially I was very disappointed by all the seemingly naive visitor comments, which seemed non-intellectual and driven by trivial, nostalgic sentiment for this place, even if this potential must have been clear to me from the beginning. In a way, this attempt to situate myself outside of the institution must have been fully conceptualized without considering the “unfamiliarity” of the audience I would encounter in Sa-dong, for which I now feel embarrassed and even ashamed. In fact, I immediately put those books and notes from the visitors aside and pretended that they did not exist. My mom was the one who noticed their significance and advised me to read through them carefully. While she sensed the warmth and genuinely autonomous and self-empowered minds and emotions that came through in them, I remained stubborn and desperately tried to stick to my self-determined agenda, so I reluctantly read them months after my mom’s sincere advice. Anyhow, it seemed that “enough” time had passed, and I was finally ready to take them in my hands and read through them. And I was blown away by the beauty and liveliness of these documents. Of course, some of them were simple compliments and encouragement addressed directly to me or to Hyunjin (the curator of the exhibition), yet the expressions were extremely intimate and tender. They documented vivid moments of self-empowerment in which people’s stories unfolded in the most modest and direct language.⁹ There are a couple of informative facts I discovered from the guest books. First, the majority of the

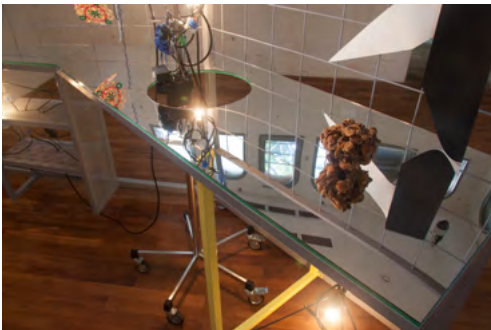
visitors were non-art professionals—people who really took their time and mobilized their autonomous interest in this place. Second, quite a large number of people visited more than one time. Third, the way in which they found out about this project was mostly through non-official paths such as personal recommendations by friends, family members, or blogs. On top of all these meaningful facts, I also realized that visitors felt firmly convinced that they were entitled to relate to this place. This was indisputable proof that *Sadong 30* was neither an ordinary institutionalized public project nor a conventional art presentation. There was such an enormous amount of self-organization by Hyunjin and me, but moreover by the visitors. Some of them even changed the lightbulbs and noted in the guest books that they had found extra bulbs and carefully replaced them. Another person gave a noise concert on his own—without any announcement—using an old radio, which he took apart and with which he generated some sounds out of electric sparks. This performance was discovered accidentally and reported to me by a friend of mine, who happened to be there at the time. Altogether there was an intensive *post-Sadong 30* process that took place in me. Somehow the project was not fully over even after the exhibition had closed, more or less because of the guest books and letters from visitors, who made their own history in that place, as an actual and communal space, without ever negotiating directly through/with me.

EJ: As in *Sadong 30*, you often develop works that require the subjectivity of the viewer—a kind of investment of one's subjectivity to locate an outcome, which is the experience of your work itself.

HY: It might sound absurd to bring up a scientific metaphor to address how I would like to construct my "output," yet it seems proper to say that I strive for a kind of "condensation." I imagine metaphorically that I preserve cool air in me as long as I can, until the temperature difference is so great that water drops collect on the bottle. I would like to transmit things to others without pouring water out of the bottle. I believe that people can be mobilized by this condensation, which is a kind of direct reaction, without

needing to negotiate specificities. I guess the Sa-dong house somehow triggered this kind of silent communication, without any trace of the water's source. I believe that in such "blind" and "silent" communication, which feels abstract, there is a negation of learned knowledge, obtained information, and individual experience that opens people up to others in an unprotected way. For me, refusing specific stories and replacing them with something "blind" or "silent" is a conceptually ethical process because it fundamentally prevents me from taming my audience with my learning and experience. The researched knowledge and lived experiences remain transparent, yet are accessible only if I am asked about them. The audience is therefore quite free of my own personal trajectories, whether related to my grandmother or historical figures who mean a lot to me. I do not deny that some of the audience would interpret such layers as meaningful and might wonder why I do not actively elaborate on those references. Since I am conscious about the exploitative aspect of self-reference and desire to reach beyond each individual narrative, I would rather continue to "unlearn" my own position in order to remain "impersonal" in the work. That is how I relate myself to the notion of subjectivity.

EJ: In *Doubles and Couples* (2008), you compare and conflate the appliances in your home. Why did you come to work with appliances and references to your private life or space?



► Haegue Yang, *Sallim*, 2009. Courtesy of Studio Haegue Yang.

HY: *Doubles and Couples*, presented at the second Turin Triennale, has a prehistory, which is another work of mine: *5, Rue Saint-Benoît* (2008). These works have something in common in terms of their spatial implication, which is the kitchen and living. I work at home and have spent a lot of time in the kitchen, where I can be without my computer, printer, or phone, yet with cigarettes and coffee. The kitchen is a place where I can “work” in a different manner than at my work table—work without work. This work is free of many of the things that are attributes of the ordinary concept of work in terms of social effectiveness/productivity. The kitchen is somehow a place of different engagement with my own work toward the outside world and toward others. My new work for the Venice exhibition, *Sallim*, also considers these ideas of how to distribute your most intimate part directly to the public without losing its compelling intimacy. Of course, the emphasis on the kitchen is not solely self-referential: It is also interwoven with anecdotes from historical figures like Marguerite Duras, in whom I recognized a conformity with my seemingly overly idiosyncratic interpretation of “privateness.” I believe that I have a particular tendency to personalize not only historical figures and events but also machines and objects that are largely domestic. There is something profoundly genuine about household machines. They seem to me so dedicated and committed to what they are supposed to do, which moves me deeply. I used to observe them for hours, sometimes out of depression, which also developed into an affectionate fascination. I feel very close to appliances, maybe even wish to be similar to them in terms of attitude, silent presence, supportiveness, loyalty, understatement, and substance. They seem to be modest, yet it is significant how they are there to help with organizing life—things like cooking, washing, eating, etc., but not necessarily as acts for recharging oneself in order to be productive in the outside world. Rather the opposite. I would insist that the activities in the private space deserve more attention, that the private space be considered a place of complexity, where the self is cared for and contemplated and can be shared in a different way. Second, I am interested in the potentiality of the kitchen as one of the most private spaces, which opens itself most generously and genuinely to the others, even under difficult circumstances. That is what I got

from Duras as well as from my mom. Both eagerly cooked for and fed people, even hid wanted political criminals in their homes. The kitchen was a peaceful battlefield for their engagement against socio-political injustice. I was a difficult child who was unsatisfied and unhappy with the openness of my mom's kitchen, where I wanted to be her only child instead of one of many hungry people. It took me a while to understand the meaning of her activity as the hostess of the house who was an intellectual activist outside the home but also active from inside by opening her private space to others as a shelter for people in need, a meeting place for students and activists, as well as a kitchen for anyone. I am interested in this most natural and genuine process of opening one's home to others or to the outside world, physically or metaphorically. There is an intimate public engagement, in which privateness and publicness are not accommodated separately. Besides, all of sudden I was aware of the fact that I had two flats, one in Seoul and one in Berlin, but no studio (working space). It may be hard to believe, but I was even a bit surprised by it when I became conscious of it. There were in fact two places I needed to open up. The experiment I was attempting with *Doubles and Couples* was to picture an impossible, therefore abstract space in which domestic appliances from two different spatial origins are in movement or in a relational posture with each other.

EJ: If then your focus in *Sallim* (2009), one of your new works for the biennale, is to acknowledge the significance of that which happens inside as equal to, dependent upon, and affecting that which happens on the outside, then it seems that works like *Sadong 30*, *Squandering Negative Spaces* (2006), and *Yearning Melancholy Red* (2008) might do the reverse. In these works, there seems to be some reference to the impact of public life or the outside world on the person. In fact, many of your works might be discussed in terms of the impact of the larger world on the private space of the home, or on one's personality, ambition, or psychology.

HY: I have not thought about this work in the way you describe it. It is interesting to hear your view, incorporating an idea of in and out with private and public. According to your observation, my focus lies

in rhetoric about some private quality that is not solely private, since it opens itself toward an implication of the failure of rigorous and ordinary publicness. As we discussed two days ago on the phone, the notion of *sallim*, which in Korean means something like “running a household,” or I guess “a container of the household,” such as the kitchen space, interests me as a microcosm of running the machinery of life. This modest form of machinery is often understood as a secondary or marginal (*nebensächlich*) narrative compared to one’s job or productive activities, but it plays a significant role for basic life organization. Because of its unique autonomous and generous quality, I am drawn to attempt an articulation of it. Going back to your question about the reversed way of treating in and out or private and public, I have to say that for me, it is about the scale. On one hand, whether it is a private household or a public household, I am interested in the household, which is usually taken less seriously in any system or structure because it is regarded as something less specialized or as a territory that is less skilled. I feel extremely inspired to work in this low-tech or low-profile niche, which is somehow modestly scaled in its meaning, despite its fundamental importance.

EJ: Your new installation for the Korean Pavilion, *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Voice and Wind*, cites a series of installations dating back to your project at BAK in Utrecht, the Sao Paulo Biennale, and recently at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Tell me about *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements* as an ongoing investigation.

HY: I guess the new installation is citing not only previous works but also new encounters. Yet the type of citation has changed in that there are no clear referential stories anymore. The figures and stories behind my works were never obvious: In fact, they were impossible to read with bare eyes. I admit that this disappearance of reference is not a complete one, and if it has been weakened, the process was progressive and not sudden. So previous works reveal much of where I have come from and how much everything stays in relation. Still, for me, there is a big lapse with my previous work *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Shadowless Voice Over Three*, from my

exhibition *Symmetric Inequality* at Sala Rekalde in Bilbao in December 2008. The long march of intentionally conceived serial works is more or less finalized, and now I stand at a new beginning, which feels at the same time old. If there is a continuation from this previous work, it lies in the element of voice. *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Shadowless Voice Over Three* contains an open microphone, which is made available for use by the visitors. Whenever the microphone transmits a voice, the six spotlights in the exhibition space move differently from what was originally planned. This break from a fixed choreography is triggered by the voice. The new work at the Korean Pavilion is titled *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Shadowless Voice and Wind* and offers a sensory experience of wind from various fans and wind machines, and I think conceptually offers a voice as an underlying sentiment, which is human and singular. Unlike *Shadowless Voice Over Three*, these two elements are not connected with each other mechanically in *Voice and Wind*: The direct interdependence is not there. The connection between voice and wind without a traceable connection of mechanics seems to me more considered. A contradictory sense experience had previously been mobilized in *Yearning Melancholy Red* at REDCAT in Los Angeles in 2008, where three fans were installed face to face with three infrared heaters. When someone stood between them, he or she would sense both simultaneously. I felt that these simultaneously intersecting and contradictory senses were very comforting. In *Voice and Wind*, scents will dissipate, blow away, and mix with each other whenever neighboring wind machines are turned on. This is a kind of evolution of my interest in offering different senses, which are presented in the space but which keep their ephemeral and vulnerable nature as well as their violent and expressive nature, even if on a small scale. Somehow the first of these installations, *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Version Utrecht*, realized at BAK in 2006, in which various sensory machines were installed alongside the presentation of my video trilogy, feels fresh and very close to what I am currently developing for the Korean Pavilion, due to its reduced elements and loose atmosphere. This is different from recent installations that use the theatrical effect of programmed spotlights and calculated compositions of sense experiences. The

installation at BAK was immediately echoed in a more complex spatial configuration in *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Blind Room*, shown the same year at the Sao Paulo Biennale. In that installation, the machines are carefully yet simply arranged in the space with less relational interweaving. It features a simple juxtaposition of humidity, heat, light, reflection, and scent that is less composed, except for the partial and uneven distribution of each sensual effect. As the title suggests, I was interested in building a field of unevenness, in which the experiences are rather independent, simply existing next to each other. The realization in Sao Paulo, which was later also exhibited at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, achieved its roomlike form through a periphery of Venetian blinds that made the entire zone a half-transparent chamber in which the light, smells, and humidity drifted around and through it, and yet because of the small scale of the work, the effects stayed more or less at their origin, marked by the body of each device. The looseness of these first installations with their various sense experiences is what I am trying to regain after the tours and detours of the last three years. I am not only including precisely programmed elements but also trying to endow a more airy atmosphere in general. For instance, wind will blow and destabilize the geometry of the blinds, while the audience's presence, the walls of blinds, and the crosscurrents of wind will block and direct air in different ways to produce a subtle, unpredictable new order not designed for the space. I adapted the recurring title, *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements*, for various types of works, from light sculptures to installations with blinds and spotlights. I never actually intended to have a serial title: It just happened that it felt right to use this title over and over again. There is, however, an aspect of this title that seems to me legitimate to carry on. It is difficult to articulate why, but I would like to try.... I am often interested in making things by loose association, which can be described by the word "arrangements": This again allows me to follow a methodology of "take", instead of "make." So, as I stated in my video trilogy, I am interested in observing how new composition arises while cutting and pasting proceed, which is a non-editing process. Also "arrangement" applies to the nature of things I take. Regardless of whether they are events, phenomena, objects, or images, I am often

drawn by the vulnerability of things, and I realize they make me vulnerable as well. Curator Binna Choi once described it as "oblique." I guess there must be other synonyms. I do not know where and how to meet "vulnerability," but I slowly get to know it, its hometown, its namelessness, as well as its voice. I guess I am still on a journey of investigating those concepts in life.

EJ: *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Voice and Wind* also relates to several large-scale, labyrinthine installations that have relied heavily on theatrical lighting. But the Korean Pavilion necessitated a slightly different approach.

HY: Yes, lately I have been working intensively on the dialectic combination of light and Venetian blinds that filter each other and demonstrate a certain quality of permeability as relational narratives in between. Now the situation of the Korean Pavilion's fully bright space with strong daylight makes me vulnerable, and I feel entirely disarmed in a sense that I have to give up all that I have recently mastered. Of course, I could make the space entirely dark for the perfect choreography of lights to create a more controlled and familiar situation. Yet I have never felt comfortable making a major operation to change an exhibition space for my work, so I will not heavily tailor the space for my needs. On top of this habit of taking things mostly as they are, this vulnerability I obtain by giving up "the known" is something familiar to me. Since I am currently busy with certain systems of self-management, which is modest self-management, the situation of natural daylight feels right to work with. It took me a while to accept the conditions of the pavilion's architecture as it is. There is certainly still a sensation of risk, and I am working physically and mentally to contain this under the umbrella of "domesticity." I am interested in defining this notion of "domesticity" for myself.

EJ: Tell me more about how you are engaging with daylight and transparency in *Voice and Wind* as well as in your new video essay *Doubles and Halves—Events with Nameless Neighbors* (2009).

HY: It is somewhat difficult for me to articulate my interest in domesticity since the work is in process, but what attracts me is its scale. Domesticity has a slippery and elastic unofficial-ness that an authoritarian power structure can hardly grasp or influence. I guess even privateness can be the object of manipulation and control under severely suppressive circumstances, yet I believe domesticity is a framework of non-public influence because of its almost mundane, modest, and harmless characteristics. When I was confronted by the fact of the daylight in the exhibition space, after a long period of working with theatrical lights, I felt that this might be something equivalent to the domesticity I was concerned with because of its transparent clearness: As we often say, something is “as clear as day.” Having been away from the daylight for a while, working in a darkened space and illuminating it with choreographed light, I feel blinded now with the daylight. I guess this sensation of blinding my sight with ordinary sunlight is what I am looking to experience personally and artistically by unlearning controlled light.

The new video essay contains an aspect of a particular domesticity—places as well as people with specific recognizable qualities. I began with my neighbors in Seoul, who live without drawing much attention from the outside because of the scale of their life, which feels almost fragile. I started with their seemingly poor situation, which is interpreted by me as youth. The same goes for the disappearance of this neighborhood, which is being pushed farther out of the city due to gentrification. But they will remain, distinctively memorable beings. For *Doubles and Halves*, I wrote about the inhabitants of this neighborhood, called Ahyeon-dong. I would just like to sing for them: the shamans, the aged, the prostitutes, the debtors, and ordinary people who do not seem to have much to boast about. I quote the beginning of the narration here:

*People who live here are young.
Their youth is explained by its uselessness.
Because they are young, they move swiftly.
This is different from being in a hurry,
because they are not in a hurry to be on a fast track.*

Their agility is also explained by its uselessness.

(...)

Some may understand this form of living to be a kind of poverty.

Mostly they say it's a life "without amenities."

But we ourselves don't actually feel that way.

The "poverty" in this neighborhood is in fact not being understood very well.

It is not surprising.

It is not surprising that people do not notice the fact that what is called poverty in this neighborhood takes place only because their minds are somewhere else.

It's hard to figure out where the minds have gone off to, so it's easier to simply say they are poor.

(...)

But, what they are busy with, they won't show:

They are busy without being noticeable.

They know well that other people don't know, but they won't say.

Because if the details were revealed, it wouldn't be elegant.

Only they do send a message now and then, through a gesture, intimating "You people cannot possibly understand."

Those who recognize this gesture have a hard time figuring out what to call them.

Thus they do not have a name.

On the one hand, while I was living in Ahyeon-dong, I felt accepted by the neighbors through non-verbal communication. No one ever asked who I was or what I was doing there. This silence made me feel incredibly accepted, and I could identify with them perfectly and live next to them. I somehow wanted to respectfully capture my memories of their ghostly existence. The images of Ahyeon-dong are combined with footage from Venice, around the Korean Pavilion, which is located marginally in the Giardini. The park draws many illegal visitors, who are mostly invisible to us, except for their traces. I heard about them from the coordinator who works at the pavilion—how it is a problem to have these people camping on the roof of the Korean Pavilion during the off-season or overnight. When I found traces of them, I was immediately inspired by these

visitors to the pavilion who might not be interested in art. I somehow perfectly understand their wanting to camp there because the rooftop is a highly attractive hidden site for romantic youngsters, lovers, and homeless people. Their secretive existence and their coexistence with the spectacle of Venice as apparitions were what I was interested in. I am now separating the narration and the footage, which I always wanted to try. In fact, I have never felt comfortable fixing a layer of narration and images on the same timeline. I believe that autonomous texts and images are more fluent and flow into each other better. If there is a relational structure, it will be so intimate that I do not need to pair them on the same timeline. So somehow I expect that the separation will help people make momentary connections among the numerous and constant combinations of image and sound to evoke the relationship between Ahyeon-dong and my thoughts on it, for instance. Seeing that I am addressing ghost-like places, figures, and their events, this type of unfixed match will endow a connection with my mysterious momentary experience, in which I had a clear glimpse of understanding those people.

I titled this new video essay *Doubles and Halves*, a phrase that from the beginning played a role in my conception of all the works for the Korean Pavilion because the quality that fascinates me is the relationship between the half of the whole and the double of the whole. Both of them seem incomplete, yet they cannot help each other. As I previously expressed in *Doubles and Couples*, I am driven by the tragic incompleteness of reality, which encourages me to narrate things in an abstract manner. This time I am interested in ghostly "halves," who meet their ghostly "doubles" over and over again, which is altogether a silent event because of its worklessness (*desoeuvrement*). I am focusing on their domesticity and its worklessness, which take place autonomously.

Upon the request of the commissioner Eungie Joo and with the consent of the participating artist Haegue Yang, the transcription of the recording of a conversation between the two included in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion of the 53rd Venice Biennale is republished here.

*Original text: *Condensation*, Hyunsil Munhwa, pp.15–22. 2009



▼ Haegue Yang, *Sallim*, 2009. Courtesy of Studio Haegue Yang.

Haegue Yang, who also participated in the main exhibition in 2009, created and presented three new works under the theme of *Condensation* through a solo exhibition at the Korean Pavilion. She actively used light, heat, air, scent, and sound to provide the audience with synesthetic experiences beyond visual perception, including touch and smell. She presented a video essay titled *Doubles and Halves—Events with Nameless Neighbors*, a large-scale sculpture titled *Sallim*, and a large blind installation called *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Voice and Wind*. The New York MoMA later acquired *Sallim*, while *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Voice and Wind* found its place in the Guggenheim Museum.

IX



2011

IX - 2011

Yun Cheagab presented media artist Lee Yongbaek in a solo exhibition entitled *The Love Is gone, but the Scar will heal*. Yun was an independent curator active throughout Asia including in South Korea, China, and India. As the commissioner, he wanted Lee's art to tell the story of pain and hope in South Korea's modernization and cultural development.

Since the 1990s, Lee has been producing diverse forms of art using technology, and is widely recognized for work that captures the unique political and cultural issues of the time. For the Korean Pavilion, he showed 14 major works ranging in genre from video and photography to sculpture and painting, taking advantage of the multifaceted and multi-layered structure of the Korean Pavilion. The video performance *Angel Soldier*, featuring a floral-patterned military fatigue, creates an extreme contrast between an angel and a soldier which conveys a candid representation of contemporary social situations. The floral fatigues hanging outdoors on the roof of the Korean Pavilion were a symbol of ceasefire and peace, and attracted many visitors.

Pieta: Self-death, then installed in the curved window space at the front of the pavilion, recreates the figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary with a molded figure being held by the mold that created it. The mold and the molded figure appear either to be engaged in a gruesome fight. Lee's video work *Broken Mirror* comprises a mirror and a flat screen which displays the viewer's reflection in the mirror before suddenly breaking with an ear-splitting shatter. At the opening ceremony, Korean Pavilion staff members donning the floral fatigues enacted a performance, and during the previews,

the fatigues were spotted marching around the Giardini, drawing attention.

**The Korean Pavilion at the 54th International Art
Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia**

The Love is gone, but the Scar will heal

June 4–November 27, 2011

Commissioner

Yun Cheagab

Exhibitor

Lee Yongbaek

Assistants to Commissioner

Choi Sooyoung, Seung Najung,
Lee Jinmyung

Korean Pavilion Coordinator

Eun Jeong Kim

Exhibition Installation

Jun Hui Byun

Web Programmer

Team Default

Design

the flat (KIM Taejung)

Publication Coordinator / In

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Choi Sooyoung

In English Edited by

Seung Najung

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la Biennale di Venezia

The Love is gone, but the Scar will heal

§ Yun Cheagab

Lee Yongbaek (b. 1966, Gimpo), since graduation from the Department of Painting at Hongik University in South Korea in 1990, the Department of Painting at Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design in Germany in 1993, and the Department of Sculpture at the Graduate School of the same university in 1995, has been actively working in South Korea and abroad. From the early 1990s, Lee has worked with various technologies, from single-channel videos, sound, kinetics to robotics. Lee is recognized as a representative artist in these artistic fields in South Korea. The reason his work is highly evaluated is not only due to his technological experiments, but also his ability to contain the peculiar political and cultural issues of our time and his imagination in the form of these technologies. Recently, Lee has been presenting new works covering a wide range of genres from video art, which he has long been concentrating on, to sculptures and paintings. This kind of attempt is one of his strengths. Lee, while maintaining a unity with his existing works, is able to explore the difference and does not insist on using only familiar forms. The presentation of his recent works has become an opportunity to effectively arrange and highlight



► Lee Yongbaek,
Pieta: Self-death, 2011.

© Lee Yongbaek.
Courtesy of
ARKO Arts
Archive, Arts
Council Korea
and the Artist.



► Lee Yongbaek, *Pieta:Self-hatred*, 2011. ©Lee Yongbaek. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

his wide interests, which deal with existence, society, religion, and politics.

Angel Soldier is a video performance in which, through the drastic contrast between an angel and a soldier, without any logical proceedings and explanation whatsoever, directly and frankly expresses the social conditions of our generation. Perceptual and emotional values in an artwork are entirely different from those of an academic study in that an artwork is free from logical proceedings. The strength of directness is like a poem. If a movie is like a novel, then an artwork is like a poem. Lee Yongbaek is an artist who is able to capture this advantage and strength in his artwork.

Lee's other video work *Broken Mirror* also shows the artist's characteristics well. *Broken Mirror*, composed of a mirror, a flat screen, and a computer, focuses on existence. This simple, yet captivating work displays a mirror seeming to suddenly break with ear splitting sound. In front of it, the viewer questions whether the breaking of the mirror is real or an illusion, indubitably revealing the artist's strength. This is why the life and work process of an

artist resemble practices of a Buddhist monk. They both carry out continuous self reflection and the fruit of continuous self-reflection is born at once. It should not be forgotten that over twenty years of effort was put in to bear this fruit.

The search for essence and existence continues on in Lee's recent paintings *Plastic Fish*. Real, live fish capturing artificial fish for survival, then abducted by its own attempt to survive, and a human being who would be holding a fishing pole between the two, this harsh paradox of existence is neither Chuang Tsu's the Butterfly Dream nor Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacres et Simulation*. Perhaps it is cruel pain, like eternal punishment that has to be carried upon all living creature's shoulders.

The series *Pieta*, pity, will be created in two versions, *Pieta: Self-hatred* and *Pieta: Self-death*. This sculpture series uses both the mold (of the sculpture) and the molded figure itself, the mold being Virgin Mary and the molded figure being Jesus. In *Pieta: Self-hatred*, the two figures viciously fight like K-1 fighters, and in *Pieta: Self-death*, the mold of Virgin Mary holds the dead, molded Jesus. This series metaphorically unfolds contradictions of human existence and the dark barbarism of civilization. Like the sudden summer downpour, Lee Yongbaek's works carry a chillness that cannot be escaped.



► Lee Yongbaek, *The Love is gone, but the Scar will heal*, Exhibition view, 2011. ©Lee Yongbaek. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion
at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011 is republished here.

*Original text: *The Love is gone but the Scar will heal*, Arts Council Korea,
pp. 8–9. 2011

Yongbaek Lee_ Artist for the 2011 Korean Pavilion

"I often find the commonly accepted label of 'Korean' rather contradictory. Some associate Koreanness with traditional elements and yet say, 'Nam June Paik is the most Korean artist,' which doesn't make sense. He was an advocate of 'global citizen,' and his works approach local identity within a global context. From a global rather than international perspective, I think local features created by political and social situations can be universally applicable worldwide. (...) Rather than focusing on one piece, I chose to include a variety of works given the space. *Angel Soldier* was originally planned as a performance. However, while preparing for the exhibition in Venice, I realized that the biennale, housing all these national pavilions, was a cultural battleground. Changing the planned performance of floral military uniforms to an installation of laundry hung on the roof, I wanted to evoke a sense of peace rather than staging an 'aggressive form' of performance, reflecting the tranquil sight of laundry hung across Venice."

***Interview "What does Korean art dream of?", *Art in Culture*, June 2013 issue, p.137**



► Catalog *The Love is gone but the Scar will heal* from the Korean Pavilion, 2011. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

A person in a dark coat is walking away from the camera down a curved, modern glass corridor. The floor and walls are highly reflective, creating multiple rainbow-colored light patterns and reflections of the person. The architecture features clean lines and large glass panels. The overall atmosphere is futuristic and artistic.

X

2013

X - 2013

Seungduk Kim was the commissioner, and Kimsooja was the selected artist. Both Kim's left South Korea early in their careers, worked in the United States and France, and were perceptive of changes in the international art scene. Within the special circumstances of the Venice Biennale, anthropological and literary concepts were effectively and successfully introduced into the indoor architectural setting of the Korean Pavilion. With *Bottari* as the title of the exhibition, the architecture of the Korean Pavilion was approached as a *bottari* (a traditional wrapping cloth), wrapping the outer wall—the boundary between the outdoor and indoor.

The *bottari* concept had been a regular theme for Kimsooja over three decades, and for the biennale, she used a seemingly immaterial material to expand the notion to cover the entire structure. The architecture of the Korean Pavilion was presented as-is, while the translucent film wrapped over the outer surface as a conceptual *bottari* offered a curious and constantly changing prismatic experience. While visitors experienced refracted and changing light, the inner space of the Korean Pavilion was filled with *The Weaving Factory 2004-2013*, a sound performance featuring the breathing of the artist herself.

Meanwhile, *To Breathe: Blackout* created an encounter completely devoid of light and sound—an increasingly rare experience for the modern city-dwellers. The deprivation encourages thoughts on the most primitive of subjects, not least mortality. Due to space constraints, the deprivation chamber could only allow 1–3 entrants for 1–2 minutes at a time. By introducing visitors to the emptiness of space, the space itself functioned as art. Full, yet empty, boundlessly

expanding inwards and outwards, not as an individual work but as the entirety of the space itself, visitors had to personally experience this piece. Yet not everyone has the means to visit Venice. The experience is digitally available on the Korean Pavilion website and through video records, albeit in a limited format.

The Korean Pavilion at the 55th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

To Breathe: Bottari

June 1–November 24, 2013

Commissioner / Curator

Seungduk Kim

Photography

Thierry Depagne

Exhibitor

Kimsooja

Web design

byul.org

Deputy Commissioner

Kyoung-yun Ho

Architect and Construction

Supervisor

Eun Jeong Kim

Communication & PR

Maxime Heylens

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Sound Recording / Mixing

Christian Manzutto

Video Documentary

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Arts Council Korea, Fondazione
la Biennale di Venezia

Kimsooja Studio

Communication & Coordination

Susie Quillinan T

Technical Support

Graham McNamara

3D and Architectural Advise

Jaeho Chong



► Korean Pavilion exhibition catalog, *To Breathe: Bottari* souvenir *bottari*, and a USB box including the press kit, 2013. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.

Facing Stromboli

§ Seungduk Kim

The phone rang. I had just arrived. On Salina, one of the Aeolian Islands off the northern coast of Sicily. The phone rang: They have been looking for me. They were calling from South Korea to tell me I had been selected to be the next commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

I used to live in Venice in 1993 when Nam June Paik was invited to the German Pavilion, along with Hans Haacke. That was also when there were discussions in the air concerning the last remaining plot to host a national pavilion in the Giardini. It finally happened in 1995. Indeed, the Korean Pavilion was the last pavilion to appear in the Giardini. It is located among tall trees, overlooking the laguna, open wide to nature and daylight.



▼ Kimsooja, *To Breathe: Bottari*, exhibition view, 2013. Courtesy of ARKO, Arts Council Korea and Kimsooja Studio. Photo by Jaeho Chong.



▼ Top, bottom: Kimsooja, *To Breathe: Bottari*, 2013. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and Kimsooja Studio. Photo by Jaeho Chong.

I remember this strange feeling of embarrassment and comfort: This pavilion is not made for art. Rather like the Soviet Union Pavilion by Konstantin Melnikov in 1925 in Paris, or the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe in 1929, these models for architecture are not tools for art but for the self-glorification of architecture, for the sake of it. In Venice, the Korean Pavilion is a composition of geometrical elements and a souvenir. An idyllic hut, lost among the trees. An object of ambiguous quietness.

Every day, from the terrace on the island of Salina, I faced the perfect cone of Stromboli, carefully landed on the surface of the sea. I kept this powerful image of stillness and uncertainty in mind.

As commissioner for the Korean Pavilion, my first consideration was not a list of artists but the site and the physical presence of the pavilion. The site called for the project. Since the architecture is rather complex, I decided to confront it literally. The premise for the project was therefore to avoid changing the basic structure and respect the architecture with no modification. No constructed walls, no black curtains to block daylight out, no objects, nothing tangible. Just a great experience due to the dialogue between the architecture and a certain vision of art: Kimsooja's vision.

But the place had to be cleaned. Since there would be no construction, no new room built inside, the space needed to be purified. It needed to be repainted, restored, and washed from the top down. I was not looking for a tabula rasa; memories are here and souvenirs are piled up. But I did want to offer Kimsooja a decent space, a place where she could act safely without any burden other than her own demands and expectations.

Along with my publisher and co-editor, I set up a structure for this book which is designed to accompany the exhibition in its own specific and related way. Three sections organize the content.

The first section—since the pavilion, as the container, needs to be defined and remembered throughout its history—presents new

commissioned texts: Yongwoo Lee on the historical and factual circumstances of the erection of the Korean Pavilion; Dan Graham on Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion as an ideal place; Michel Mossessian on a national pavilion as a singular architectural archetype, a temporary representation of nationhood; and Hyungmin Pai questioning the invaluable specificity of the Korean Pavilion.

The second deals with the exhibition itself in all its majesty. It captures how the artist Kimsooja has worked with the "brief" to use and take on the architecture as the main component of the situation. How she has shifted previous work to form an original creation in perfect dialogue with the metallic building. The stories told are of the materials and people involved to create and build the exhibition, with photographic stills of some of the early moments in its half-year life.

The third section covers related works by the artist through their printed memory: selected texts and images from a number of books and catalogs published over the years and in different countries map out Kimsooja's global journey.

This book itself is a *bottari*.

The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 is republished here.

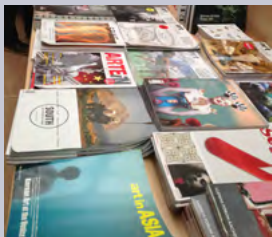
*Original text: *To Breathe: Bottari*, Les Presses Du Réel, pp.7–8. 2013



▼ Kimsooja, *To Breathe: Bottari*, 2013. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and Kimsooja Studio. Photo by Jaeho Chong.

The Promotion Competition and Collaboration with Media Outlets

The pre-opening of the Venice Biennale alone attracts 25,000 visitors, including 8,000 journalists. Venice, where key figures in the international art scene gather every two years, serves as an opportunity to effectively promote South Korean art to the global art stage through the exhibition of the Korean Pavilion. With an increasing number of national pavilions participating, competition is becoming increasingly fierce, highlighting the importance of promoting South Korean art through the Korean Pavilion. Promotional campaigns with the media are also becoming more and more intense. Rather than relying on conventional coverage, i.e., press conferences or press visits to the exhibition for journalists to write articles, the national pavilions place paid advertisements in online and traditional media or even partner with specific media to produce special features. In 2013 and 2015, the Korean Pavilion collaborated with the bimonthly English art magazine *art in ASIA* to publish a special issue for the Venice Biennale, funded by Arts Council Korea. The magazine was available at the Korean Pavilion and officially stocked at the Venice Biennale bookstore, where it sold out during the exhibition, which resulted in restocking a second batch. (H)



► Special edition of the bimonthly English art magazine *art in ASIA* displayed at the Venice Biennale bookstore, 2013. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.

XI



2015

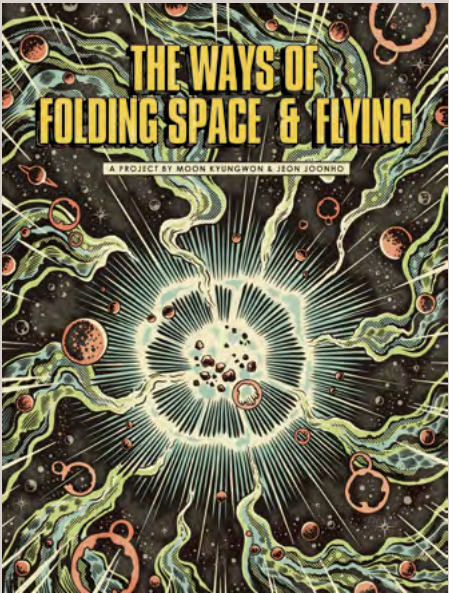
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Sook-Kyung Lee commissioned and curated the artistic duo Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho in 2015. As Lee noted, "2015 marks the 20th anniversary for the Korean Pavilion. It is an opportunity to look back on what has been achieved, and also look onwards to new horizons." She shared her wish not only to deal with the more acute issues in contemporary art, but also to provide perspectives on changes to come. Coupled with the 2015 Biennale's theme of *All the World's Futures*, the artists' imagination allowed visitors to experience a future-retrospective.

Titled *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying*, the 2015 Korean Pavilion exhibition made the most of the venue's structural specificity with a 7-channel film installation, the largest scale attempted by the duo. *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying* is a visual story of a post-apocalyptic future, the image wrapping the Korean Pavilion from the outside-in.

The world in which *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying* is set is a post-apocalyptic Earth in the future, where most of the world's landmass is submerged and only the Korean Pavilion has remained afloat like a buoy where Venice once stood. *Chukjibeop*, or, when literally translated, "ways of folding ground," is a concept originating from Taoist practice, a hypothetical method of contracting physical distance so as to cover a greater distance in less time. Out more simply, *Bihaengsul*, or "divination of levitation," means flying. This ambitious project by Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho for the Venice Biennale, *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying* is not simply about a dystopian future in the manner of a typical sci-fi film backdrop, but ventures into the true meaning of what art can stand for in this

contemporary age of uncertainty and instability, even if it may seem absurd at times, or is difficult to explain logically.



▼ Catalog *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying* from the Korean Pavilion, 2015. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

**The Korean Pavilion at the 56th International Art
Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia**

The Ways of Folding Space & Flying

May 9–November 22, 2015

Commissioner

Sook-Kyung Lee

Exhibitors

Moon Kyungwon
& Jeon Joonho

Exhibition Coordinator

Diana Eunjee Kim

Korean Pavilion Manager

/ Architect

Eun Jeong Kim

Korean Pavilion Coordinator

/ Architect

Jun Hui Byun

Design

Cultureshock Media (Alfonso
Lacurci, Hannah Dossary)
a-g-k (Gyeongtak Kang)

Web Programmer

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Jongmin Ahn

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A Place Without Meomeris

§ Sook-Kyung Lee

To survive, to avert what we have termed future shock, the individual must become infinitely more adaptable and capable than ever before. He must search out totally new ways to anchor himself, for all the old roots—religion, nation, community, family, or profession—are now shaking under the hurricane impact of the accelerative thrust. Before he can do so, however, he must understand in greater detail how the effects of acceleration penetrate his personal life, creep into his behaviour and alter the quality of existence. He must, in other words, understand transience. —Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*¹⁰

Uncertainties around the future are often projected as fear and unease. When Alvin Toffler first coined the term “future shock” in 1970, his main concern was how overwhelming the future would be to people who were not properly equipped to cope with changes in all areas of human civilisation. In a manner similar to “culture shock” that emphasized unfamiliarity between different cultures and societies, Toffler’s term highlighted disparities within a society, but across time. The degree and speed of these changes are immensely wide and abrupt, according to Toffler, making the process of adjustment highly challenging. A great deal of his seemingly radical predictions have become reality, and the impacts of such changes are present in all corners of the world, including, or rather, in particular, developing countries. Our sense of disquiet for the future seems to persist, as the future is intrinsically unknown and unpredictable, therefore, uncontrollable.

Moon Kyungwon and Jeon Joonho have been exploring the future as an indication of our present since their first collaborative project *News from Nowhere* in 2012. Both artists had been working actively in South Korea and internationally for some years by then, participating in a number of exhibitions, biennales, and triennales.

Their individual artistic practices were not similar or particularly related, but they were often invited to the same exhibitions, being it a survey of contemporary South Korean art or a thematic selection. It is not unusual that a shared sensibility exists in a generation of artists from the same social and cultural environment, and Moon and Jeon also had some common concerns and interests. One of the most urgent questions they shared at the time was an almost mundanely fundamental question about art: What is art to society? For artists establishing serious careers in an increasingly complex and globalized art scene, reflecting their practice against the current social conditions can be understood as a small act of pause, a reconsideration of their rising position. For Moon and Jeon, it was a conscious act of creating a protective enclosure from a conspicuous force that could absorb and consume their art as a generic production rather than as a contextualized discourse.

By way of collaboration, Moon and Jeon began an open-ended quest to find the meaning of what they do as artists, when they were invited to take part in dOCUMENTA (13). They started questioning a number of professionals and experts in fields related to but distinct from visual art about what art meant to them and where they thought art was going in relation to human civilization in general. What had started as a fundamental and somewhat abstract enquiry about art and its social position turned into an extremely pressing questioning of the function of art, when the earthquake and tsunami devastated the Tohoku area of Japan in 2011. Discussions around possible ecological disasters with architects, product designers, and scientists became ethical and solution-focused debates for facing imminent issues, in particular for the participants based in Japan, such as the architect Toyo Ito and the design engineering firm takram. This unexpected turn of the project created a sense of urgency for the collaboration among the participants, and Moon and Jeon deepened their questioning of the fate of humanity in the future. In addition to questions like how art might support a sustainable model of human existence, they started to ask whether art would have a place in a future where our own survival is at the utmost stake.

A need to transform the discourse of a distant future into the discourse of the critical present was a logical next step for the project, *News from Nowhere*. Borrowing the title of the 1890 novel written by the British artist and socialist activist William Morris (1834–1896), the project explored the ideas of utopia and dystopia as questions, without proposing any solutions. Moon and Jeon treated the future as a symbolic reflection of the present in this work, portraying the near extinction of humankind on the Earth and the subsequent bleak survival in a highly corporatized world. Their two-channel film, *El Fin del Mundo*, was the centerpiece of the project, and depicted the portraits of a man and a woman, whose presence overlapped and interconnected across time and space. The breakage of linear time was a key element for interrupting the film's narrative, enabling the viewers to imagine a situation not specific to a particular time or space but as a state of transience. The conventions of science fiction cinema employed by the artists were seminal in setting the film's futuristic tone, while the signs of apocalyptic fate continuously yet subtly referred back to contemporary issues such as the destructive force of natural disasters and environmental crisis.

Dissident Desires

The collapse of linear time and discernable space is central in Moon and Jeon's new project for the Korean Pavilion, *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying*. The title of the project refers to the Korean words *chukjibeop* and *bihaengsul*. Not dissimilar to the notion of teleportation in physics, but originating from Taoist practice, *chukjibeop* means a hypothetical method of contracting physical distance and of allowing one to travel a substantial distance in a short space of time by folding or reducing the Earth. There are several mythological tales and literary references related to this concept in the history of East Asian culture in particular, and it is still a relatively familiar term in everyday usage in many East Asian countries including South Korea. Just as the idea of teleportation notably featured in the US sci-fi TV series *Star Trek*, *chukjibeop*

has a wide appeal in popular culture in these countries, often showcased in martial art films, comics, and novels. *Bihaengsul* refers to another supernatural power to levitate and fly. Based on one of the oldest human desires, the idea is not specific to East Asian culture but reflective of a common desire to reach a state of complete emancipation of both mind and body from physical limitations and natural forces. Moon and Jeon's approach to these concepts are somewhat anthropological, interpreting the illogical grounding of these ideas as an inherent element of human nature. Moreover, they attempt to imagine the relevance of such notions in relation to an unknown future, despite their apparent discordance with current mainstream science. While some scientific theories and hypotheses have supported the possibility of realizing such ideas, both *chukjibeop* and *bihaengsul* remain largely in the realms of parable and fantasy, epitomizing our collective yearning to surpass the barriers and forces that bind us physically and otherwise.

However, what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari termed as "nomad" or "minor science" seems to provide an alternative reading of *chukjibeop* and *bihaengsul*. In their collective writing *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari have argued that there is a kind of science, or treatment of science, which is different from sciences established by history.¹¹ Using a hydraulic model, according to them, this kind of science defies a theory of solids; in this model, "one no longer goes from the straight line to its parallels, in lamellar or laminar flow, but from a curvilinear declination to the formation of spirals and vortices on an inclined plane"; the difference is "between a *smooth* (vectorial, projective, or topological) space and a striated (metric) space."¹² The distinction between the two kinds of science proposed here is closely bound up with Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the "State." As with other dimensions of their "nomad" thoughts, their view on natural science and other apparently objective fields of knowledge is decidedly critical, posing questions on the underlying conditions of the construction and dissemination of prevailing thoughts within the "State." The seemingly illogical notion of folding space or reducing the Earth, associated with *chukjibeop*, can find a reasonable

explanation in this “nomad” scientific model, as space itself is not solid but in flux. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the sea is a smooth space par excellence, where the line is a vector, a direction and not a dimension or metric determination. They have also argued that “the force of gravity lies at the basis of laminar, striated, homogeneous, and centered space,”¹³ questioning conventional or what they refer to as “royal” science. *Bihaengsul*, or the way of flying, is also a certain possibility in this sense, if “speed is not merely an abstract characteristic of movement in general but is incarnated in a moving body that deviates, however slightly, from its line of descent or gravity.”¹⁴ The critical stance entailed in Deleuze and Guattari’s thoughts is also implicit in desiring such abilities as folding space and flying, in the sense that these abilities are against presumed human limitations in natural and social environments.



► Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho, *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying*, Still from film, 2015. © Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

The revolutionary repercussion of *chukjibeop* and *bihaengsul* is apparent in the widely known Korean novel *Tale of Hong Gildong*. It is believed to have been authored by the progressive intellectual Heo Gyun (1569–1618) during the Joseon Dynasty, when Confucian hierarchical laws were most strict. The novel is a story of a noble man’s illegitimate son Hong Gildong and of his becoming a righteous bandit leader, not dissimilar to the story of Robin Hood. In the story, Hong could command such techniques as *chukjibeop* and *bihaengsul* in fighting the rich and the established, distributing his gains to the poor and eventually establishing a utopian island nation *Yul-do* with his followers. Both abilities are described as key parts of his exceptional characteristics, following the conventions of

attributing these techniques to superior and celestial humans such as *Shin-sun* (or *xian*) in Taoist beliefs. The character of Hong was in fact inspired by a historical figure, Im Kkeokjeong (?–1562), the leader of a failed peasant rebellion in Hwanghae province between 1559 and 1562. Like in the case of the fictional figure of Hong, Im was believed by his contemporaries and future generations to be able to reduce the Earth and to fly, projecting common people's dissident hope of transcending restrictive rules and repressive power. The very presence of these tales and their continuous re-telling throughout history, even in the forms of video game and animated film in recent years, can be understood in the context of radical desires, which are not just inherent in human nature but also assimilated by historic events and shifting social conditions. Deleuze and Guattari have explained the tension between regulating force and its counter-force:

What interests us in operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces. [...] smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries.¹⁵

Moon and Jeon's affinity to social transformation within and beyond the realm of art is evident, however remotely, in their use of the Korean words *chukjibeop* and *bihaengsul*. As with the notion of smooth space Deleuze and Guattari proposed, these words manifest what is repressed and erased in the official and proven history, something that cannot be surfaced into the collective consciousness unless it is in the forms of myth and fantasy. The project is therefore a proposal, a challenge against what is perceived as facts, unchangeable and universal truth. While the political nature of their practice is not overtly noticeable, the articulation of their vision of the future is highly detailed and concrete. Their vision is neither completely new nor cliché-driven but recognisable enough, with familiar formal and contextual

references from widely known sci-fi films.

Future Ruins

The artists' fascination with multi-layered time is evident in the film, also titled as *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying*, which is the seminal element of the project. The film's protagonist is an embodiment of accumulated human knowledge and experience, a necessary product to maintain the essence of human civilization in a post-apocalyptic future. The nature of the characters' construction is unclear in the film, but it is implied that this is the type of human being that could carry forward what is necessary for human survival, in terms of physical, biological, psychological, and behavioral traits. Mechanical accuracy, emotionless task-taking, and solitude seem to be at the core of this person's existence, while routines and repetitions suggest a circular, recurrent timeframe. By collapsing notions of past and future in what can be regarded as a probable present, the film negates linear narratives and historical continuities. The multi-channel installation of the film is also critical in ensuring the film's non-linear unfolding of the multiple narratives; by layering distinctive paces and seemingly fragmented scenes in a complex loop, Moon and Jeon create the parallel presence of different tenses, being in a past, present or future, all only plausible, not definitive.



► Moon
Kyungwon &
Jeon Joonho,
*The Ways of
Folding Space
& Flying*,
Exhibition view,
2015
©Moon
Kyungwon &
Jeon Joonho.
Courtesy of Arts
Council Korea
and the Artist.

The film is set in a closed space reminiscent of a scientific laboratory. Again, this stems from the familiar lexicon of sci-fi film conventions, but upon closer investigation, it becomes clear that the place is somewhat distinct from an ordinary laboratory. Gradually it reveals itself as the Korean Pavilion building in the Giardini, Venice, but in a different time, perhaps a near future, or in a different dimension, like a parallel universe. Meticulously replicated in the smallest details but transformed from an art venue to a futuristic laboratory, the place is presented as a site that is specific yet groundless. The rich and complex history of Venice as the city of thresholds and the recent history of "La Biennale" as the world's largest international art event have been deliberately muted here. Instead, what we are facing and immersed in is a site where the past is present in the architectural residues yet no longer accessible as tangible memories. The exploration of this site becomes somewhat archaeological, for the site is enacted as a ruin, or what Robert Smithson referred to as "ruins-in-reverse."¹⁶

Smithson was one of the first artists to identify "the monumental vacancies that define, without trying, the memory traces of an abandoned set of futures."¹⁷ Observing the vast expansion of suburbia and the creation of a place with no prior history in New Jersey, he recognized the buildings that do not fall into ruins after they are constructed but rather rise into ruins before they are built. These "ruins-in-reverse" are the opposite of the "romantic ruins," the picturesque ruins that portray a better past while simultaneously legitimizing a present that in turn promises an idealistic future. A belief in the linear and progressive construction of history is behind this traditional understanding of ruins, and the decaying process of the building establishes an historic and aesthetic distance between the past and the present based on the concept of continuity. Antoine Picon has also articulated the divergence between traditional and contemporary ruins: "in traditional landscapes the productions of man, his constructions in particular, surrendered themselves progressively to nature in the form of the ruin. [...] There is nothing of the sort in the contemporary city where objects, if they don't disappear in the one go, as if by magic, are instead relegated

to obsolescence, a bit like the living dead who endlessly haunt the landscape preventing it from ever becoming peaceful again.”¹⁸

What Moon and Jeon seem to suggest in the film is an absence of progressive time, that is, a rupture of history. By depicting the Korean Pavilion as a site where neither architectural remnants nor memories function as a catalyst for temporal integration, the artists are disrupting the continuity of the place’s history. It is a kind of erasure of history from a place that is almost too saturated with historic and symbolic memories and identities. Instead, Moon and Jeon inspire a place not integral to the earlier places, but indicative of an interrupted future where we have survived its ruin. Marc Augé has established a clear connection between ruins and their temporal underpinnings in his analysis of modern life:

What we perceive in ruins is the impossibility of imagining completely what they would have represented to those who saw them before they crumbled. They speak not of history but of time, pure time. What is true of the past is perhaps also true of the future. To perceive pure time is to grasp in the present a lack that structures the present moment by orienting it towards the past or the future.¹⁹

Augé has proposed the notion of “non-places” to characterize the places without history, places in transit; “spaces of circulation, consumption and communication.”²⁰ They are airports, superstores, motorways, and international hotel chains that exist beyond history and relations. While an “anthropological place” shows inscriptions of the social bond or collective history, “non-places” represent the ephemeral and the transient of modern life. Cities like Venice have numerous non-places; the city’s many attractions are also becoming non-places, as they are increasingly inhabited by people who have no lasting connections, relations, or bonds with the places. Both place and non-place exist in the relative sense of the term, according to Augé, as the distinction between the two is a way of measuring the degree of sociality and symbolization of a given space.

Moon and Jeon's reimagining of the Korean Pavilion as a non-historic space can be understood as an attempt to disengage the space from its complicated social and symbolic functions in order to stage the condition of pure time, where the role of art can be configured without the burden of history. The anonymous and appeasing solitude of the non-place might be an illusion, but it could also be the only way of enduring and surviving the current world. Can we imagine a future where there is no history? What would art mean if a future is as arbitrary as a present? Stripped bare of memories, identities, and histories, the site of the Korean Pavilion is at least temporarily an enclosed present, a present that is in transit and becoming. Moon and Jeon's question of art's role in society can acquire a renewed significance in this place, despite the fact that it is a sort of space that eradicates the very existence of sociality.

The text published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015 is republished here.

*Original text: *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying*, Cultureshock Media, pp.9–23, 2015



▼ Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho, *News From Nowhere, Behind the Scene*, 2015. ©Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the artist.

For the filming of the video, they created a life-sized replica of the Korean Pavilion on a film set in Namyangju-si, east of Seoul. Among the experts and professionals who collaborated on the project were Oh Jung-Wan, President of Bom Films, who was involved in the film production, actress Im Soo-jung, and designer Jung Kuho. The commissioner stated that the scope of the exhibition was beyond that of an average film production, and that the project would not have been viable without the help of its supporters, citing the sponsoring companies as major collaborators in the exhibition. With the opening of the exhibition, a book was published chronicling the project's process and including interviews and conversations with leading academics on relevant subjects just like in the past *News from Nowhere*.

XII



2017

XII - 2017

Just prior to the 2017 exhibition, the official title of "commissioner" of the Korean Pavilion changed to "curator." An open call system was also adopted as a new way of selecting "curator" by Arts Council Korea. Lee Daehyung, art director of Hyundai Motor Company at the time, named Lee Wan and Cody Choi as two artists to represent the Korean Pavilion in his exhibition proposal presented during the review of open call applications and followed through with his proposal upon selection. In addition to the two artists, Lee Daehyung adopted "Mr. K" as the third voice of the exhibition entitled *Counterbalance: The Stone and the Mountain*. Mr. K served as the figure embodying the exhibition concept as well as a critical figure in one of Lee Wan's works that takes its title from him. Through the life of the late Mr. Kim Kimoon, to whom the 1,412 photographs Lee Wan purchased in Hwanghak-dong for the trivial sum of 50,000 KRW (less than 50 USD) belonged, Lee showed not only an individual's life full of fierce battles but also the process of South Korea's modernization. Lee presented six works in total, including *Mr. K and the Collection of Korean History and Proper Time*.

Cody Choi presented a large neon light installation entitled *Venetian Rhapsody* on the facade of the Korean Pavilion as an attempt to overcome the building's spatial limitations. The installation that drew from the symbolic images of Las Vegas and Macao was a lampoon of "casino-capitalism" that had also laid roots in the international art circle. While examining the geo-cultural characteristics of Venice where art and commercialism go hand in hand, Choi came to realize that Venice makes artists chase rainbows and that artists (including himself), collectors, galleries, and curators participating in the

Venice Biennale are swayed by it, making bluffs.

Each belonging to a different generation, Lee and Choi created an interesting narrative that corresponds with the concept of "counterbalance," cutting through the three-generation perspective of "grandfather-father-son." Though this trigenerational framework was criticized in South Korea as "convoluted," foreign media raced to name *Counterbalance: The Stone and the Mountain* as an exhibition not to be missed. Visitors from around the world commented that "the exhibition took an illuminating approach of converging "trans-national" and "trans-generational" issues, thereby revealing that the issues of South Korea, Asia, and the world are closely interlinked.

The Korean Pavilion at the 57th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

Counterbalance: The Stone and the Mountain

May 13–November 26, 2017

Commissioner

Arts Council Korea

Curator

Lee Daehyung

Exhibitors

Lee Wan, Cody Choi

Korean Pavilion Manager

/ Architect

So-Yung Han

Curatorial Team

Lee Daehyung, Susie Cho,
Michaela de Lacaze, Krvs Lee

Editorial Team

Lee Daehyung, Susie Cho,
Kyoung-yun Ho, Jae-seok
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Lee Sohyeon

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Counterbalance: The Stone and the Mountain

§ Lee Daehyung

In 2016, the global landscape was marred by profound socio-political turmoil, underscored by the harrowing Syrian refugee crisis, the impassioned pleas for equity by the Black Lives Matter movement, and a surge in pernicious xenophobia and racism fueled by nationalist, extremist populism spanning Europe, the United States, and parts of Asia.

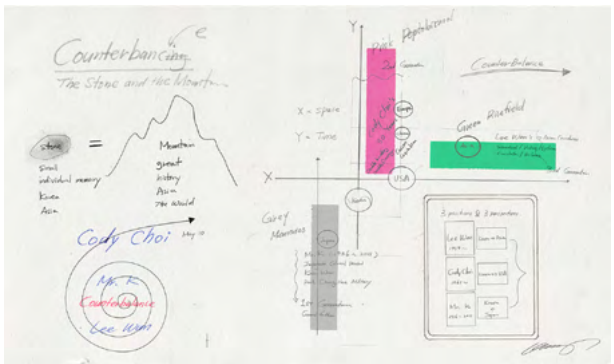
Amidst this context, I conceived two visual metaphors to critique the prevailing global climate, yet imbue it with a semblance of positive energy, transcending simple opposition. The inaugural image that coalesced in my thoughts was that of a mountain, alongside a solitary stone hewn from its mass. The subsequent image envisioned was of undulating waves, their burgeoning force and momentum tempered by gravity's reciprocal pull. Despite the stark contrast in their magnitude, a stone and its mountain progenitor are unified in essence, a truth unveiled through meticulous scientific and philosophical scrutiny. Likewise, the perpetual motion of water molecules within a wave, transitioning in response to the wave's amplitude, serves as a testament to the fluid nature of dichotomies such as elevation and depth, significance and triviality, magnitude, and minuteness. Far from being disruptive, this incessant flux is integral to the wave's equilibrium—its quintessential power and identity. These ruminations ultimately inspired the title of the Korean Pavilion's 2017 exhibition: *Counterbalance: The Stone and the Mountain*, a poetic encapsulation of the notion that true balance arises from an acknowledgment of the universal interconnectedness and fundamental parity of all entities.

To curate artists whose oeuvres resonate with this philosophical discourse, I devised a series of guiding analogies:

(stone : mountain) = (Korea : Asia) = (Asia : world)
= (memory of an individual : history) = (individual : society)
= (stone : mountain)

In my subsequent research, I delved into artists who articulate the complexities and inequities inherent in global interactions. This inquiry culminated in the selection of two artists: Cody Choi and Lee Wan, each offering a unique perspective on our collective, global milieu, and its ramifications for Korea. Cody Choi stands as a seminal figure among Korean artists of the 1990s, who navigated a cultural dichotomy with the West. Through strategies of appropriation and parody, Choi not only addressed the hegemony of Western culture but also processed his own experience of cultural dislocation as an immigrant in the United States. His oeuvre resonates with the Korean diaspora and Koreans of the era who looked beyond their borders, articulating a critical stance from a liminal space between Korea and the West. From this vantage point, Choi probes the cultural dialogues, economic entanglements, and societal structures that delineate these regions, shedding light on their interrelated perceptions and identities

Lee Wan, emblematic of a new generation of Korean artists, eschews the binary "East vs. West" perspective, approaching Western culture with a nuanced indifference characteristic of a more globally minded worldview. Rather than anchoring his work to a specific locale, Lee traverses the nebulous terrains of capitalism's global structures through an ethnographic lens. His focus is not on cultural exploration but on the socioeconomic impacts of neoliberalism across Asia. His contribution to the Venice Biennale employs an archive of photographs, objects, and writings from Mr. Kim Kimoon (1936–2011), endowing the narrative with an additional, albeit absent, voice that contrasts with and complements the artist's perspective. Dubbed "Mr. K," Kim symbolizes the archetypal Korean, embodying a generation that weathered Korea's tumultuous modern history and regarded Western democracies as beacons of utopian ideals.



▼ Lee Daehyung, *Counterbalance* concept map. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea.

Mr. K, Choi, and Lee collectively articulate a nuanced depiction of Korean identity across generational and geographical dimensions, presenting a narrative that intersects Korea's contemporary history with its evolving stance towards the global East/West dynamic and the homogenized landscape of a globalized world. This narrative spectrum—from idealization through critique to indifference towards Western paradigms—frames their exploration of Korean subjectivity within these contexts. Their artistic positions underscore the thematic essence of the Korean Pavilion: *Counterbalance: The Stone and the Mountain*. The exhibition posits that, much like the intrinsic nature of a stone mirrors that of a mountain, differing only in scale, the individual narratives articulated through the pavilion's artists encapsulate a microcosmic history reflective of Korea's—and by extension, the global—journey over the past century. Yet, the mountain, with its pyramidal structure, suggests a complexity and hierarchy absent in the stone. "Counterbalance" probes the interplay between personal narratives and broader national histories, questioning how these stories within the Korean milieu resonate globally and illuminate paths forward. This exploration constitutes the intricate counter-balancing act undertaken by the featured Korean artists, providing a profound commentary on identity, history, and the global human condition.

Cody Choi

For the 57th Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion, Cody Choi presents a trilogy of installations—*Venetian Rhapsody*, *Vacant Strips*, and *National Anthem*—marking a conceptual evolution from his acclaimed works of the 1990s. During that era, Choi's art wrestled with his own experiences as a Korean immigrant in the United States, often reflecting on this narrative directly. His latest pieces, however, engage with these themes more subtly, without explicitly revisiting his personal journey. The incorporation of earlier works such as *The Thinker* series of scatological sculptures and *Self-Portrait in Energy Level*, alongside *Cody's Legend vs. Freud's Shit Box*, suggests a continuous, albeit evolved, conversation with his previous oeuvre. These installations maintain an exploration of the cultural dissonance and tensions inherent between South Korea and the purported West, a theme pervasive in his earlier Pepto-Bismol²¹-drenched sculptures.

In a new twist, Choi's current installations critically examine the pervasive influence of global capitalism, highlighting its role in diminishing clear-cut geographical and cultural distinctions—relics of an imperial past now seemingly oversimplified against the backdrop of contemporary neoliberalism. His work poignantly critiques how the relentless march of capital flattens distinctions and historical nuances, commodifying authenticity of "the local"



► Cody Choi, *Venetian Rhapsody—The Power of Bluff*, 2017. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

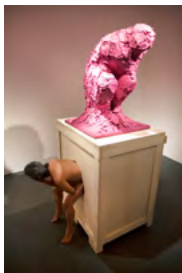
and the exorcism of mythical "Other" in the process. This nuanced examination not only extends but deepens Choi's interrogation of cross-cultural dynamics, reflecting a sophisticated understanding of how global economic forces shape cultural identities and exchanges in the modern world.

In his characteristic fashion, Cody Choi's installations for the Korean Pavilion are imbued with a rich tapestry of double meanings, visual puns, and parodic elements. The playful and rhyming titles of works such as *Venetian Rhapsody* and *Vacant Strips* are deliberately crafted to both guide and perplex the audience. These pieces evoke cities like Venice, Las Vegas, and Macao, all of which are emblematic of late capitalism's reshaping of urban landscapes into spectacles of extravagance. Through *Venetian Rhapsody* and *Vacant Strips*, Choi navigates what Michel Foucault described as a "heterotopia of illusion," a concept that morphs into a dystopian vision akin to a nightmarish reflection of "Venice." This is highlighted by the replication of Venice's famed architectural marvels, such as the Piazza San Marco and its iconic canals and gondolas, in the gambling havens of Las Vegas and Macao. Choi artfully blurs the lines between these disparate locales, proposing that the speculative nature and the gambling culture endemic to Macao and Las Vegas mirror the competitive gambits of the art world. By incorporating the notion of "bluffing" within *Venetian Rhapsody*, Choi provocatively suggests that such strategies are not exclusive to the casinos' high rollers but extend to the maneuvers of collectors, galleries, and even artists themselves, hinting at his own participation in this complex dance.

In keeping with the thematic undercurrents of illusion and facade, Cody Choi's installations prompt reflections on the concept of emptiness across both symbolic and material realms. The *Self-Portrait in Energy Level* playfully contends that its boxes, contrary to appearances, brim with energy—suggesting a nuanced bluff within the artistic narrative. Meanwhile, *Vacant Strip* overtly probes the hollow performativity associated with its titular subject matter. These works encapsulate a portrayal of a disorienting, globalized

reality where traditional points of reference are deliberately obscured, leaving no sanctuary from the immediate and overwhelming spectacle of the Venice Biennale, with its intoxicating amalgamation of art, affluence, and desire. This continuous provocation and unfulfillment of desire—a motif recurrent in Choi's oeuvre—serves to underscore the perpetual motion of longing and its unattainable resolution. The artist has candidly shared how his upbringing in postwar Korea was saturated with idealized visions of America and its women, dreams that were starkly challenged upon his arrival in Los Angeles. There, he was met with a different societal perception of his identity as an Asian man. Through works like *The Thinker* series and *Self-Portrait in Energy Levels*, Choi engages in a dynamic process of contestation and redefinition, grappling with his positionality as an individual marked by racial otherness. This aspect offers a profound commentary on the intersection of personal identity and cultural expectations, exploring the complex layers of self-perception and external perception within a transnational context.

However, Choi's latest installations at the Korean Pavilion depart from offering viewers the comfort of such empowering narratives. Instead, they find themselves entangled in a voyeuristic milieu that oscillates between allure and frustration, a dynamic that both captivates and confines. Immersed in an excess of neon glows, beckoning signs, and performances that blur the line between seduction and commodification, the audience is left to ponder whether Venice—synonymous with romance—has lured them into a mirage, failing to fulfill its promises of love, connection, and significance. Termed "V.R." by Choi, *Venetian Rhapsody* transcends mere escapism to a "virtual reality" of an idealized realm; it rather lays bare the deceptions and facades of our current existence. We are not ushered into an alternative reality but left in one devoid of virtue. While Choi's depiction of the modern condition may initially appear devoid of redemption, his artistry persistently carries a beacon of hope. Through a critical lens that dares to both mock the absurdities of society and its own artifice, Choi suggests that awareness and self-reflection might yet temper, if not wholly transform, this landscape.



▼ Left: Cody Choi, *Thinker*, 1995-96. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

▼ Right: Cody Choi, *Color Haze*, 2017. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

This strategy of employing parody, irony, and even sarcasm has long been a hallmark of Choi's body of work—ranging from his subtle acknowledgment of Jameson's theories in Cody's *Legend vs. Freud's Shit Box* (1994-1995) to the brazen but humorous "footnotes" found in *Episteme Sabotage*.^{22 23} In a world increasingly fraught with violence, intolerance, and the anxieties wrought by globalization, the necessity for such inventive methods of expressing dissent against the prevailing order has never been more pressing. Indeed, in the face of the alarming rise of reactionary movements across the globe, the vital recourse to critique and the liberating power of laughter stands as the most effective antidote. Yet, Choi's creations are far from being mere depictions of a detached, postmodern reality synonymous with globalization. Moving beyond his initial engagements with the Western cultural archive, Choi now captures and inverts the contemporary cultural ethos to challenge it through parody. His technique of cultural amalgamation is so comprehensive that it results in a detachment of symbols from their original meanings, histories, and cultural contexts.

Lee Wan

Proper Time: Though The Dreams Revolve with the Moon features an ambitious assembly of 668 clocks, each meticulously marked

with the names, birthdates, nationalities, and professions of diverse individuals worldwide. At first glance, the installation's uniform appearance belies a deeper complexity: Every clock ticks at a unique pace, mirroring the distinct economic realities faced by the subjects it represents. This inventive work serves as Lee's exploration of an intriguing inquiry: What amount of labor is required from different people to earn enough for a standard breakfast in their respective cultures? To unravel this question, Lee engaged in comprehensive research, conducting interviews with over 1,200 individuals. These participants provided detailed information regarding their annual earnings, work schedules, and dietary expenditures. Incorporating variables such as national GDP to account for the economic disparities among the participants, Lee crafted a sophisticated mathematical formula to determine the precise speed at which each clock should operate, offering a poignant commentary on global economic inequality through the lens of time.

The culmination of Lee's work is an absurdist collection of abstract portraits that transforms into a resonant, chaotic, and at times overwhelming multisensory and immersive exploration of global economic disparities. The installation poignantly employs the concept of relativized labor and purchasing power, invoking Albert Einstein's theory of relativity to challenge the conventional understanding of "proper time," traditionally measured through closed system processes like a burning candle or a swinging pendulum. *Proper Time* also nods to Felix Gonzalez-Torres' seminal conceptual artwork, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* from 1991, which similarly utilized clocks as metaphors for individual lives. However, Lee's installation diverges significantly in its thematic focus; rather than depicting a tender narrative of human connection as Gonzalez-Torres did, it articulates a narrative of alienation, disconnection, and the inequalities fostered by neoliberal policies within a global capitalist framework. This revelation is particularly striking against the backdrop of the almost universal experience of trading labor for sustenance. Lee's clocks do not just keep time; they serve as a metaphorical countdown, echoing the Marxian aspiration for a self-

aware, united transnational proletariat, all the while highlighting the deep-seated commodification that challenges this very ideal.

In 2012, Lee embarked on an ambitious project titled *Made In*, aiming to become the producer of all the raw ingredients necessary for his staple breakfast meal. This extensive endeavor led him to travel across 10 different Asian countries, where he engaged in labor alongside local workers to produce a range of products including rice, sugar, and wooden chopsticks. Beyond the physical production, Lee delved deep into the historical and cultural contexts of each country, exploring their unique connections to the raw products they traditionally produce, which are integral to his breakfast. The result of Lee's rigorous investigations and hands-on experiences are presented through a compelling installation that features a wall adorned with twelve monitors, each playing videos that narrate the stories and insights gleaned from his journey.

The dynamic and multifaceted nature of the screens demands that viewers constantly adjust their gaze and divide their attention, a challenge reminiscent of Nam June Paik's seminal 1995 video installation, *Electronic Superhighway: Continental US, Alaska, Hawaii*. However, whereas Paik's installation engages deeply with the particularities of American culture, mapping out the vast expanse of the nation's territories, Lee's work adopts a more universal approach. His grid of videos eschews personal or geographical specificity, blending the cultural and territorial identities of the Asian countries it features into a singular, indistinguishable whole. This portrayal positions Asia as a unified "factory of the world," erasing individual distinctions in favor of a collective identity. This approach not only reflects on the globalization of production but also on the challenge viewers face in trying to assimilate the flood of information displayed across the twelve monitors. In doing so, Lee's work mirrors the broader societal challenge of comprehending the nuanced historical and economic conditions of production in an age overwhelmed by the constant flow of information through the "electronic superhighway" of television and the internet.

Furthermore, *Made In* offers a profound commentary on human connections, collaboration, and the rituals of food preparation, positioning itself as a critical counterpoint to the relational aesthetics championed by Nicolas Bourriaud and epitomized by artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija. Through this lens, Lee interrogates the intricate and often exploitative economic systems that lurk beneath the utopian veneer of Tiravanija's intimate and seemingly idyllic culinary engagements. By doing so, Lee prompts a pressing inquiry: Is it possible for the community-centric and anti-capitalistic endeavors of contemporary art to mitigate or even counterbalance the pervasive influence of capital's global machinations, within which the realm of art is deeply entangled?



► Lee Wan, *Mr. K and the Collection of Korean History*, 2017. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

Mr. K and the Collection of Korean History emerges as an evocative installation, built around the found personal photographs of Kim Kimoon, who lived from 1936 to 2011. Unearthed at Hwanghakdong Antique Market, these photographs were acquired by Lee for a mere 50,000 KRW (under 50 USD), a transaction that poignantly underscores the fragility and disposability of individual and collective histories. In conversation with the artist, I dubbed Kim Kimoon "Mr. K," a moniker that transcends its bearer to symbolize a generation of Koreans enmeshed in the seismic shifts of the 20th century: the era of Japanese colonial rule; the Korean War and the resulting bifurcation of the Korean Peninsula; the birth of the Republic of Korea; the iron grip of authoritative governance in

the 1960s and 1970s; alongside the nation's meteoric economic rise and march towards democratization. Lee juxtaposes Mr. K's photographic legacy with his own assemblage of historical artifacts, weaving together a complex tapestry that challenges linear or homogenized narratives of Korea's modern odyssey. This installation not only bridges the personal with the national but also probes the fissures and confluences within their narratives, questioning the veracity of a neatly packaged history. Central to the exhibition is a porous mosquito net, a poignant emblem that speaks to the fluidity between eras and the elusiveness of a comprehensive grasp on the past. This metaphorical barrier serves as a reminder of the inherent limitations in accessing and understanding the full spectrum of historical experience, inviting a contemplative engagement with the layers of memory and identity that define a nation and its people.

Challenging the concept of an unmediated grasp on history, *Mr. K and the Collection of Korean History* intentionally obfuscates a singular, all-encompassing perspective of its elements, thus thwarting any viewer's aspirations towards a false sense of all-knowingness. Through his deep dive into Mr. K's life, Lee crafts a narrative that renegotiates the boundaries of authorship. In this dynamic, Mr. K unwittingly assumes the role of a co-creator in Lee's artistic endeavor. Consequently, the artwork becomes a vessel for a diversity of perspectives on history, embracing ambiguity and inviting viewers to forge their own interpretations of historical "truth."

Possibility of Impossible Things: The Stone and the Mountain manifests as a poetic and utopian sculpture that achieves a delicate balance between two disparate objects: a beach-sourced stone from Korea and a pack of Mountain Dew soda. The stone bears the simple inscription "from the Sea," while the sodas are intriguingly marked with the Korean words for mountain and dew, *san* and *yiseul*. In this playful linguistic and conceptual juxtaposition, Lee crafts a paradoxical realm where traditional opposites are rendered equivalent, challenging the viewer to embrace a reality where stones might offset mountains, and dew can counterbalance the

sea. This sculpture serves as a vehicle for estrangement, compelling its audience to question and reassess our entrenched perceptions of the natural hierarchy. Lee's work extends beyond mere artistic experimentation, gesturing towards broader geopolitical reflections. The choice of a local stone and American sodas operates as a subtle metaphor for South Korea and the United States, respectively, proposing a reimagined global order. Here, Lee suggests the possibility of a utopia where prevailing power dynamics are dismantled, inviting contemplation on the potential for equity in international relations.

Diligent Attitude Towards a Meaningless Thing manifests as an abstract oil painting that seemingly reverberates with the monumental ethos of modern art. Yet, its essence stems from an enlarged depiction of a minor doodle by the artist. This creation was brought to fruition by assistants who followed the artist's specific directives, applying brushstrokes and utilizing a palette that had been pre-selected. In this manner, the artwork emulates the structured simplicity of a "paint by numbers" activity, thereby challenging conventional ideals of creativity, expression, authorship, and originality. The artist draws an analogy between this mode of creation and the impersonal production processes typical of late capitalism, a system he critiques for reducing individuals to mere cogs in a vast machine of production and consumption.

For a Better Tomorrow critically reinterprets a Korean socialist realist image depicting a family brimming with optimism, transforming its original narrative into a provocative critique. Lee's reinterpretation involves the family figures being notably disfigured and their faces hollowed out, creating a jarring absence where their expressions of hope once were. This deliberate alteration serves as a metaphorical blinding, compelling viewers to interrogate the prevailing optimism surrounding technological advancement as the panacea for future societal imperfections. The work delves into the ramifications of a Deleuzian "society of control," where omnipresent surveillance, predictive algorithms, and the digitization of social interactions erode personal autonomy and privacy. Lee views the techno-

utopias of the contemporary moment as being as misleading, if not more so, than the utopian projections found in Korea's historical socialist realist art.

Counterbalancing "Dyspeptic Universe"

The motif of consumption, digestion, and excretion is a recurring element in Cody Choi's oeuvre, underscored by his symbolic use of Pepto-Bismol and as interpreted by Mike Kelley. Choi's artistic narrative is emblematic of a broader cultural malaise, highlighting a world in disarray, where the set order of things is diseased, flawed.²⁴ His work suggests that the assimilation and processing of information—or, more broadly, the capacity for interpretation and empathy—are disrupted by power imbalances and fundamental disparities. These disruptions are most pronounced in the dichotomies between East and West, as well as in the tensions between a patriarchal framework and its marginalized "Others."

Lee Wan's seminal series, *Made In*, embodies a metaphorical representation of obstructed digestion. The project's inception is rooted in the ritual of breakfast, posited as the day's most essential meal. Yet, through his expansive exploration of global power dynamics and societal structures, Lee metaphorically postpones the consumption of this meal indefinitely. By continually engaging in the preparation or replication of breakfast ingredients, Lee metaphorically leaves us—and by extension, his family and himself—with an unfulfilled hunger. This metaphorical hunger mirrors the real deficiencies experienced by the workers Lee encounters, highlighting the pervasive socio-economic disparities that mark our global landscape. The notion of equilibrium is a central motif in Lee's oeuvre, using scales to interrogate the constructs of a "well-adjusted" citizen, with timekeeping devices further emphasizing the theme of standardization.

Through their artworks, both artists scrutinize the intricacies of transnational production and consumption, distilling the essence

of human experience. Here, a stone symbolizes the individual, while the mountain represents the societal framework enveloping that individual. Yet, personal narratives emerge as potent critiques and alternatives to prevailing systems and histories, offering a counterbalancing art through their distinct voices. Through the lens of this exhibition, individual narratives unfold as analogies, offering poignant reflections of the broader, complex challenges that characterize our wider contemporary world.

The essay published in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 is republished here.

*Original text: *Counterbalance: The Stone and the Mountain*, Idea Books, pp.16–29. 2017

§ Jane da Mosto_We are here Venice

“It was both surprising and comforting to be contacted in Spring 2017 by arch. So Young Han, manager of the Korean Pavilion, to suggest a fundraising objective to integrate with their biennale exhibition—Lee Daehyung (curator) and Arts Council Korea had spontaneously offered to collect donations as an extension of the theme of the pavilion “Counterbalance.” This initiative represented the fulcrum of finding a balance between the exhibition space and the surrounding context of Venice as a living city.

With the proceeds, we were able to facilitate and accelerate restoration of one of the water level monitoring stations managed by the Tide Forecasting Centre operated by the Venice municipality and support the Centre in their efforts to make the local government more mindful of the importance of this technical infrastructure for daily life of Venice.

We ensured that the names of everyone who had contributed was engraved on the cabin and it remains a key symbol of the intimate connection between the state of the lagoon and the fate of Venice, and the importance of visitors to Venice as well as Venice’s role as a mirror on the world.”



▼ Eco Bag Project from the Korean Pavilion, 2017. Provenance: 2017 Venice Biennale Korean Pavilion Blog (Naver)
(<https://blog.naver.com/koreanpavilion/221028310080>)

XIII

History Has Failed Us, But No Matter

May 15 - November 24, 2019

Artists
Ahn Sun-yeon, Jung
Hanyeon Nam,
Jane-Jin Kallen

Curator
Hyunjin Kim

Deputy Curator
Hyun-Jung

Assistant Curator
Haena Noh

Managing Editor
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Construction Supervisor and Manager
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XIII - 2019

Independent curator Hyunjin Kim led the 2019 Korean Pavilion and invited Hwayeon Nam, siren eun young jung, and Jane Jin Kaisen as artists. The exhibition borrowed its title, *History Has Failed Us, but No Matter*, from the first sentence of Min Jin Lee's novel *Pachinko* (2017) and staged those who were banished, veiled, forgotten, abandoned, and condemned by history as the principal voices of a new narrative. The exhibition attracted attention with all of its participants being women, possibly appearing as a narrative that reversed the male-centric history presented by the Korean Pavilion's previous exhibition in 2017 or as a preview of *The Milk of Dreams*, the main exhibition of the 2022 Venice Biennale. Kim stated, "We have recently witnessed expansions in ways the history of modernization is read, written, and imagined anew, thanks to the language and imaginative power of visual arts. I believe the main engine that will drive such change more innovatively is gender diversity."

Hwayeon Nam presented *A Garden in Italy* and *Dancer from the Peninsula*, which contemplates the dance and unusual trace of the life of Choi Seung-hee, a modern female artist who was in conflict with and broke free from nationalism amidst colonization and the Cold War. siren eun young jung produced a multichannel video installation entitled *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise*, which follows the most talented surviving male-role *yeoseong gukgeuk* (a genre of Korean theater featuring only women actors) actor Lee Deung Woo and examines the aesthetics and political nature behind the works of later performers who carried on the genealogy of contemporary queer performance. Jane Jin Kaisen's new work for the Korean Pavilion was *Community of Parting*, which

reframed the shamanic myth of Princess Bari as the root of diasporic women in the process of modernization, thereby interpreting the legend as a story that transcends divisions and borders.

Through these research-based works, *History Has Failed Us, but No Matter* unfolded a multifarious video narrative that delved into the deep and long-standing layers of the history of modernization in East Asia. The three artists' unique video installations also incorporated dynamic visibility, tactile sound, colorful light, and various rhythm, while working with the surrounding architectural structure based on organic curves, thus highlighting the "placeness" of the Korean Pavilion on the whole.

The Korean Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

History Has Failed Us, but No Matter

May 11–November 24, 2019

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Arts Council Korea

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Haena Noh

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Eunah Park, Yoosuk Kim

Managing Editor

Eunah Park

Italian-English Translation

Margherita Malerba

Construction Supervisor and Korean Pavilion Manager

Eun Jeong Kim

English Proofreaders

Nick Herman, Aaron Tobiason

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▼ Catalog *History Has Failed Us, but No Matter*, from the Korean Pavilion, 2019. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.

History Has Failed Us, but No Matter

§ Hyunjin Kim

It is from the body, not the mind, that questions arise and answers are explored. What calls for thinking is the body, rather than the mind, and the questions that Fanon's Black body asks are not prompted because the body is Black, but because Black bodies have been denied or questioned Humanity in the imperial rhetoric of modernity. —Walter D. Mignolo²⁵

Tactile economies reassert ontological rather than epistemological knowing and highlight touch, texture, sensation, smell, feeling, and affect over what is assumed to be legible through the visible. —Jasbir K. Puar²⁶

This exhibition explores the history of modernization in East Asia through the lens of gender and the agency of tradition. Questioning the canon of the heterosexual male as much as it questions the West, this is also an argument over the many boundaries and borders of modernity that are carved into today's aporia. In particular, in its critical understanding of the problems of the modernization process in Asia, this exhibition investigates how tradition is invented and generated in close relation to modernity, and explores the emancipatory potential of tradition in Asia through a perception of gender complexity that goes beyond the canon of Western modernity.

Constructing a genealogy of queer performance in Korean society, and examining the notion of queering and its aesthetics, for the past 10 years siren eun young jung has based her work on *yeoseong gukgeuk*, a fast waning genre of Korean traditional theater that features only women actors. Jane Jin Kaisen interprets the Bari myth, a story of a daughter who was ousted from her community, as a new potential of escaping the melancholia of diaspora and the liminality of the West's *colonial-modern*. Hwayeon Nam explores the work of the 20th-century choreographer and dancer Choi Seung-

hee, who embraced a grand ambition for East Asian dance and constantly collided with modern borders as she generated modern inventions while fighting ideologies and notions of nation. In the work of these three artists—presented in the Korean Pavilion for the 58th Venice Biennale within the exhibition *History Has Failed Us, but No Matter*²¹—"tradition" serves as a significant medium throughout the process of digging into researching, discovering, rethinking, and finally interrupting the modality of the East Asian modernization that has been in pursuit of Western modernity.

In fact, to speak of contemporary through tradition is to wrestle with the old issue of Orientalism and Occidentalism, and it also involves breaking the deadlock with patriarchy in which Asian "tradition"—often incompatible with the perspective of gender diversity—is positioned. Because the exhibition takes place in an Asian national pavilion during the oldest global art event in Europe, it is also intertwined with the process of being misinterpreted or summoned through the various borders, barriers, and alerts around Eurocentrism, nationalism, Orientalism, and Occidentalism.

While preparing for this exhibition, I encountered an Asian woman curator, a generation older than me, who sounded suspicious of my curatorial proposal and asked whether the issues of women/gender-Others, tradition, and modernity were not a repetition of an Oriental strategy on a Western stage. She suggested that I was



► siren eun young jung, *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise*, 2019. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

absurdly exaggerating Orientalism by utilizing traditional elements such as *yeoseong gukgeuk*, Choi Seung-hee's East Asian Dance, or the Bari myth, and that I was presenting Asian women artists as the object of consumption to the West's Orientalism. In fact, I had heard similar criticism a few years earlier from another woman curator from the region, when I was presenting *Tradition (Un)Realized*, a project that explores the reciprocal reproduction between Asian modernization and tradition, and the argument around regional modern complexity. When I explained the phenomenon and complex problem of Asian elites—the recipients of modernized education—distancing themselves from tradition and suppressing it as something inferior, she responded emotionally by asserting that we should respect the previous generations who had strived to break free of tradition. Of course, it seems their criticisms were fragmentary judgments and mere conjecture, but for me, this was the moment I witnessed the abyss of a certain aporia surrounding complicated gender perceptions when addressing the disposition of modernization and tradition in East Asian societies.

These two women come from the same generation and are from my own region. Out of respect for these successfully and professionally established women who received a modern education while growing up under patriarchy and conservatism, I believe their experiences and struggles are not commensurable with my generation's experiences of extremely rapid development throughout East Asian societies in the recent half-century. It is most likely that they perceive tradition along the lines of repressive patriarchy, and that their resistance to tradition lies within their objection to the patriarchal society of East Asia. In other words, the historical coordinates on which they sit cannot be overlooked. As I understand it, they were institutionalized curators from a generation who studied art history and critical theories relevant to Western society as well as Edward Said's notion of "Orientalism," which made them aware of artistic operations within Orientalistic consumerism. Though I strongly empathize with their mode of critical reflection on certain regional tendencies to be alert against an Orientalist use of tradition, it is also true that their generation embraces the paradox

of having to censor and judge themselves as being constantly inferior to the West, which had educated them even on the problems of Orientalism. For those who are in the authoritative position of exhibiting and didactically performing the hierarchy of knowledge that they acquired by internalizing Western discourse, a strong belief in the undefeatable Western-centric hierarchy of knowledge hangs over them as an unremovable shadow. It is an undeniable fact that the acceptance of an empire embedded deep in their hearts resonates with the task of recognizing the hierarchy of knowledge produced by that empire. Such unstable signals blinking from their positions have a peculiar way of encountering Occidentalism.

In fact, the process of inspecting or internalizing Orientalism from the perspective of Occidentalism, and the process of differentiating and absorbing Western modernization within Asian societies, are very complex. Walter D. Mignolo points out that in the case of approving and supporting modernity lies the problem of not seeing—or pretending not to see—colonialism, which is the invisible other half of modernity. Today's non-Western curators and artists who keenly pursue decolonial practices far too often check and inspect whether they themselves are not the operators of either Occidentalism or Orientalism, or question how they could go beyond these two perspectives. Today, when there is a strong tendency to read nationalism and anti-colonialism as one thing, they constantly examine whether certain drives of contemporary art that break free of nationalism are actually another form of internalizing imperialist thoughts. In doing so, they position themselves within the oscillation between numerous borders. In fact, because of such complicated contexts, approaching tradition-related narratives or the intersection of gender and tradition within the modernization process is actually for East Asian women a way to witness or encounter the numerous conflicts, divisions, and violences embedded in the process of Western modernization in Asia. In doing so, they also cannot but repeatedly slip as they experience the reflection of complicated intersections in their relationships with the outside world. According to Mignolo, it is such epistemological intensity of local intellects—which they acquired while always acknowledging the West as

the standard of judgment and feeling less valuable than the West throughout the last five centuries—that indeed allows one to recognize the limits of Western modernity.

Then how is it possible for women and gender queer in Asia to be free from the canons of the West, from the Asian patriarchy, and the nation-state? First, we could find a clue in Walter D. Mignolo's argument that modernity, in its premise of Western colonial history, should always be stated as the colonial-modern. Another way is to strive for a *pluriversal* realization of emancipatory narratives of gender diversity that allows us to delink from what generates the colonial-modern and define oneself as the subject of where one dwells. In this exhibition, this takes place through the mediation of tradition and the affective experience of bodily movements, a vital assemblage of unchaining from both the patriarchal structure and the linear thinking of Western universal history.

Queer Affect, Queer Assemblage

In the context of such a curatorial approach for the Korean Pavilion, siren eun young jung's project on *yeoseong gukgeuk*, which generates a particular meeting point between the traditional, modern, and queer, occupies a significant position. The artist has explored the modernized genre of yeoseong gukgeuk for over 10 years. Gradually disappearing today, *yeoseong gukgeuk* was born right after Korea's independence from Japan, as a by-product of Korean traditional opera *changgeuk*'s transformation into a modern form of theater in which only women took part. It started with the establishment in 1948 of the Women's Gugak Club, a community of female singers—who felt great antipathy to men's authoritarianism, abuse, exploitation, and violence, which was prevalent in the *gukgeuk* scene back then—and gisaeng (Korean geisha) who had polished their skills in the traditional arts under institutional management during Japanese rule.²⁶ The world of traditional art and its system of apprenticeship between an oppressive teacher and a student has been deemed problematic as a field of sexual

land and economic exploitation. As early as the late 1940s, *yeoseong gukgeuk* was very significant in the attempt by women artists to redeem themselves as active subjects. The late 1940s in particular was when the Korean Peninsula was busy building its nation-state, and “border- niaking” inevitably proceeded alongside the establishment of new governments in the North and South by the two different ideologies of the Cold War.

In *yeoseong gukgeuk*, women perform all the roles, including those of male protagonists in stereotypical love stories. Offering fantasies to housewives and earning their enthusiastic applause, the genre presents a very unique queer-performance of overthrowing the dichotomous heterosexual representation with non-heterosexual desires. In other words, it achieves a liberation of demolishing normality and sexual boundaries by trespassing borders.

This is not just an interpretation provided by siren eun young jung or other contemporary researchers, but it stems from the actual testimony of the actors and audiences that experienced *yeoseong gukgeuk* at the time—it is said that the genre gained great popularity by serving as a window of liberation from the conservative and authoritative male masters of the traditional theater scene and also by providing romantic fantasies far from the patriarchal husbands at home.

A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise—a new video installation made by siren eun young jung for this exhibition—is composed of multiple video channels. First, a video portraying the on-stage performance and makeup process of Lee Deung Woo (aka Lee Ok Chun), a second-generation *yeoseong gukgeuk* actor and an outstanding surviving actor of the genre, is displayed at the front of the exhibition venue. The process of the aged actor putting on makeup is a process of the woman becoming a man, but the process of putting on “male-becoming makeup” on top of an aged face that has already lost most of its distinctions of biological sex is also a scene of creation of gender heterogeneity.

Then, four contemporary queer performers that provide an imaginary genealogy of queer performance aligned with Lee's practice, appear as an interesting heterogeneity and disharmony through a three-channel video installed in a room within the venue. The four figures that siren eun young jung presents as the genealogy of queer performance in Korean society are the electronic musician KIRARA, whose performance and music actively incorporate the sense of physical disjuncture and segmentation that one experiences as a transgender: the lesbian actor Yii Lee, who has always provided the male-centered and gendered theater scene of Korean society with an independent and unorthodox alternative; Seo Ji Won, a disabled woman, performer and director of the Disabled Women's Theater Group "Dancing Waist" with which she has developed a very exceptional action aesthetic; and DragKing AZANGMAN, who has strived to create a drag culture and community at the feminist-queer intersection. The practices of these women are charged with formal challenges that escape normality and existing standards. The disparate and anomalous performance of these non-cisgender performers, stemming from their bodies but further propelled by the discordance between themselves and their bodies, are edited in complex crosscuts as they not only interfere with one another but are hybridized through light, rhythm, velocity, and noises of friction, disharmony, and segmentation in siren eun young jung's video installation. As such, they move toward a queer time, queer experience, and queer affect.

Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (...) Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations. (...) Bindings and unbindings, becomings and un-becomings, jarring disorientations and rhythmic attunements. Affect marks a body's

belonging to a world of encounters or; a world's belonging to a body of encounters but also, in non-belonging, through all those far sadder (de) compositions of mutual in-compossibilities.²⁹

The artist underscores the dimension of “inter-body transmission” within the training process of *yeoseong gukgeuk*, which is orally passed on from one generation to another. It includes not only the mastering of vocal sounds (*chang*), but also the movements of the body and theatrical gestures— in other words, the aspect of gender-becoming and the elements of tradition that are metastasized through encounters between bodies. Such oral tradition accompanies a certain sense of excess, as it encompasses the experience of overcoming the boundary and the border. In her work *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise*, siren eun young jung experiments with the pursuit of such sensation of excess. The artist does not merely accentuate gender identity and orientation, but she questions how the norms of history could be interrupted with the senses and affect that we constantly experience. Employing frictions of sound and flashes, she substitutes stable and moderate visual conventions with agitating tactile senses that violate and exceed, ultimately maximizing the politics of the body that has been sustained within the practice of performance art.

Then, why is such queer time and experience necessary? To perceive the assemblage with overthrowing modern liminality, tradition, and queer within the queer performance of *yeoseong Gukgeuk* is not merely a way of representing the realm of a sexual subject, but moves forward to a social act that obfuscates the gender experience, and thinks of sexual identity and borders through a disposition of irregular (abnormal) sensations.

Today, in several societies, including Korea, we witness the phenomenon of twisted heterosexual- or cisgender-centered feminism colluding with neoliberal rights and phobia against queers and Muslim refugees. In effectively ruminating on such a situation, it is worthwhile studying Jasbir K. Puar's extraordinary argument in *Queer Times, Queer Assemblages*. As per the aforementioned

situation in Korea where cisgender radical feminism met a neoliberal frame and security issues, and ultimately ended up serving *biological women* centrism, Puar points out the serious paradox in which the discourse of queerness has served the discourse of U.S. exceptionalism, that is, “a sexually exceptional form of American national sexuality through a rhetoric of sexual modernization that is simultaneously able to castigate the other as homophobic and perverse, and construct the imperialist center as ‘tolerant’ but sexually, radically, and gendered normal”³⁰ within America’s counter-terrorism strategy. Moreover, Puar also points out how queer exceptionalism often considers Muslim and homosexual as mutually exclusive categories, while it works to “suture U.S. nationalism through the perpetual fissuring of race from sexuality—the race of the (presumptively sexually repressed, perverse, or both) terrorist and the sexuality of the national (presumptively white, gender normative) queer.”³¹ The way of thinking about queer only through sexual oppression as the agency while overlooking the operation of racism, nationalism, and patriarchy presses one to be on guard against everyone. Therefore, Puar breaks from the assimilation strategies of queer discourse and instead affirms and pursues abnormality and marginalized positions, asserting the queer assemblage that questions the frame of exclusion, which regulates the borders of normality through (re)production of queer acceptance.

Here, the “assemblage” that Puar speaks of is related to feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information. In other words, assemblage, “in its debt to ontology and its espousal of what cannot be known, seen, or heard, or has yet to be known, seen, or heard, allows for becoming/s beyond being/s.”³²

Beyond what the body looks like, then, this is also about what the queer body feels like, for the embodied and for the spectator. (...) As that which immerses the senses beyond the structuring logic of vision and dislodges memory as the fascia of history/ tactile knowledges install normativizing traces of danger, fear, and melancholia into the bodies of racialized terrorist look-alikes. The turban, for example, is not merely an appendage

to the body. It is always in the state of becoming, the becoming of a turbaned body, the turban becoming part of the body (...). Through queerly affective and tactile realms, the Sikh *pagri*, or turban, is acquiring the inscriptions of a (terrorist) masculinity, much in the way that veiling has been read as indicative of another femininity. The turbaned man, no longer merely the mark of a durable and misguided tradition, a resistant anti-assimilationist (albeit patriarchal) stance, now inhabits the space and history of monstrosity, that which can never become civilized. The turban is not only imbued with the nationalist, religious, and cultural symbolic of the other. The turban both reveals and hides the terrorist. Despite the taxonomies of turbans, their specific regional and locational genealogies, their placement in time and space, their singularity and their multiplicity, the turban as monolith profoundly troubles and disturbs the nation and its notions of security.³³

Queerness, as the terrorist-becoming performed by turbans, presents a very confusing challenge against normative concurrence through temporal, spatial, and bodily segmentation. Puar underscores that only the amplification of queer assemblage, which performs not only an opposition against the mode of nationalization but also queerness as a diaspora from the space of nation, could “bypass entirely (...) a continuum that privileges the pole of identity as the evolved form of Western modernity.”³⁴

siren eun young jung also does not insist on merely absorbing the queerness discovered in tradition within the realm of normality. In an East Asian society where tradition is actively employed as a nationalist discourse, the queer assemblage that the artist discovered in *yeoseong gukgeuk* and amplified, is in fact a challenge of paradox. Taking into account the fact that modernization and patriarchy are closely linked, and also today's situation where certain twisted identity politics degenerate into another voice of hatred against non-cisgenders or refugees, jung's work triggers and carries a more fundamental experience of abnormality through sense and affect, the manifestation and existence of a “queer time.” This work presents the performances and bodies of a lesbian, a transgender, and a disabled queer woman—who challenge the conventional logic

of performance and deploy bodily disharmonies—through dissonant yet tactile noises, joints, and severances. In her work *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise* jung intentionally makes an immoderate use—or even abuse—of the media and its physical power in order to subvert its constraints.

The work finally invites us to an immersive and overwhelming space for a queer assemblage, a strong sensory experience, saturated with disruptive audiovisual clashes, anomalous textures, asymmetric movements in disparate bodies, questioning all violence that comes from the pursuit of accordance, the normative, normalization, building identity in a sense of integrity.

Only If I Could Dance

Hwayeon Nam's two video installations, *Dancer from the Peninsula* and *A Garden in Italy*, explore dancer Choi Seung-hee (1911–1969), who in the 20th century had already dreamt of an East Asian dance and led a cosmopolitan life of traveling around the world, but found her artistic attempts constantly slipping upon the divisions and dispositions of colonialism and Cold War ideologies, and lost her life to diaspora. *Dancer from the Peninsula* has evolved from one of her previous works, *A Garden in Italy*, Nam's 2012 stage performance, which the artist had choreographed with a few remaining documents from Choi. What Nam attempted in the work was neither to reenact Choi's original dance piece nor to contribute to the highly mythicized obsession around Choi. Rather, what the work was keen to look at, in the paucity of Choi's archive, was the fundamental and epistemological understanding around the state of the archive as a future event. There is always a desire to be near to the past, but what this nearness means is a time-relevant intervention for both the present and the future, instead of museological taxidermy of the past.

In the Korean Pavilion, Nam presents *Dancer from the Peninsula*, a new multi-channel video installation, alongside *A Garden in Italy*, in



▼ Hwayeon Nam, *Dancer from the Peninsula*, installation view, 2019. Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the Artist.

a setting that connects the interior and exterior of the pavilion by employing a curved-shaped indoor platform and modest planting behind the building. *Dancer from the Peninsula* explores the cultural topography surrounding the life of Choi Seung-hee, especially the period between 1941 and her move to North Korea. Focusing on her work at the time, Nam molds a bricolage not only of Choi's interviews about East Asian dance and her philosophy as a dancer, but also disparate visual materials—various archive materials, footage, sounds, movements, brilliant and ephemeral light, close-up shots of fluttering flowers—through a choreographed rhythm.

Feminist and early 20th century anarchist Emma Goldman, born in Imperial Russia, was responsible for the saying “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be part of your revolution.” To change the phrase into a positive form would be an accurate account of Choi Seung-hee’s life. Although Korean by birth, she was also a Japanese citizen called Sai Shoki during the Japanese occupation, and a world-renowned choreographer and dancer traveling to Tokyo, Paris, New York, Mexico City, and elsewhere, who also had close exchanges with artists such as Pablo Picasso and Jean Cocteau. However,

Choi had to make political choices, forced to select one side or the other of the dichotomic border in order to live her dream of dance. She is one of the most luminous, incomparable, mythical East Asian divas, but she also lived through a period of unfortunate historical influences and paradox, and was a figure of controversy due to her performance contributions to Imperial Japan's war and her decision to join the North Korean communist regime. After tours through Europe, and North and South America, Choi returned home in 1941 with the ambition of creating an East Asian dance. That same year, in December, Japan started the Pacific War. Then, at the peak of her popularity, Choi had to perform for Japanese soldiers in China during the war. But at the same time, she had an urgency to establish an East Asian dance for herself: Choi showcased works influenced by *noh* (能, No) and *bugaku* (舞楽); stressed the necessity of modernizing Peking opera; and learned Chinese ethnic dances during her stay in China until 1946. That same year, the year of independence for Korea and defeat for Japan, Choi defected to North Korea. While she was branded a communist in South Korea, in the late 1960s she was purged in North Korea amid political conflict with Kim Il Sung. Her political collusion and participation for the sake of dance have framed her to this day in Korean society as a pro-Japan traitor and North Korea defector. However, what Hwayeon Nam is attempting here in her two installations is to move Choi away from such a state of confinement—though the artist is fully aware of the problems of Choi's controversial activities—free her from her death in diaspora, and survey her pursuit of East Asian dance. As we encounter Nam's works, her carefully written video choreography with its syntax of dance, movement, flowers, archival materials, beats, and rhythms brings us closer to Choi's cosmology of dance, to her numerous parabolic crossovers for East Asian dance—that is, an utterly plural visual-cultural topographical event.

In previous works of video and choreographic performance, Nam used motifs from treasure hunting, such as old national treasure, an orchid hunt in the deep forests of Asia, and archives of flora and fauna, to rethink humans' desire to possess and their obsession with the unreachable or the unseizable. Nam's artistic questions

in these earlier works are imbued with an ontological thinking of archives, experimenting with archival time of the past as an event for the future. Her 2017 work *Imjingawa* traced how the North Korean song “Inijingawa”³⁵ had traveled through a Jochongnyeon³⁶ *Zainichi* Korean school and gained great popularity as a pop song in Japan in the 1960s. It traced how music could not only be merely adapted in a disparate cultural setting, but also serve as a vehicle for collective memory and a sense of community through its sentiment and inspiration. As such, Nam’s work transforms the cultural fragments bearing traces of East Asia’s geopolitical history and diaspora into an artistic speculation that unleashes an incident of the present.

Nam’s most interesting revelation from the articles and interviews by Choi Seung-hee, narrated in the video, is her perception of East Asian dance. In the texts she left behind, Choi clearly states that her encounter with the West had been the motivation to perceive an image of East Asia. Her interview becomes evidence of how Asia’s history had unfolded throughout the 19th and 20th centuries as Asia itself was introduced to the image of the West, and how Occidental experience brings an awareness of Asia as the image of the Orient. It is hard to say, however, that Choi’s words bear any trace of an inferiority complex toward the West or admiration for Western standards. Rather, in her celebration of the splendor of her world experiences, she began to learn, with great enthusiasm, local traditional dances in a perception of contemporaneity in plural time and space, and of a global worldview that embraces the Asian continent and its locality.

When dancers come back from the tour around America and Europe, they usually bring in Western style of dance. But it was the other way around for me. I came back with Eastern dances.

The Western world does not hold a benign curiosity about Eastern dance; the people are sincerely eager for a breath of fresh air from us. From now on, I’ll mostly be learning indigenous dances. I’m going out of my way a bit but I’m thinking of the inland area of Japan that is rich with

native dances, as well as Manchuria, China, and Mongolia with their artistic traditions. I am going on a research trip to these regions around August. —Choi Seung-hee³⁷

In such statements, Choi Seung-hee, eager to “invent” an East Asian dance, illustrates a compelling historical trajectory—an Asian woman dancer, who had learned Western dance from the prominent Japanese choreographer Ishii Baku, rediscovers and attempts to invent tradition through Western modernity and Orientalism. This would be a relevant instance of what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argued through the concept of “invented tradition” in modern society. However, we cannot simply describe Choi as having served as a mere tool of the two parties just because she willingly became a warrior of Orientalism through her experiences of Occidentalism. She was clearly aware of the continuum of differences between Japan and colonized Joseon, between the Western Empire and the Asian Empire, and between Western modernity and Asia becoming modern. Would her attempt in her dance have been merely an Orientalist product?

“The world has changed, the world has changed.” In the work *Dancer from the Peninsula*, these words, written in a letter that Choi Seung-hee sent to her teacher Ishii Baku, are resonant. In these few, simple, ambiguous words, in what is left unspoken, a still unyielding worldview lingers. The artist envisions Choi as “multiple bodies that have split in the collision of two contrasting timeframes—both the imminent tomorrow and the faraway future that her ideals were headed toward.” And through a choreographic arrangement of archive materials and audiovisual elements, Nam paints the contours of an abstract and contradictory space that Choi had dreamt of and ran toward, but could never reach. Choi moved between the peninsula and the continent, Asia and the West. In her existence in the in-between, she becomes a particular liminality itself. She was born in diaspora, died in diaspora. Choi is an example of a unique assemblage around the senses of dance, movement, stage, war, historical turmoil, national disturbance and borders. Choi’s own times did not allow her, a figure of the liminal,

to transcend beyond the two sides of the dichotomous border, and the restoration of her movements and voice in Nam's works lets us contemplate around the ambivalence of modernity that went through her.

Perhaps it is possible to ask this question here. Are the charges that we convict Choi Seung-hee of indeed that different from the patriarchal discourses of today's South Korean society or the nationalist discourses that put East Asian countries in competition with one another? The two keywords that have always followed her until now are taboo and violation. Her existence reminds us of the incommensurable, free, borderless spirit of a modern Asian woman who struggled over modern borders. *Dancer from the Peninsula* does not repeat a blind mythicizing of Choi, nor represent her dance. Instead, with Hwayeon Nam's uniquely astute senses it traces the numerous materials and trajectories of Choi, and transforms the fragments of her life into the realm of encounter, passage, and affect—unfolding the multiple bodies toward a wider world.

What we can summon from Choi—a colonial woman artist who vigorously sought an East Asian dance generated through an encounter with the bigger world—is the manifestation of a dancing subject who strived to freely trespass all modern borders and matrixes. As the artist asks, "It is possible for Choi Seung-hee to yet again move, not as a historical figure, but as an artistic force, not as the narrated past, but refracted through an ontology of the present?"

Bari, the Liminal, and the Wilderness

When perfectly ordered nationalism merged with the nations existing Confucian patriarchy, oppression and rejection of individuals, women, and non-heterosexuals became the mainstream narrative of the society.

Jane Jin Kaisen has used the testimonies and memories of

individuals to explore the history of violence against Others, especially women, throughout modernity's border-making process including wars, nation states, and colonialism. In her previous work *The Woman, The Orphan, and The Tiger* (2010), she addressed Korean women of three different generations—"comfort women" violated as military sex slaves during the Japanese colonial times; sex laborers for the American army; and adoptees that were sent overseas constantly after the Korean War—in the form of poetic testimony. In *Reiterations of Dissent* (2011/2016), she explored the repressed history of the Jeju Uprising. Kaisen continues her earnest observation with poetic camera movements in *Community of Parting* (2019). She investigates the wounds of the massacre that took place on Jeju Island, her birthplace, and moves through Asia as she traces the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) between the two Koreas, the border area between North Korea and China, the *Zainichi* diaspora in Japan, and the *Goryeojin* diaspora in Kazakhstan—juxtaposing narrations from women political philosophers, poets, activists, anthropologists, refugees, shamans, and artists. In this life of colonialism, violence, and diaspora, we witness how modernization in East Asia sought the nation-state, which is a "form of modern sovereignty that possesses a monopoly on the use of violence, (that) has both been an agent of emancipation from colonialism and heir to it."³⁰

However, here we also have Bari, the mediator of the divided space. Jane Jin Kaisen's *Community of Parting*, presented in this exhibition, addresses the Korean myth of Bari (an abandoned princess) through the artist's subjective interpretation. Creating video of multilayered narrative structures and nonlinear montage through archive materials, footage of shamanistic rituals, aerial images, verses of poetry, voiceovers of various testimonies and interviews, and delicate soundscapes of the sea and the forests, the artist reads the Bari myth, which deeply resonates with her personal experiences of diaspora, as a narrative that could newly evolve in tune with the various problems of East Asian modernization.

There are numerous versions of the Bari myth, but the common

storyline can be told like this. Born the seventh princess of a king and queen who had wished for a prince, Bari was abandoned for being a girl. The name Bari encompasses the word *buhrida* (meaning to “throw away” in Korean), and signifies a nameless state. The abandoned child is discovered and raised by an elderly couple, and later learns of her royal heritage. The king gets an incurable disease for the sin of having abandoned his child. Bari, who learns this news when she visits her parents, obtains the remedy from heaven and cures her father’s illness. The king rewards Bari with more than half his kingdom for having saved his life, but Bari refuses the prize. Instead, she chooses to become a god who stands at the boundary between life and death, guiding the spirits in the afterlife. Jane Jin Kaisen refers to poet Kim Hyesoon’s text entitled *Garbage and Ghost*, a thought-provoking discussion of the differences between the story of Bari and other women myths. Kaisen focuses in particular on the “three deaths” illustrated in the text as a significant foundation of her video. Bari experiences three deaths. The first is the death from abandonment, the second comes from fighting against the logic of borders that sustains her state of abandonment, and the final death comes from choosing to become a shaman when she discards her given identity in order to serve as a mediator by placing herself on the border.

She saves his father and is at last granted the permission to live within the community, but refuses the offer. Instead, she proposes to serve the role of sending the dead to the afterlife, as a being that is half dead and half alive at the border between death and life. Through her experience of the other side, Bari proposes a place outside of the community, a different place of community, a territory-less community. After discovering the space of border between life and death, she declares the will to forever travel to that place of absence. It is the will to take up her duty in a place that her fathers power cannot reach. She proposes a place of the mediator, like a shaman who is neither here nor there.³⁹

Poet Kim Hyesoon states that through Bari, the origin of shamanism, we can also understand that shamanism is a religion of women, by women, for women, and that it encompasses the history of not only

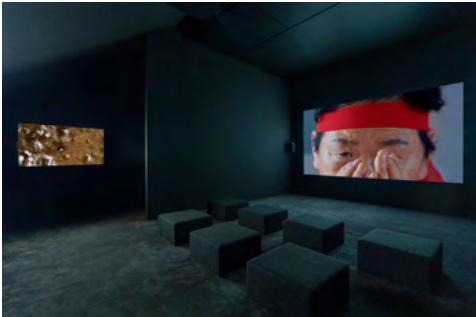
blood but suppression of women and conflict between classes. Bari chooses neither here nor there and decides to become a mediator, a shaman, the liminal. Bari is a human and a god, a princess and a peasant, the abandoned and the savior—the infinite entirety of liminality, embracing both life and death. She is the boundary zone and the threshold between life and death, a being that transcends and rejects division and exclusion. In *Community of Parting*, the artist also transcends the history of colonial-modernity's borders and violence. She follows Jeju Uprising survivor and shaman Koh Soon Ahn and her rituals, the powerful performances of consolation and commemoration, as she unites the inside and outside worlds of the screen through the rituals' rhythms and sympathy.

Community of Parting does not present any iconic image of Bari, a mythical figure. Instead, the camera lens, undoubtedly the ideological machine of modernity, transmits the scene as if shot from Bari's viewpoint. Embracing a lyrical yet profound mode of contemplation, the camera gazes at the portraits of numerous women that exist anonymously in cities and along borders throughout East Asia, and vertically moves between the land and the sky. Scarred with the matrix of modernity, these places have become spaces of violence and injury, but the camera's delicate gaze captures the sea's waves and the horizon where the forest meets the sky, the breathing state of wilderness that may currently be abandoned but has the potential to become a place for living, and for biopolitics. This is the space of Bari—a space of no division, a space where "the community of parting" can live and dwell.

*

The major concern for the three artists in this Korean Pavilion exhibition is to attempt to substitute the notion of identity in East Asian society, molded mainly by the merger of modernity, nation-state, tradition, and patriarchy, with notions of colonial-modernity, gender-Other, and transnationalism. The tradition revealed by the lens of gender-diversification, and gender-complexity can replace the restraint of tradition as the patriarchal norm. Generating a complex narrative assemblage of historical interventions, the three

artists in this exhibition seek to resist and create ruptures in the logic of systems and power, and they are keen to question how the development of civilization, violence of convention, and the norms of such history take place in our times. Saturated with the performance of tactile knowledge and the experiences of affect that are manifested through the sounds, rhythms, waves, series of scattered images and bodily movements, the exhibition attempts a space for the veiled, the forgotten, the exiled, the condemned, and the silenced. Here, they murmur, sing, cry, pause, laugh, express, move, and dance, and finally speak out loud. "History has failed us, but no matter."



► Jane Jin
Kaisen,
*Community of
Parting*, 2019.
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Pavilion, La
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Venezia 2019.
Courtesy of the
Artist, Photo by
Kyoungho Kim.

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*Original text: *History Has Failed Us, but No Matter*, Turtle Books, pp.37–64. 2020

Colorful Opening Parties

After the pre-opening period, the biennale begins in earnest, and the diverse off-site events are yet another spectacle of Venice. In 1999, artist Ik-Joong Kang's staff cooked homemade marinated *bulgogi* on a charcoal-fired drum in front of the Korean Pavilion and shared it with the biennale's staff. Since then, the party has been sponsored by the galleries of the participating artists. Since the beginning of main sponsorship in 2013, the scale of such events has significantly expanded, with formal dinners hosted at prestigious locations in Venice, such as Hotel Danieli (2013 and 2017) and Hotel Monaco (2015). The same goes for other national pavilions, leading to increased competition to reserve prime hotels and more diversified events such as cruise parties. Meanwhile, the Korean Pavilion in 2019 held a dinner at Serra, an outdoor venue near the Giardini, and then moved to a club in downtown Venice for a full-fledged party. In light of the exhibition concept of the Korean Pavilion, the party was organized by Seendosi from South Korea (Byoungjae Lee and Yunho Lee) and showcased performances and DJing primarily by Asian female musicians, including Kirara (South Korea), Cleo P (Thailand), IRAMAMAMA (Indonesia), and DJ YESYES (South Korea), which drew a positive response among young art professionals from around the world. (H)



▼ Photograph from the Korean Pavilion opening party (Venue: Laboratorio Occupato Morion), 2019. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.



XIV

2022

XIV - 2022

The Korean Pavilion's exhibition, themed around *Gyre*, illustrated the swollen boundary between the tumultuous present and the emerging era. Initially, seven works were planned to be exhibited under three themes: *The Swollen Sun*, *The Path of Gods*, and *The Great Outdoors*. However, to better align with the architectural structure of the Korea Pavilion and the ambiance of the surrounding environment, the exhibition was revised to showcase six works, including one on-site drawing and three new installation pieces. Notably, for the first time in the history of the Korea Pavilion, the ceiling was completely removed to maximize the harmony between light and the artworks. Curator Young-chul Lee described the presentation as "a space-specific exhibition where the artworks and the space breathe as one, revealing both the inside and outside of the Korean Pavilion."

After majoring in electronic music in South Korea, Yunchul Kim studied abroad in Germany under composer Wolfgang Rihm, where he transitioned to experimental visual media, focusing on the study of media art. He explored the "potential properties of matter" and studied photonic crystals and metamaterials. The artist introduced the exhibition, stating, "In this exhibition, nameless materials are connected to the universe, space, and the viewers in their own right, regardless of their use or value. I intended to demonstrate a new era of many suns rather than the absoluteness of a single sun, and a new sense swirling and awakening herein." The exhibition, structured around three themes, *The Swollen Sun*, *The Path of Gods*, and *The Great Outdoors*, projected the labyrinthine world through the entanglement of nameless materials, mechanical devices of unknown purposes, microcosms, and cosmic events, and

presented a narrative in which the exhibition space is transformed into a horizon teeming with events of creation through the flow of objects, humans, sensations, and meanings. *The Art Newspaper* selected South Korea, along with the United States, Belgium, Canada, France, the Nordic countries, and Romania, as the seven must-see national pavilions at the Venice Biennale.

The Korean Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

GYRE

April 23–November 27, 2022

Commissioner

Arts Council Korea

Graphic & Website Design

OOST, OKOK Services

Curator

Young-chul Lee

Pavilion Tote Bag Design

XLIM

Exhibitor

Yunchul Kim

In Partnership with

Hyundai Motor Company

Deputy Curator

Jungyeon Park

With the Support of

Barakat Contemporary, Korean Air

Assistant Curators

Catherine (Hyun Seo) Chiang,
Kahee Jeong

Catalog Editor

Jungyeon Park, Sijae Lee

Pavilion Manager

Eun Jeong Kim

Catalogue Design

Kyungjin Lee Studio

Editorial Manager

Kyoo Lee

Photo Credits

Roman März, Studio Locus Solus

Space Design Advisor

Hyun Joung Hong (KC Architectural Lab)

Publisher

DISTANZ Verlag

International Press Communication

Scott & Co

Production Management

DISTANZ Verlag (Berlin), Studio Locus Solus (Seoul)

Review of the Korean Pavilion Curator Selection Meeting at the 59th International Art Exhibition at the 2022 Venice Biennale

Date and Location of Meetings

- ◎ 1st selection meeting: Document screening
 - Date / place: July 26, 2021 (Monday) 15:00–17:00 / Zoom online deliberation
- ◎ 2nd selection meeting: Exhibition proposal presentation (PT) and interview
 - Date / place: August 10, 2021 (Tuesday) 13:40–18:30 / Committee conference room at Artist House / Zoom
- ◎ Selection committee members: Taeman Choi (Selection Chairperson), Dongyeon Koh, Wonseok Koh, Gimhongsok, Jinsuk Suh, Hyesoo Woo, Jin Whui-yeon, Sungcheon Yoon, and Doohyun Park

General Remarks

Cecilia Alemani, Artistic Director of the 2022 Venice Biennale, which was postponed for a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and is scheduled to open on April 23, 2022, has selected *The Milk of Dreams*, a book written by the surrealist painter and writer Leonora Carrington for her children, as its theme. She pledges to organize “an optimistic exhibition that celebrates the possibility of art to create alternative cosmologies and new conditions of existence despite the grim global situation.”

Since the 2022 Venice Biennale will be held amid the continuing pandemic, where travel between countries, regions, and cities has been virtually cut off, and interpersonal contact is generally shunned, people are pondering the fundamental question of “What role can art play?”. Against this backdrop, the theme proposed by the curator holds significant relevance for the Korean Pavilion as

well. Therefore, all selection committee members have focused on proposals that would not only set the Korean Pavilion apart from other national pavilions by sensitively and earnestly approaching the crisis humanity is currently facing but also present a new exhibition format that would resonate with people and facilitate experience sharing.

Selection Criteria

In an effort to revisit past exhibitions at the Korean Pavilion of the Venice Biennale and to critically assess and enhance their achievements, the selection committee aimed to choose the curator of the Korean Pavilion based on the following criteria:

1. Curator and artist's experience and competitiveness in organizing and participating in international events
2. Originality and distinctiveness of the theme
3. Understanding of the Korean Pavilion's architectural structure and locational, spatial characteristics, and willingness to reinterpret them in relation to the theme of the exhibition
4. Feasibility of the proposal
5. Global promotion capability

Selection Process

Three candidates, selected through the first round of deliberation based on the proposals submitted by each candidate recommended by domestic and international experts, presented their theme, exhibition design, artwork plans by their recommended artists, and operation plans, including budget and staffing, which was followed by Q&A. The three finalists developed their proposals in much greater detail than the drafts submitted in the first round and presented visual materials that gave a sense of what the exhibition would actually look like.

Selection Results

The selection required extensive discussion and deliberation by the committee. Despite the insufficient time allotted to each candidate to satisfy all the selection criteria outlined above, all three candidates had a solid understanding of the theme of the 2022 Venice Biennale and provided enthusiastic proposals to curate the Korean Pavilion as an authentic and vibrant space. The three candidates were not only talented curators with experience in organizing exhibitions on an international scale but also stood out with their original ideas and specific execution plans for their proposals.

Upon thorough assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal, the committee members reached a consensus to select *Campanella: The Swollen Sun* by curator Young-chul Lee. It is worth mentioning that there were also comments in support of the other proposals.

In recognition of the need to fundamentally contemplate and question the way contemporary art exists in an unprecedented pandemic situation, curator Young-chul Lee emphasized the call for an exhibition that stimulates creative imagination, not reproductive imagination, and proposed *Campanella* as a concept that encapsulates this. Campanella is the name of an Italian monk (Tommaso Campanella) who wrote *La città del sole* (The City of the Sun), which describes an idealized theocratic society where private property is shared, and also means a little bell (*la campanella*) in Italian. By combining this double entendre with the title of artist Yunchul Kim's 2011 poem, *The Swollen Sun*, he expressed his determination to make the exhibition a bell heralding the dawn of a new era.

The consensus of the committee members was that the proposal aligned well with the direction and theme of the 2022 Venice Biennale. They also found the proposal complete and feasible, with



▼ Top: Yunchul Kim, *Chroma V*, 2022. Courtesy of the Artist, Photo by Roman März.

▼ Bottom: Yunchul Kim, *Impulse*, 2018. Courtesy of the Artist, Photo by Roman März.

the potential to highlight the Korean Pavilion through experimental methods. In particular, it should be noted that there was a significant endorsement for the artistic excellence and outstanding spatial presentation of the interdisciplinary work based on the fusion of art and science pursued and presented by artist Yunchul Kim.

Kim's recent work has focused on the artistic potential of fluid dynamics and magnetohydrodynamics, including photonic crystals as metamaterials. Having served as a member of the art and science project group Fluid Skies, a chief researcher of the independent research group, Mattereality, of the transdisciplinary research program of KIAS (Korea Institute for Advanced Study), and a former resident at CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire), he is poised to materialize the Korean Pavilion as a space that blends art and science to open a cosmic imaginary world of light, sound, matter and non-matter, form, and beyond.

Suggestions for Challenges to Overcome

The ordeal of reselecting the curator for the Korean Pavilion has resulted in a shortened preparation period, presenting a challenge that the new curator must overcome. The curator also faces the tasks of closely collaborating with the artist, efficiently managing staffing, and securing a budget in order to bring new endeavors to fruition. In addition, there was a recognition of the need to present sophisticated discourse surrounding mechanical aesthetics and artworks, and to develop and implement a global promotion and publicity strategy.



▼ Yunchul Kim, *La Poussiere de Soleils*, 2022. Courtesy of the Artist, Photo by Roman März.

The exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022 is yet to be published. Hence, the English translation of the “Review of the Korean Pavilion Curator Selection Meeting at the 59th International Art Exhibition at the 2022 Venice Biennale” is presented here instead.

How to View the Archives of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

The curator of the Korean Pavilion is responsible not only for the exhibition but also for promotion and archiving. This includes the production of printed materials, including an exhibition catalog, a website, and, since 2013, a report (hereafter “White Paper”) that summarizes the process and results of the exhibition. The White Papers for both the art and architecture exhibitions at the Venice Biennale have been created with a completely different design each year. The official web address of the Korean Pavilion is always www.korean-pavilion.kr. Still, it is set to the most recent exhibition page, and past exhibition pages are archived in the “Yearly Websites” link under the “Korean Pavilion of the Venice Biennale” menu on the Arts Council Korea website (www.arko.or.kr/biennale/content/644). Regrettably, only the archive from 2009, which is being maintained properly, is accessible. One can still access the website for 2001, 2004, 2005, and 2007 through the ‘Archive’ menu (www.arko.or.kr/pavilion/17pavilion/index.html) of the 2017 webpage, but detailed webpage other than the homepages have been lost. The exhibition catalog, the primary archival source for the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, is housed in the ARKO Arts Archive and requires an online access application. In addition, the White Papers produced by Korean Pavilion Curatorial Team at the 2022 Venice Biennale since 2013 can be downloaded as PDF from the website of the Arts Council Korea under the “White Papers” section (www.arko.or.kr/board/list/5965?bid=5963&page=1). (H)



▼ Website homepage from the Korean Pavilion, 2022. Courtesy of the Artist.

XV



2024

XV - 2024

KOO JEONG A (they/them) is constantly in orbit, living and working everywhere. In their practice, architectural elements, texts, drawings, paintings, sculptures, animations, sound, film, words, and scents play a significant role. Throughout the years, KOO has investigated and blurred the lines between their artwork and the space it occupies. The works add new layers to any given space, and KOO manages to merge small intimate experiences and large-scale immersive pieces.

The curatorial approach for the Korean Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia has been to combine some of the key subjects and sculptural elements that KOO JEONG A has worked with during the last three decades. With the new commission *ODORAMA CITIES*, created especially for the Korean Pavilion, KOO delves into the nuances of our spatial encounters, investigating how we perceive and recollect spaces, with a particular emphasis on how scents, smells, and odors contribute to these memories. With the pavilion itself, KOO explores an expanded tactility.

Some of the prominent interests in KOO's art, such as immaterialism, weightlessness, endlessness, and levitation, are keywords mirrored throughout the Korean Pavilion. They are embedded and engraved as infinity symbols directly into both the new wooden floor and the outdoor installations, are manifested as two floating wooden möbius-shaped sculptures and a levitating, scent-diffusing bronze figure, and finally are symbolized in the scents that transform the pavilion into a collection of olfactory memories.

These scent memories are a cornerstone in *ODORAMA CITIES*. During the summer of 2023, KOO collected them with the aim of making a scent portrait of the Korean peninsula. Through social media, advertisements, press releases, and personal one-on-one meetings, the team behind the Korean Pavilion has reached out to North and South Koreans and non-Koreans alike – anyone who has a relationship to Korea – and asked the question: “What is your scent memory of Korea?” This open call has generated more than 600 written statements about Korean scents. The perfumers, armed with the stories and keywords, took on the task of interpreting and incorporating them into the creation of 16 distinct scent experiences for the pavilion and a single commercial fragrance.

**The Korean Pavilion at the 60th International Art
Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia**

KOO JEONG A – ODORAMA CITIES

April 20–November 24, 2024

Commissioner

Arts Council Korea

Curators

Seolhui Lee, Jacob Fabricius

Exhibitor

KOO JEONG A

Assistant Curators

Yoojin Jang, NaJeong Lee

Architect

Jens Rørholt Schmidt

On-Site Manager

Eun Jeong Kim

Editorial Managers

Haelee Kim (KR)

Sarah Quigley (EN)

Graphic Designer

kontaakt (Wonseop Lee,
Wonyeong Baque)

Translators

e. yaewon, Jein Han, Mischa
Hoekstra, Jack Saebyok Jung,
Helen Shiner, Emily Jungmin
Yoon

Open Call Translators

A Young Kim, Jae Ted Kim

Publisher

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Web Developer

DEERSTEP (Seunghyuk Choi)

Documentation

Joonbeom Yoo, Nikolaj Nielsen
Phillipsen

Communication Advisor

Youwon Kim

PR

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Hyundai Motor

Partners

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Malmö Konsthall, M+B studio,
Ricehouse, Viktor-Art

Review of the Korean Pavilion Curator Selection Meeting at the 60th International Art Exhibition at the 2024 Venice Biennale

Date and Location of Meetings

- ◎ Initial review and preliminary selection : Document screening
— Date / Location: February 16, 2023 (Thursday) 08:00 / Online Zoom meeting
- ◎ Finalist presentations : Exhibition plan presentation (PT) and interview screening
— Date / Location: March 7, 2023 (Thursday) 08:00 / Online Zoom meeting
- ◎ Selection committee members: Eungie Joo (Selection Chairwoman), Hyunsoo Woo, Geun-jun Lim, Jung Hyun, Jochen Volz, Yung Ma

General Remarks

Initial Review and Preliminary Selection (February 16, 2023)

An open call was posted on December 2, 2022 for the Korean Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale; ten candidates applied with specific projects defined within the application by the deadline on December 30, 2022.

Prior to the meeting, jury members reviewed documents, portfolios, and applications and were asked to select their top three candidates and submit brief comments on that selection. Based on that exercise, the top five applications were reviewed and discussed at length at the online meeting of February 16, held on Zoom. Three applications including curators Jacob Fabricius and Seolhui Lee (Artist KOO JEONG A) garnered the most votes. Each of these proposals features single-artist presentations.



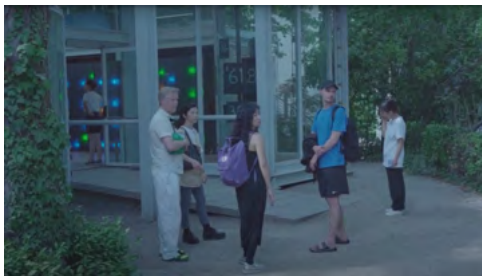
▼ Dinesen production facilities in Jels, Denmark, Oct, 2023. Courtesy of the Korean Pavilion Curatorial Team at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

Two of those proposals that also had support were large group exhibitions that some committee members did not feel adequately considered the context or the platform of the Korean Pavilion as one exhibition venue among many other national pavilions, the main exhibition, and collateral events. The jury agreed that these projects were neither realistic to execute in Venice nor compelling to an international audience, and they were excluded. The committee agreed that the three proposals were the strongest and were selected for full curatorial presentations at the second meeting on March 7, 2023.

Finalist Presentations (March 7, 2023)

For the second meeting, three applicants were invited to present for 35 minutes each, followed by Q&A.

The first presentation featured major new works in video and sound.



► The Korean Pavilion, August, 2023. Courtesy of the Korean Pavilion Curatorial Team at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

The second presentation featured new works focusing on themes of death as well as an allegorical exploration of the DMZ.

The presentation by curators Jacob Fabricius and Seolhui Lee, *ODORAMA CITIES*, presents works by artist KOO JEONG A both inside the Korean Pavilion and in the Giardini or City of Venice. The main proposal is linked to previous works by the artist on smell and color and transforms the pavilion into a sensorial space of smell and color—a scent journey. The other two presentations were also great, but they were not well received due to practical concerns.

Deliberation Results

While each of the final presentations was well prepared and delivered, the committee came to a unanimous decision to support the appointment of Jacob Fabricius and Seolhui Lee as co-curators for the Korean Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale. In this proposal, the Korean Pavilion is transformed into an immersive scent journey that will “include smells that represent a variety of cities in North and South Korea.” Smells representing the cities will be professionally produced and embedded into the paint of the pavilion.

In the jury’s deliberations, much was said of the caliber of all the artists proposed, but the proposed use of the space of the Korean Pavilion by KOO JEONG A was discussed as the most exciting

and provocative. Overall, the jury felt both curators and the artist had best considered the Korean Pavilion as a site as well as the exhibition as part of the context of the Venice Biennale. The jury appreciates the timely, poetic nature of the project when the curators write, "reflecting on today's society, we know how precious the experience of breathing and smelling after COVID-19 is, and *ODORAMA CITIES* could awaken the sense we have lost or missed." The jury enthusiastically supports Fabricius and Lee's proposal to "create an immersive environment of intimacy, and through this scent journey make a national portrait of Korea... the perception of scents and odors establishes an effective connection to memories and emotions in the recipient, so we expect that the scents will unite Korea in a previously unforeseen way." The idea of scent memory uniting the peninsula is a powerful insertion as we near the 70th anniversary of the Korean Armistice, and a poetic gesture of peace.

The jury members would like to continue discussions with the curators as they develop their project, suggesting a follow-up meeting in the coming months. Additionally, the jury would like to express their collective concern for the total budget available for the Korean Pavilion exhibition, production, staffing, and publication. The current budget is around 600 million KRW (approximately 480,000 EUR). The jury humbly suggests that the base budget of the Korean Pavilion be increased to secure the best exhibitions, works, and promotion in the future.



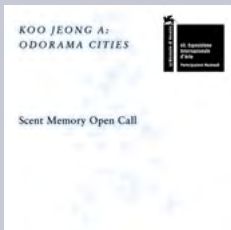
▼ PKM Gallery, Seoul, September, 2023. Courtesy of the Korean Pavilion Curatorial Team at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

The exhibition at the Korean Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024 is yet to open, so the “Review of the Korean Pavilion Curator Selection Meeting at the 60th International Art Exhibition at the 2024 Venice Biennale” released to the public at the time of the selection of the curators (2023) is published here.

Scent Memory Open Call

In preparation for the 2024 exhibition, the Korean Pavilion held a "Scent Memory Open Call" from July 2023 through its official social media (Instagram @korean_pavilion) worldwide. The names of all participants who submitted their stories related to the scent of their hometowns or cities will be listed in the exhibition catalog of the Korean Pavilion. Artist KOO JEONG A encouraged interest and participation in the open call, stating, "*ODORAMA CITIES* is like a collective portrait of the scents. The stories you shared with us through the Scent Memory Open Call will become part of the artwork to be presented at the Korean Pavilion of the Venice Biennale next year. I am thrilled to be able to share the journey of preparing this exhibition with you." Jacob Fabricius and Seolhui Lee, curators of the Korean Pavilion, expressed excitement, noting, "The scent narratives we've received so far unveil incredible sceneries of Korean scents. While some scent memories portray nature, others hint at Korean history, economy, and industry. Among them are personal stories, some poetic, some even poignant. This open call stands as a true treasure trove of Korean memories. We are profoundly touched and grateful for so many participants who have shared their memories. This will form a significant foundation for *KOO JEONG A – ODORAMA CITIES*, the exhibition at the Korean Pavilion of the Venice Biennale."

***Press release "The 'Scent Memory Open Call' for KOO JEONG A: *ODORAMA CITIES*, the Korean Pavilion Exhibition at the 60th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale 2024," Arts Council Korea, August 16, 2023 (<https://www.arko.or.kr/board/view/4057?page=18&cid=1806772>)**



▼ Web-Poster (Instagram) from the Korean Pavilion. Courtesy of the Korean Pavilion Curatorial Team at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

1. Hou Hanru, "Gimhongsok: Lost (and Re-discovered) in Translation," *Antarctica*, exhibition catalog, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, South Korea, 2004.
2. Beck Jee Sook, "Bae Young-whan's 'Subart'?!", *Pop Song 2*, exhibition catalog, Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea, 1999.
3. A full list of contributing individuals and institutions can be found on page 316 in the catalog of the 2009 Korean Pavilion.
4. *Trilogy* (2004–2006) consists of: *Unfolding Places* (2004), *Restrained Courage* (2004), and *Squandering Negative Spaces* (2006).
5. The 1980 manifesto of Reality and Utterance (현실과발언/Hyun Sil Gwa Baleon) can be found on pages 231–233 in the catalog of the 2009 Korean Pavilion. The collective Reality and Utterance was formed in 1979 in response to the manifesto of 현실동인/ Hyun Sil Dong In (1969). Some members included Ahn Kyu Chul, Choi Min, Jeong Dong Suk, Kim jung-heun, Lee Tae Ho, Lim Ok-sang, Min Jeong-gi, Noh Won Hee, Oh Yoon, Shin Kyung Ho, and Sung Wan-kyung.
6. siren eun young jung's contribution to this publication can be found on pages 235–243 in the catalog of the 2009 Korean Pavilion.
7. Contributions to this publication by Bae Young-whan and Park Chan-kyong can be found on pages 169–185 and 265–277 in the catalog of the 2009 Korean Pavilion, respectively.
8. Gimhongsok's contribution to this publication, *Public Blank*, can be found on pages 213–229 in the catalog of the 2009 Korean Pavilion.
9. Selected examples of *Sadong 30 Guest Books* can be found on pages 279–309 in the catalog of the 2009 Korean Pavilion.
10. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (London and Sydney: Pan Books, 1970, reprint, 1971), 41.
11. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 361–374.
12. *Ibid.*, 361–362.
13. *Ibid.*, 370.
14. *Ibid.*, 371.
15. *Ibid.*, 500.

16. Robert Smithson, "A tour of the monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 72.
17. *Ibid.*, 77.
18. Antoine Picon, "Anxious Landscapes," *Grey Room* no.1 (Fall 2000): 76–77.
19. Marc Auge, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London 8c New York: Verso, 1995), xvii.
20. *Ibid.*, viii.
21. Bismuth subsalicylate, the active ingredient in Pepto-Bismol, relieves symptoms such as upset stomach, indigestion, nausea, vomiting, heartburn, and diarrhea. The original variant of Pepto-Bismol was introduced in 1900, and distributed nationally in 1918 under the name Bismosal by the Norwich Eaton Company. A year later, the product was rebaptized as Pepto-Bismol, and the formula remained relatively stable for the next 80 years. Following the brand's acquisition by Procter & Gamble in 1982, Pepto-Bismol tablets and caplets were launched. Even the P&G archivist was unable to explain why Pepto-Bismol was made pink.
22. As already pointed out by Marie de Brugerolle, *Choi's Cody's Legend vs. Freud's Shit Box* alludes to Rene Magritte's 1934 painting *The Red Model*. However, Magritte's shoes are also discussed by Frederic Jameson, who famously describes them as "a postmodern emblem" (see Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. xv and 10). *Cody's Legend* is therefore not just a simple appropriation of Magritte's image, but a self-conscious pastiche that willingly pokes fun at itself by acknowledging Jameson's reproving analysis of this postmodern form. In this way, *Cody's Legend* refrains from being just symptomatic of what Jameson describes and, instead, actively partakes in theoretical discourse.
23. *Are You Sure* (2014) and *Just Map* (2014) are perfect instances of Choi's idiosyncratic wit, aimed at the pretensions of high culture.
24. Kelley describes Cody Choi's Pepto-Bismol painting in his essay "Dyspeptic Universe: Cody Choi's Pepto-Bismol Paintings" in *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism*, ed. John C. Welchman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
25. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global*

Futures, Decolonial Options (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 44.

26. Jasbir K. Puar, "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages" ed. David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam and Jose E. Munoz, *Social Text* (2005), 23, issue 3-4 (84-85): p. 134. [https://read.dukeupress.edu/social-text/article-ab-stract/23/3-4%20\(84-85\)/121/32722/Queer-Times-Queer-Assemblages?redirectedFrom=PDF](https://read.dukeupress.edu/social-text/article-ab-stract/23/3-4%20(84-85)/121/32722/Queer-Times-Queer-Assemblages?redirectedFrom=PDF)
27. The title of the exhibition is borrowed from the first sentence of Min Jin Lee, *Pachinko* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017), a powerful narrative of Zainichi Korean diaspora and a dynamic portrayal of women positioned as subaltern in the turmoil of the 20th century in East Asia.
28. siren eun young jung, "A Brief History of Yeoseong Gukgeuk: Birth and Decline," in *Trans-Theatre* (Seoul: Forum A, 2016).
29. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham/ London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-3
30. Jasbir K. Puar, "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages," p. 122.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
35. Music by Koh Jong-hwan, lyrics by Park Se-young.
36. An association of pro-North Korea residents in Japan.
37. Citations from Choi Seung-hee's interviews and letters that Hwayeon Nam researched and included in *Dancer from the Peninsula*.
38. Anselm Frank, "Interrupted Survey: Fractured Modern Mythologies," in *Interrupted Survey: Fractured Modern Mythologies*, exh. cat. Gwangju: Asia Culture Center, 2015, p. 20.
39. Kim Hyesoon, "Garbage and Ghost," in *Woman, I Do Poetry* (Seoul: Moonji Publishing, 2017), p. 40.



III. Studies

The Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion and Curatorship

Kim Hong-hee

30 Years of Adversities, Connecting Broken Trajectories

Kyoung-yun Ho

How the Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion Came to Be

Young-chul Lee

The Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion and Curatorship

§ Kim Hong-hee

The Korean Pavilion's 30th Anniversary

Launched in 1895, the Venice Biennale is the world's first international art festival with a biennale format. From its first edition, the biennale was an international event where artists from 14 countries were invited to promote "the most noble activities of the modern spirit without distinction of country." During the 20th century, awareness of biennale grew throughout Europe, and the event expanded into the construction of national pavilions. The first of them, built in 1907, was for Belgium. It was followed in 1909 by ones for Germany, Britain, and Hungary. Over time, a total of 26 were constructed until the Korean Pavilion was finally established in 1995 at the Giardini di Castello. Today, the event is thronged with visitors, with the Arsenale—a shipyard during the 19th century—having been renovated for use as a main exhibition venue. While the Arsenale serves as the chief exhibition site today, it was used in the past for artists invited from countries without pavilions of their own, and it was there that Korea first began taking part in the Venice Biennale with the 42nd edition in 1986. If we recall the situation at the time, where only a small venue was assigned for exhibitions as recently as 1993, we can see that it is truly fortunate for Korea to have acquired its own pavilion, becoming the second Asian country to do so (after Japan) and the last to take up residence in the Giardini.

The Korean Pavilion was established in 1995, which was both the year of the Venice Biennale's 46th edition and its centennial. During this illustrious event, the new pavilion announced the global growth of Korean art from the outset as participating artist Jheon Soocheon received a special prize. The potential of Korean artists was further illustrated when Ik-Joong Kang was honored at the pavilion's second edition (1997) and Lee Bul at its third (1999). Even from today's

perspective, it is exceptional to consider that Golden Lion winner Nam June Paik was also taking part in 1993 at the German Pavilion, while Korean-born Jae-Eun Choi was featured at the Japanese Pavilion right next to the Korean Pavilion in 1995. Korean art would continue to assert its presence at the Venice Biennale with the Golden Lion prize awarded ten years later to the Korean Pavilion's "Crow's Eye View" (commissioner Minseok Cho) at the 2014 Venice Biennale's International Architecture Exhibition, as well as the Silver Lion awarded for *Factory Complex* to Im Heung-soon, who was invited to the main Arsenale exhibition in 2015.

After this string of achievements, Korea now celebrates its 30th anniversary in Venice in the year 2025. To commemorate this, Arts Council Korea is holding a 30th-anniversary special exhibition at the Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta in Venice, with ARKO Art Center providing the planning. Coinciding with the opening of the 60th Venice Biennale the same year, the *Every Island is a Mountain* exhibition consists of an archival exhibition providing an introduction to the 30-year history, along with a main exhibition in which 38 artists and collectives who have participated in past pavilions are presenting their Biennale submissions or more recent work. It may be a matter of the nuances associated with the title, but I can hardly wait to see what it will look like as the works of 38 artists who have established towering reputations and careers over the years are all brought together in one place. Will it be disruptive discord or convergent harmony?

Nam June Paik in 30-Year History of the Korean Pavilion

It may be something of a stretch, but *Every Island is a Mountain* recalls for me an early work by Nam June Paik entitled *SinfoNiE FoR 20 Rooms* (1961). The work was a kind of musical score that used text drawings to represent sound events taking place simultaneously in 16 different rooms. (Why he referred to "20 rooms" in the title after creating scores for 16 remains a mystery.) The work was never performed, existing only as a score, but the

same concept of exhibiting music was expressed in a different way at the artist's first solo exhibition, 1963's *Exposition of Music – Electronic Television*. Here, he presented 13 videos obtained through random manipulation of 13 television receivers—specifically their cathode-ray tubes. It was the first video art conceived as a variable and indeterminate electronic video, and it was the new ontology of music that Paik had long been pursuing.

I imagine the possibility that the same sort of disordered, meaningless artistic chaos that the young Paik presented with his "20 rooms" and 13 television sets in the early 1960s may be created in different forms by his successors six decades later. It is like a metaphor for reincarnation: rebirth as a dynamic complex, an environmental convergence, a genristic multimedia approach created not by the individual vision of a single artist but by the multiple visions of 38. Paik himself used the analogy of *bibimbap*, a Korean dish of mixed rice and vegetables. The hope is that this collaborative performance by 38 unparalleled "mountains" will offer the Venice Biennale's global audience a taste of a Korean-style *bibimbap*, where various ingredients are mixed together yet remain alive with individual flavors.

My hypothesis identifying parallels between the *Every Island is a Mountain* exhibition and Nam June Paik's early work and "bibimbap" metaphor is a way of lauding his efforts that enabled the establishment of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale prior to any logical basis. He realized the dream of establishing the pavilion through concerted efforts that included communicating the need for one to the Mayor of Venice Massimo Cacciari, and he also served a midwife role in the 1995 creation of the Gwangju Biennale. In 1993, the same year that he won the Golden Lion in Venice, Paik afforded an opportunity for Korean viewers to expand their horizons when he donated USD 250,000 of his own money to organize a Seoul exhibition for the 1993 Whitney Biennial, which had been a source of controversy and debate over its bold content relating to the body and sexuality. Sympathizing with the aims of Minister of Culture Lee O-Young, he played a part behind the scenes in

organizing the Daejeon Expo; for the exhibition, he created a Turtle Ship (a type of warship used by the Korean Joseon Navy from the early 15th century up until the 19th century) made out of 284 old television sets. In short, he used the capabilities and influence at his disposal at the height of his career to globalize and advance Korean art and culture. In retrospect, the 30-year history of the Korean Pavilion seems like the fruition of the seeds he planted as a "K-art" pioneer.

The Venice Biennale's Artistic Director System and the Rise of Curatorship

As the world's first biennale, the Venice Biennale left a significant mark on global art history. But behind that illustrious legacy lurked the shadows of national and continental hegemony. The biennale was modeled on the World's Fair events held in places like London and Paris during the mid to late 19th century, at a time when European imperialism was at the height of its expansion. Consequently, it harbored certain intrinsic limitations in terms of emphasis on national identity and the will to power, with a desire to show off the individual country's political, economic, and cultural stature. A contrasting example can be seen in Brazil's São Paulo Art Biennial, which emerged as the first "Third World" biennale in 1951. While it used the Venice Biennale as a reference in adopting an approach of showing work by representative artists from participating countries, it gradually distinguished itself from the Venice Biennale by eschewing national exhibitions in favor of themed ones.

Documenta was launched in 1955 in Kassel as a quinquennial art festival with the aim of contributing to cultural appreciation for German viewers, who had endured the dark ages of contemporary art suppression under Nazi rule. It too adopted a Eurocentric focus on "great figures" until 1972, when the innovative programming of Harald Szeemann turned it into a testing ground for cutting-edge avant-garde art. For the 11th edition in 2002, Okwui Enwezor served

as the artistic director, breaking down the existing Eurocentrism and broadening the exhibition's scope to India and Africa. In addition to Documenta, Skulptur Projekte Münster also began gaining renown as an art festival held every 10 years in Europe beginning in 1977. Inspired by this example, the Venice Biennale opted for an approach that preserved the national pavilions but minimized the aspect of countries competing with each other. Through new exhibition programs that actively adopted timely themes, it established itself as a cutting-edge forum for contemporary art.

The truly historic change for the Venice Biennale came when an artistic director system was introduced. The invitation of specialist curators to serve as artistic directors was a way of both emphasizing curatorship and diluting the more conservative, authoritarian aspects of the national pavilion tradition. Before this system was implemented, Szeemann and Achille Bonito Oliva had been in charge of planning in 1980, which was also the first year of *Aperto*, an exhibition for emerging artists that took place alongside the main Arsenale exhibition. But it was not until the 46th edition in 1995—the biennale's centennial—that an outside figure was invited to serve as an artistic director for the main exhibition. With the arrival of Jean Clair, the director of the Picasso Museum in Paris and the first foreign curator in the Venice Biennale's history, the event moved beyond its past practice of having exhibitions overseen by Italian artists and critics. It had now established the framework for a truly international biennale.

In terms of exhibition programming, an impetus for innovation would come thanks to Harald Szeemann, a world-renowned Swiss curator who served as the artistic director for both the 48th edition in 1999 and the 49th in 2001. Emphasizing exhibition culture and the role of the curator from a position that viewed art as a kind of seismograph for social change, he treated exhibition venues as a laboratory while establishing museum exhibitions and spearheading spatial expansions. Among the features he introduced were exhibitions as a process of intersecting various ideas, rather than a mere display of existing object art; venues for presenting on timely topics

that were constantly undergoing transformation and creation, rather than specific themes; and a new concept of the exhibition, which was regarded as a sort of organism instead of an array of individual works. Emphasizing a philosophy of de-territorialism and a discourse of nomadism, he adhered to a free, liberal approach to the selection of artists, which was not bound by notions of country, region, gender, age, genre, or trend. Then-emerging Korean artists Kimsooja and Lee Bul were selected for the 48th edition's main exhibition, which took the title *d'APERTutto* from the Italian word meaning "everywhere"; this was followed by Kimsooja and Do Ho Suh's selection for the 49th edition. This international honor was made possible by Szeemann's adherence to decentralized values.

In 2003, Francesco Bonami took over the baton from Szeeman as the artistic director for the 50th edition. As though posing a challenge to his predecessor's charisma, he conceived *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer* as a radiating exhibition rather than a centralized one, emphasizing the "dictatorship of the viewer" over that of the curator. His idea involved facilitating an overview of different regional art through an "exhibition of exhibitions" by multiple curators, where viewers could survey and appreciate individual works as though following a map. At the same time, he also rejected geographical and political fragmentation in favor of a "total world," which was to be autonomously defined by the languages of contemporary art. The title *Dreams and Conflicts* appeared to rationalize this ambivalence and contradiction: by positing regional confrontation and collision as "conflicts" and their synthesis as "dreams," it implied that the achievement of glocalism—a transcendence of the part/whole and globalism/localism oppositions—represented a challenge much like the realization of a dream. Despite the ambitious nature of his programming concept, he ultimately faced criticism from observers who felt that the exhibition's theme was rendered vague by the vast scale, with 300 artists taking part in 10 projects devised by 12 curators. For the Korean art world, at any rate, it was a tremendous boon, as several artists, such as KOO JEONG A, Sora Kim & Gimhongsok, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, and Jaehwan

Joo, were invited to take part in the main exhibition.

Post-Colonial and Feminist Topics and Curation

The political and aesthetic horizons of the Venice Biennale were subsequently broadened by artistic directors who elicited both support and controversy with concrete topics that were more timely and acute. One noteworthy presence among them was the late Okwui Enwezor, who curated the 56th edition in 2015. Through the Arsenale-centered exhibition *All the World's Futures*, Enwezor reaffirmed his critical values with regard to Western-centric political and economic systems and neo-colonialism. A globally active Nigerian-born curator based in the US and Germany, he was a revolutionary figure who was among the first to convey the colonial subject's experience in the global artistic forum, raising unprecedented themes from a post-colonial perspective. Expressing a critical stance on ideological conflict, religious wars, new forms of fascism and nationalism, and the catastrophic polarization brought about by neo-liberalism and globalism, he practiced a unique form of curation, through the 2015 Venice Biennale and numerous other exhibitions, presenting occasionally brutal works characterized by an apocalyptic vocabulary and strong symbolism. Yet he also faced questions over his authenticity due to his dual identity as both a Third World curator hailing from a colonized country and an influential First World curator. Some wondered whether his 2015 Arsenale exhibition truly did present a "non-Western" perspective on the political and social crises faced by contemporary society, the bleak aspects of dark history, and the future of human civilization at a larger level. In the exhibition, Enwezor invited Im Heung-soon, Ayoung Kim, and Hwayeon Nam from Korea to take part in his exhibition, with Im Heung-soon ultimately winning the Silver Lion for *Factory Complex*.

An emphasis on gender and feminism first appeared at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005, with two female curators—Rosa Martínez and María de Corral—serving as co-artistic directors. In de Corral's

The Experience of Art at the Italian Pavilion and Martínez's *Always a Little Further* at the Arsenale, they refrained from outdoor events and performances, perhaps conscious of the criticisms of Bonami's 50th edition in 2003 as having been directionless and chaotic. Their exhibition programming, which emphasized expertise over accessibility, was rated as "cool." There was a much larger proportion of female artists, with the event departing from its past androcentric exhibition practices to focus on women's issues and cultural pluralism. As someone conscious of Third World and feminist themes, Martínez in particular exhibited a feminist approach to her curation, challenging androcentric art history and patriarchal power by inviting artists whose works incorporated powerful political statements about gender and cultural difference—including Louise Bourgeois, Guerrilla Girls, and Annette Messager—as well as non-Western female artists such as Iranian Shirin Neshat and Korean Kimsooja.

Feminism would be brought back to the biennale 17 years later with its 59th edition in 2022. The exhibition in question was *The Milk of Dreams* by Cecilia Alemani. Inviting gender non-conforming artists as well as women of color and women outside the mainstream, Alemani presented the first exhibition in the biennale's 127-year history to have women represent an overwhelming majority 90% of participating artists. Her exhibition narrativized feminist statements rooted in symbiosis, solidarity, and sorority. The title *The Milk of Dreams* is taken from a picture book by Leonora Carrington, a Surrealist painter whose work included bizarre animals and other creatures. Fittingly, Alemani's exhibition focused on themes of anatomy, transformations in the body, liberated desires, and shifting identity, presenting a world of wondrous fantasy where human beings coexisted with non-human ones and unusual organisms. Alemani defined artists who explored and thematized women—sensual and fragmented women, women in the process of metamorphosis, monstrous women—as being surrealist rather than non-realist. She challenged the androcentric patriarchy and affirmed that this exhibition is a new festival of the female imagination, through such artists as Sonia Boyce who was the first

non-Caucasian artist representing the British Pavilion and won the Golden Lion for Best National Participation, and Simone Leigh, a Black American artist, a representative of US pavilion as well as a participant in the main international exhibition who won the Golden Lion for the Best Participant in the International Exhibition. Also invited in a similar context were Mire Lee and Geumhyung Jeong, both born in the 1980s, who drew much attention with their presence as Korean female artists and non-Western feminists.

Korean Commissioners and Invited Artists

The internationalization of Korean art truly began gaining momentum in 1995 with the establishment of both the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and the Gwangju Biennale. As mentioned in the introduction, Nam June Paik's influence obviously played a part, but we also cannot overlook the contributions of the commissioners and invited artists, who have made 30-year history as they carried the baton from the first edition of Korean Pavilion exhibitions all the way to the present. For artists and curators alike, the Venice Biennale experience would have been a personal springboard for overseas expansion and individual development. At a public level, however, its legacy for the art world lies in how it contributed to the international development and global advance of Korean art.

The inaugural Korean Pavilion in 1995 had veteran critic Lee Yil as commissioner and a list of participating artists that included Kwak Hoon, Kim In Kyum, Yun Hyong-keun, and Jheon Socheon. The historical significance of the pavilion's establishment was amplified when Jheon was honored with the Special Award for artwork that presented biennale visitors with a first-ever glimpse at Korea's unique culture and emotional identity. The second pavilion in 1997 had commissioner Kwang-su Oh selecting participating artists Ik-Joong Kang and hyung woo Lee; the third in 1999 had Misook Song selecting Noh Sang-Kyoon and Lee Bul. Ik-Joong Kang and Lee Bul , who respectively won an Honorable Mention at the second and

third editions of the pavilion thematized contemporary global issues ahead of Korean originality, giving a sense of both the present and future of Korean contemporary art. For the fourth pavilion in 2001, commissioner Kyung-mee Park showed the capabilities of Korean artists and the potential of Korean art through the artwork of Do Ho Suh and Michael Joo, who aestheticized and modernized Korean sentiments with their own plastic languages. As commissioner for the fifth pavilion in 2003, commissioner Kim Hong-hee selected three artists with very different sensibilities and aesthetics—Bahc Yiso, Chung Seoyoung, and Inkie Whang under the title *Landscape of Differences*. Her curation was to visualize the differences among participating artists, differences in the Korean Pavilion, and differences in curatorial approaches. From this point on, the Korean Pavilion exhibitions started having titles, commissioner Sunjung Kim at the pavilion's sixth edition in 2005, putting up an exhibition title as "Secret beyond the door," offered a glimpse at the accelerating transformations in Korean art by mapping the work of 15 established and emerging artists: Kim Beom, Sora Kim, Gimhongsok, Nakion (Nakyoung Sung), Sungsic Moon, Kiwon Park, Park Sejin, Bahc Yiso, Nakhee Sung, Bae Young-whan, Heinkuhn Oh, Jewyo Rhii, Yeondoo Jung, Choi Jeong Hwa, and Ham Jin.

In the 7th exhibition "The Homo Species" in 2007, commissioner Soyeon Ahn presented Hyungkoo Lee's series *Animatus*. The artist expressed a pygmalion aspiration that gives reality to cartoon characters that exist only in fantasy by representing cartoon characters familiar to everyone with the vitality of animation created by the skeletons of anthropomorphic animals. The 8th pavilion in 2009 had the first non-Korean national commissioner, a Korean American curator Eungie Joo, through the *Condensation* exhibition, presented artist Haegue Yang's work *Sallim*, which conceptualized the gap between Korean-ness and globality, art and craft, high and low culture, and gender politics and post-feminism. (Daniel Birnbaum, the artistic director of the 53rd Venice Biennale that year, invited Haegue Yang and KOO JEONG A to take part in the main exhibition.) During the 9th edition in 2011, media artist Lee Yongbaek presented various works of video, photography, sculpture, and

painting for Yun Cheagab's curation *The Love is gone, but the Scar will heal*. The 10th edition in 2013 featured commissioner Seungduk Kim and artist Kimsooja. For the exhibition "To Breathe: Bottari," Kimsooja covered the Korean Pavilion's entire glass façade with special film that filled the setting with endlessly refracted rainbow colors, and in a sealed indoor room where the only sound audible was that of the visitor's own breathing. This work was simply a conceptual bundle dematerialized by the sound of breath and light. For the 11th edition in 2015, commissioner Sook-Kyung Lee selected the artistic duo of Moon Kyungwon and Jeon Joonho. Presented in the exhibition *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying*, their work narrativized the fantasy and desire of transcending human beings' physical and perceptual limitations through the artistic imagining of supernatural movement through space. For the 12th pavilion edition in 2017, commissioner Lee Daehyung invited Cody Choi and Lee Wan to take part in *Counterbalance: The Stone & the Mountain*, where they presented different artworks that exhibited both artistic presence and creative aspirations. (Christen Macel, the artistic director of the 57th Venice Biennale that year, invited Sung Hwan Kim and Yeesookyung to take part in the main exhibition.).

The 13th edition in 2019 featured Hyunjin Kim's exhibition *History Has Failed Us, but No Matter*, with invited artists Hwayeon Nam, siren eun young jung, and Jane Jin Kaisen. Examining East Asian tradition and modernity through the lens of gender, they explored new possibilities for gender and cultural identity transcending Western norms. (For the 58th Venice Biennale that year, artistic director Ralph Rugoff invited Lee Bul and Suki Seokyeong Kang to take part in the main exhibition.) Young-chul Lee, the commissioner for the pavilion's 14th edition in 2022, selected the media artist and electronic music composer Yunchul Kim. An artist who has focused on the potential dispositions of materials while exploring the possibility of superhuman realms and different forms of reality, Yunchul Kim presented *Gyre*, which developed an event out of a spiraling cycle in which the people and machinery at the Korean Pavilion became one. The 15th edition in 2024—which marks the pavilion's 30th anniversary—has Seolhui Lee serving as co-artistic

director with Jacob Fabricius, the director of Art Hub Copenhagen. They present KOO JEONG A's "ODORAMA CITIES," which depicts a national portrait of Korea through a "journey of Korean scents." The artistic director for the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024, Adriano Pedrosa, is the director of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art. For the main exhibition, Pedrosa selected senior artist Kim Yunshin, a member of the first generation of Korean female sculptors who had lived and worked in Argentina for many years, and young artist Kang Seung Lee, a Los Angeles-based multidisciplinary artist who was named by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Korea as one of four finalists for the 2023 Korea Artist Prize.

International Exhibitions and Curating Difference

Biennales and other international exhibitions can be cradles for nurturing curators. They are also environments for learning and acquiring the planning capabilities, administrative acumen, and communication skills needed to put together large-scale, multinational exhibitions. At a time when Korean curators have been expanding their international footprints through biennales and other overseas exchange events, it seems meaningful to contemplate the direction and philosophy behind curation. Like other curators from Asia and other non-Western regions, Korean curators in the era of globalism and multiculturalism are faced with the question of how to cultivate curation that is distinct from the West and the rest of the First World. Thanks to the K-wave, Korea has been making strides as a major cultural force—yet its curators seem stuck midway between the global and local, between the center and periphery, where they are forced to wrestle with the differentiation question amid a dilemma that cannot be resolved along these binary lines. Perhaps none of the Korean Pavilion commissioners mentioned here have been free from this quandary.

For curators, biennales represent testing grounds, where they can experiment with curating differences and related practice.

In a contemporary environment of burgeoning postcolonial discourse, neoliberal capital, deterritorialization in terms of migration and diaspora, and internet-mediated transnationalism and transnationalism, the curating of international exhibitions is a matter that ties in fundamentally with a search for new identity based on the decentralization of cultural power and difference. The question of identity has been raised as an eternal proposition in Korea from the early 20th century up when Western paintings were introduced until the growth of globalism in the present day. It is a post-colonial topic that may appear trite but is nevertheless unavoidable. The task assigned to Korean curators in terms of identity is the achievement of difference. How can Korean curators (or Asian curators of Korean origin) establish differences that set them apart from their Western counterparts? It is a self-evident truth that while curatorship has no nationality, individual curators have a homeland. In this sense, Korean curators who are active on the global stage harbor ambitions of achieving a global quality while also ensuring their own identity based on discourses of difference. The context is one where difference is not only a means of distancing oneself from the center, but also a way of experimenting with a shift toward the center with a new identity. Yet the kinds of difference discourse that ensure curators' survival and competitiveness relate in turn to the dilemma of discrimination. Curators in Korea and other Asian countries in particular are vulnerable to being frustrated by the pitfalls of Orientalism, imagined by the intellect and emotions of Westerners . Indeed, Orientalism is a tempting trap that is easy to fall into, but at the same time it is a task to overcome for Korean curators who are seeking to cultivate differences in their curating based on Korean-ness or Eastern-ness. How can they achieve a Korean-ness that is unconnected with Westerners' Orientalist illusions? What sort of exhibition strategy can achieve global reach through aesthetic difference without Korean-ness being conceived in doctrinaire Orientalism? How can we avoid the error of reverse Orientalism—marginalizing ourselves by adopting Korean motifs just as materials and reducing the Korean tradition and spirit into something oriented toward the past? How do we protect Korean art from the “Eastern-ness” that global biennale visitors expect, and especially

from the Orientalist tastes of Westerners and their demands for popular exoticism? These are questions that relate directly to the representation of Korean-ness and standards for its interpretation, but they are also questions without definite answers. For Korean curators, these questions become inscribed as the dual signifier of yearning and frustration. Since there are no right answers in terms of resolving difference or establishing methodologies, curators can only employ their own strategies to experiment with difference. This is something that demands a consciousness of difference as opposed to a result-based focus on success or failure—something that requires the courage to bet on curating differences. As something that relates not only to curators but to artists as well, this may be the biggest challenge for Korean art.

30 Years of Adversities, Connecting Broken Trajectories

§ Kyoung-yun Ho

A national pavilion at the Venice Biennale is more than just an exhibition venue; its symbolic representation of cultural territory in the international art world has been highlighted. Bice Curiger, General Director of the main exhibition of the 2011 Venice Biennale, put forward the title of *Illumination*, with “nation” italicized for emphasis, defining the art world as a “nation” of one community.¹ However, the territory can be characterized by its fluidity, which disrupts the lines between the center and the peripheral. Moreover, artistic imagination demonstrated across diverse territories gives rise to a new community.

Who Has Operated the Korean Pavilion?

The Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale is closely related to the South Korean government’s international exchange policies on culture and arts. 1995 was especially a watershed moment when both the Korean Pavilion and the Gwangju Biennale opened, and the international exchange activities of the South Korean art community began to pick up steam via biennales and other international exhibitions. Currently, the Arts Council Korea (ARKO) has been in charge of building and operating the Korean Pavilion with the full support of the central and local government authorities.

Prior to the construction of the Korean Pavilion, South Korea participated in the Venice Biennale three times between 1986 and 1993, led by the Korean Fine Arts Association (KFAA). After its joining of the International Association of Art (IAA) in 1962, KFAA undertook to select South Korean artists for large-scale international exhibitions-: the São Paulo Biennale and the Paris Biennale in 1963; the Tokyo Biennale in 1967; the Asian Art Biennale

Bangladesh in 1993; and more. According to South Korean artist Ko Young-hoon who participated in the first South Korean exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 1986, the city of Venice sent an official invitation letter to the Ministry of Culture and Information, and then KFAA assigned South Korean art critic Lee Yil to organize an exhibition. In line with the theme of that year *Art and Science*, he chose Ha Dongchul and Ko Young-hoon, two artists with a non-traditional artistic approach. As the South Korean art community did not recognize the importance of the Venice Biennale at the time, the participation of the two young artists met with little resistance from senior or elderly artists. Afterwards, only Lee Yil and Ko Young-hoon flew to Venice and installed their artworks themselves at a designated booth in the Arsenale of the Venice Biennale.

From next season, those who held key positions at KFAA took part as a commissioner (currently titled as curator) or an artist: Park Seo-bo as participating artist in 1988; Ha Chong-hyun as commissioner in 1988 and participating artist in 1993; Seung-taek Lee as commissioner in 1990; and Suh Seung-won as commissioner in 1993. The fact that an artist—not a professional curatorial director—functioned as a commissioner shows the lack of infrastructure in terms of expertise and fairness. KFAA launched a campaign to build the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and even prepared an architectural blueprint, adopting a style of Korean traditional house, known as *hanok*.

This changed in 1993 when the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation (currently known as ARKO) led the initiative to build the pavilion, and the control over selecting participants and other operational tasks moved together. Nevertheless, KFAA was still in charge of shipping and producing some artworks for the inaugural exhibition of the Korean Pavilion, the cost of which were supported by the Culture and Arts Promotion Fund. The Korea Culture and Arts Foundation had consistently contributed 8 million KRW to the Korean Pavilion since South Korea's first participation in the 1986 Venice Biennale; however, with no experiences of holding an exhibition in Venice, it

needed to harness know-how of KFAA that had led an exhibition at the Italian Pavilion before. Hence, KFAA's influence extended until 2005, with the president of KFAA serving as an ex officio member of the commissioner selection committee.

The tug-of-war between KFAA and the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation persisted for some time. Details of "Operational plans for the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale,"² which was developed in July 1996 after its opening, described the situation where the two parties both wanted to be involved in the commissioner selection process. It elaborated the reasons why the Foundation must manage and run the Korean Pavilion and that the Foundation will be responsible for its overall management and operation. The basis was that the city of Venice and the South Korean government signed the contract for the use of the property by tapping into the Culture and Arts Promotion Funds, and that the biennale is an international arts competition among nations. With regard to the commissioner selection—the most sensitive topic—several reasons were specified: that many other countries have their government or public institutions charged with the task; and that assigning the task to one association may lead to issues such as academic favoritism.

Even after that, KFAA continued to argue that it has the right to engage in commissioner selections because of its experience in the Venice Biennale. Eventually, in September 1996, the advisory committee for operation of the Korean Pavilion was held and attended by Secretary General, Head of Promotion Department, and Head of International Exchange Division at the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation; Director of Arts Promotion Department at the Ministry of Culture and Sports; Deputy Director General of KFAA; Deputy Director General of Korean Institute of Architects (KIA); Artists Kwang-su Oh, Kim Bok-young, and Lee Yongwoo. KFAA stressed that it cannot allow the Foundation to lead the process of selecting participants, although the Foundation may take charge of general operation and management. The two parties went head-to-head when the Foundation disputed, "The current composition

of KFAA's members raises a question whether the association actually has the function of a representative art institution as it claims, when Korean Federation of People's Arts Organizations can perform the same role." Many art experts were also hesitant to support the idea that the International Subcommittee of KFAA is allowed to select a commissioner. The general consensus was that KFAA is not financially capable of managing the Korean Pavilion, and that the public institution must be in control because—unlike other international exhibitions—participants of the Venice Biennale represent each country. In other words, enhancing impartiality was crucial, because joining the Venice Biennale offers a considerable advantage to the artists' career. Given that it was hard to dispute that the Korean Pavilion is a reflection of the nation's identity, the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation gradually positioned itself as the organizer.

The operating committee of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale³ was decided to comprise around 10 members: 5 outside experts; 4 ex officio members including Secretary General of the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation, Director of the Arts Promotion Department at the Ministry of Culture and Sports, President of KFAA, President of KIA; and 1 representative of sponsoring companies, with the term of two years each. After that, President of KFAA or an expert appointed by KFAA joined the committee occasionally. However, the committee's relations with KFAA came to an end after the last participation of its president in 2011. On the other hand, Arts Council Korea (ARKO, formerly titled as the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation), signed a "MOU on globalization of South Korean visual arts and promotion of international exchange," with National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) and the Gwangju Biennale. It included detailed plans of international exchange cooperation projects led by each institution utilizing the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale as a platform. Later on, Director of MMCA and President of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation participated on the operating committee in 2013 and 2017, and in 2015 respectively.

ARKO, which fulfilled practical tasks at the time of its construction in 1995, has been operating the Korean Pavilion and developing an administrative system including formulating regulations on operation or expense and handling a contract with a curator (formerly known as commissioner). As of July 1, 2023, operation and management of the Korean Pavilion is controlled by the ARKO Art Center. Managing the Korean Pavilion is relatively large in scale compared to other support projects, and expertise is required in the curator selection process as well as administrative tasks. For this reason, it has long been argued that it would be more efficient for the ARKO Art Center to take charge; in fact, the ARKO Art Center has kept pace with the local situations, leveraging its know-how in exhibitions and supporting general administrative procedures. In commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Korean Pavilion, the operation and management of the Korean Pavilion is to be officially transferred to the ARKO Art Center. And the attention is on what changes it will bring within and beyond.

Dealing with the Hot Potato: Controversies and Changes Over Curator Selection

Operating regulations of the Korean Pavilion were initially introduced in 2005 and experienced six revisions until 2022.⁴ The most significant change from the revisions since its creation was that ARKO was entrusted to perform the role of commissioner in 2015. The revised regulations specified that “ARKO will play the role of commissioner, who directs the overall exhibition and operation of the Korean Pavilion, and form a committee to designate a curator for the exhibition of the Korean Pavilion and operate separate selection committees for each art and architecture exhibitions. This change is attributed to one incident where a Chinese curator and participating artists rented the Kenyan Pavilion and technically opened another Chinese exhibition in addition to the Chinese Pavilion’s show at the 2015 Venice Biennale. This sparked a global controversy and led the Biennale Foundation to call for each nation’s bigger role in operating a national pavilion.

The operating regulations consist of a total of 17 clauses, and one item pertaining to a curator (formerly known as commissioner) selection committee underwent the most frequent revision, which suggests the curator selection process was a very touchy subject. When the Korean Pavilion opened in 1995, there were no operating regulations in place, and three proposals were made for selecting a commissioner: The first was that Ministry of Culture and Sports selects and operates a commissioner; the second was that the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation selects and operates a commissioner by building an operating committee for the Venice Biennale; and the third was that KFAA and KIA are respectively assigned to select a commissioner for art and architecture exhibitions. Eventually, the second option was adopted, and the operating committee chose either to create a separate selection committee to appoint a commissioner/curator, or to have it incorporated into its role. Also, the standards for selecting the members were discussed, but never materialized. The idea was to cover the expense shortfall from the Culture and Arts Promotion Funds by operating the sponsor representative system—comprising experts in various areas of the art community, those from academia, media, critics, and sponsors—for a certain period, and thereby attracting private contributions and engaging those who share exhibition operating costs in the selection committee.

As per the most recent revision made in 2022, the operating advisory committee was newly organized, in addition to the curator selection committee. The operating advisory committee is a dedicated advisory body for the operation of the Korean Pavilion that recommends candidates for membership of the curator selection committee. This revision aimed to uphold autonomy of the selection committee; while the operating advisory committee still consisted primarily of experts in both the art and architecture fields just like the selection committee, two ex officio members—Office Director of ARKO and Director General or Director of Arts Policy Bureau at Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism—were excluded from the selection committee to serve as a member of the advisory committee. At the same time, the members of the curator selection

committee assumed greater responsibilities with added roles of evaluating and monitoring the exhibition at the Korean Pavilion of the year.

The roles of the operating advisory committee and the curator selection committee became clearly defined as the Korean Pavilion hosted more exhibitions with time, and former curators and participating artists served on the selection committee. Although the two committees fulfill the roles of offering advice for a seamless operation and supporting the curator selection process, their involvement is kept minimal when it comes to exhibition planning and general operation matters. Furthermore, given that the Korean Pavilion presents a temporary exhibition for each season with a new curator and participating artists, the schedule for selection has been moved up to secure ample time to prepare. All eyes of the art industry are on the outcome of selecting a curator and artists. In the past, the power struggles and conflicting interests within the art community were exposed during the process of curator selection. The designated curator is tasked with selecting artists for the Korean Pavilion who will represent Korean art; the curator is completely delegated to choose artists, determining the direction of the show at the stage of curator selection. Therefore, the issue of expertise and impartiality is always the focus of the curator selection process. After a competency evaluation of the candidates recommended by members of the curator selection committee, the top candidate is first given the choice to accept the offer. This procedure was partially modified or complemented, yet the overall framework remained unchanged between 1995 and 2015.

The evaluation criteria for curator include a person, ① who is capable of overseeing the domestic and international art community, ② who fully understands the global arts trend, ③ who is not influenced by specific genre, style, or school, ④ who is available to spend time directing in person during the preparation and exhibition period, ⑤ who is with advanced proficiency in foreign languages to perform activities on the ground, introducing Korean participating artists and the exhibition organization in person, and

⑥ who can fulfill the duties conscientiously and responsibly. In 2011 and 2015, three to four candidates for commissioner/curator were shortlisted, and the final decision was made after reviewing their exhibition proposals on the theme and participating artists. This shortened the time for preparation by determining artists, along with a commissioner/curator. In 2015, in a bid to embrace broad-based views of the art community and maintain impartiality, a stronger system was put in place where the recommendation committee and the operating committee were separately run.

What is notable here is clause 14 on the possible dismissal of a curator, which was newly enacted in 2013. The latest version of the concerned clause in 2015 specifies that "A curator will be dismissed when he or she significantly undermines the dignity in the capacity of a curator who oversees the exhibition at the Korean Pavilion, or compromises impartiality with regard to the exhibition operation. The dismissal can be made when more than 2/3 of the members are in favor." Clause 12 and 13 only stated that a commissioner will report exhibition plans including artists to the selection committee, but the revised clause in 2015 added that "The selection committee can demand a change of an artist if needed," "The selection committee can demand complementing of the exhibition plans if needed." The revision of 2022 detailed the reasons for dismissal with exemplary cases of significant degradation as a curator such as "sexual harassment and sexual violence, unfair treatment toward stakeholders, defamatory remarks, and more."

The Blacklist Scandal in the South Korean culture and art industry occurred in 2016. This led to stronger fairness in assessing projects submitted for competition under the Culture and Arts Promotion Fund, as well as the introduction of an ombudsman system. And the process and content of a curator selection are made public as well. When announcing a curator for the art exhibition of the Korean Pavilion, ARKO discloses more detailed selection results and reviews. The key evaluation criteria are listed: ① whether to have a vision on what the Korean Pavilion will present, and whether the vision holds a new perspective; ② whether curating has clear

directions and concrete plans; and ③ whether the exhibition would be effective in view of overall conditions of the Venice Biennale and the structure of the Korean Pavilion. That is, the focus of the evaluation is on what the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale will showcase at the time of the event.

The operation of the Korean Pavilion went through another substantial shift in the run up to the 2017 art exhibition. A curator of an architecture exhibition had been selected through an open recommendation system since 2014, and the same system was applied to the art exhibition in 2017. That year, the curator selection committee held two rounds of meetings. At the first meeting, 22 submitted recommendations were reviewed, and 6 candidates were decided by vote to deliver a presentation on their planning proposals. At the second meeting, each candidate is given half an hour for presentation and Q&A. After the 6 presentations, Lee Daehyung was elected as curator through discussion among the selection committee members. Since then, this open recruitment system has remained the same. There was a time when re-evaluation was required in the process. Similar to those who deliberate on whether to support projects using the Culture and Arts Promotion Fund, committee members who deliberate and select a curator for the Korean Pavilion are required to notify the reasons for avoidance or exclusion of related business. However, in 2022 it was later discovered that one of the committee members was in public relations with a candidate at the same institution. In response, ARKO delivered a press release, and put together a new selection committee for re-evaluation.

The list in the table above points to several changes in the landscape of the South Korean art scene. In the early days of the Korean Pavilion, the art exhibition of the Venice Biennale was characterized by its experimental approaches in contemporary art. Hence, few senior members took part, resulting in complaints and objections by some in the art world. Also, initial meeting minutes completed by ARKO's team reveal its special efforts to make a balance between two colleges of fine arts at Seoul National

▼ (*Table 1) List of former selection members for art exhibitions at the Korean Pavilion of the Venice Biennale (source: Arts Council Korea)

Year	Committee / Host	Members of Selection Committee
1995	Commissioner Selection Committee, Ministry of Culture and Sports	Lee Dai-Won (Chairman, President of National Academy of Arts of Korea, artist), Park Kwangjin (President of KFAA, artist), Lim Young-bang (Director of MMCA), Lee Koo-yeol (Head of Exhibition Division at Seoul Arts Center), Kim Young-soon (Director of Cultural Policy Network of Korea), Lee Woong-ho (Director General of Arts Promotion Department at Ministry of Culture and Sports)
1997	Operating Committee, Korea Culture and Arts Foundation	Oh Kyung-hwan (Head of School of Visual Arts at Korea National University of Arts), Kwang-su Oh (Director of Whanki Museum), Yoo Jun-sang (Head of Exhibition Division at Seoul Arts Center), Kim Young-soon (Director of Daeyu Cultural Foundation), Seo Seong-rok (Andong National University, art critic), four ex officio members
1999	Operating Committee, Korea Culture and Arts Foundation	Choi Man-lin (Director of MMCA), Kwang-su Oh (Commissioner of Korean Pavilion in 1997), Sung Wan-kyung (Inha University, art critic), Yongwoo Lee (Korea University, art critic), Yoo Jae-kil (Hongik University, art critic), Jheon Socheon (Korea National University of Arts, artist of 1995 Korean Pavilion exhibition), four ex officio members
2001	Operating Committee, Korea Culture and Arts Foundation	Yoo Jun-sang (Director of Seoul Museum of Art), Misook Song (Sungshin Women's University, Commissioner of Korean Pavilion in 1999), Sung Wan-kyung (Inha University, art critic), Kim Young-ho (Chung-Ang University, art critic), Jo Kwang Suk (Kyonggi University, art critic), four ex officio members
2003	Operating Committee, Korea Culture and Arts Foundation	Lee Koo-yeol (art critic), Ha Dong-chul (Seoul National University, artist), Nanjie Yun (Ewha Womans University, art critic), hyung woo Lee (Hongik University, artist of 1997 Korean Pavilion exhibition), Yoon Jin Sup (Honam University, art critic), Shin-Eui Park (Kyung Hee University, art critic), three ex officio members

2005	Operating Committee, Korea Culture and Arts Foundation	Sung Wan-kyung, Yoon Jin Sup (Honam University, art critic), Jo Kwang Suk, Misook Song, Kyung-mee Park (Gallerist, Commissioner of Korean Pavilion in 2001), Inkie Whang (Sungkyunkwan University, artist of 2003 Korean Pavilion exhibition), three ex officio members
2007	Commissioner Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	Sunjung Kim (Deputy Director of Art Sonje Center, Commissioner of Korean Pavilion in 2005), Kim Hong-hee (Director of SSamzie Space, Commissioner of Korean Pavilion in 2003), Kim Beom (artist of 2005 Korean Pavilion exhibition), Nanjie Yun, Taeman Choi (Kookmin University, art critic), Sungwon Kim (art critic), three ex officio members
2009	Commissioner Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	TaeHo Kim (Seoul Women's University, artist), Kim Hong-hee (Director of Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art), Baek Ji-sook (Director of ARKO Art Center), Soyeon Ahn (Chief Curator of Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Commissioner of Korean Pavilion in 2007), Choi Jeong Hwa (artist of 2005 Korean Pavilion exhibition), Taeman Choi, three ex officio members
2011	Commissioner Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	Cha Dae Young (Chairman of KFAA), Seo Seong Rok (President of Korean Art Critics Association), Kim Youngna (Seoul National University, art critic), Lee Doo-shik (Hongik University, artist), Choi Eunju (Chief Curator of MMCA), two ex officio members
2013	Commissioner Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	Chung Hyung-min (Director of MMCA), Kim Hong-hee (Director of Seoul Museum of Art), Joon-Eui Noh (Director of Total Museum of Contemporary Art), Kim Young-ho (Chung-Ang University, art critic), Lee Bul (artist of 1999 Korean Pavilion exhibition), Soyeon Ahn (Deputy Director of Plateau, Samsung Museum of Art), Yun Cheagab (Commissioner of Korean Pavilion in 2011), two ex officio members
2015	Commissioner Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	Yongwoo Lee (President of Gwangju Biennale), Kim Hong-hee, Soyeon Ahn (Deputy Director of Plateau, Samsung Museum of Art), Lee Bul, Chung Hyung-min, two ex officio members

2017	Curator Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	Jheon Soocheon, Lee Joon (Deputy Director of Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art), Yun Cheagab, Yeon Shim Chung (Hongik University, art critic), Bartomeu Mari Ribas (Director of MMCA), two ex officio members
2019	Curator Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	Kim Seon-hee (Director of Busan Museum of Art), Heejin Kim (Director of Subdivision Development Project, Seoul Museum of Art), Soyeon Ahn, Lee Joon, Cho Seon-Ryeong (Busan University, art critic), Lee Young-yeol (Director General of Arts Policy Bureau at Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism), two ex officio members
2022	Curator Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	<p>Members of Selection Committee for Re-evaluation (notice as of June 30, 2021)</p> <p>Ki Hey-kyung (Director of Busan Museum of Art), Baek Ji-sook (Director of Seoul Museum of Art), Shin Chung-hoon (Professor of Seoul National University), Seewon Hyun (independent curator), two ex officio members</p> <p>*One member was dismissed.</p>
		<p>Members of Final Selection Committee (notice as of August 17, 2021)</p> <p>Taeman Choi (Chairman of Final Selection Committee, Professor of Kookmin University, art critic), Dongyeon Koh (Senior researcher of iGong, Alternative Visual Culture Factory), Wonseok Koh (Head of Exhibitions at Seoul Museum of Art), Gimhongsok (Professor of Sangmyung University, artist), Jin-suk Suh (Director of Ulsan Art Museum), Hyesoo Woo (Deputy Director of Amorepacific Museum of Art), Jin Whui-yeon (Professor of Korea National University of Arts, art historian), two ex officio members</p>
2024	Curator Selection Committee, Arts Council Korea	Hyunsoo Woo (Deputy Director of Philadelphia Museum of Art, US), Geun-jun Lim (Chungwoo Lee, arts and design theory researcher), Jung Hyun (Professor of Inha University, art critic), Eungie Joo (Curator of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, US), Jochen Volz (Director of Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil), Yung Ma (Curator of Hayward Gallery, London, UK) *no ex officio members

University and Hongik University in making a pool of candidates for committee membership. In the past, the selection committee consisted mainly of art university professors, or artists and critics who belonged to related art institutions. Although the executive staff of major arts institutions still constitute the majority of the committee, a recent trend shows that the number of younger members with more on-site experiences is on the rise. Moreover, driven by an invigorating attempt to promote diversity, three foreign expert personnel joined in 2024, accounting for 42.9% of the total membership composition.

The selection process of the Korean Pavilion's commissioner/curator has constantly evolved, embracing the rising influence of curatorship in the domestic and international contemporary art scene. For a considerable period of time after the opening of the Korean Pavilion, ARKO organized the selection committee to decide a commissioner/curator at the selection meeting based on candidates' careers. And then, the appointed curator chose participating artists via research. Currently, in the curator recruitment competition, candidates are evaluated based on their submitted exhibition plans including artists. However, some argue that this evaluation process is not without problems. As proposed plans with participating artists act as the key criteria to evaluate a candidate, the selection committee came to hold some of the right to decide even artists—though not intended, which had been considered to be a curator's exclusive right. In light of this, it is worth rethinking whether the selection committee should be allowed to assess artists as well as curators.

Arts Council Korea as Commissioner

The title of commissioner changed to curator in 2016, and ARKO took on the role of commissioner. A curator elected by the selection committee is responsible and accountable for all aspects involved in bringing his or her exhibition plan into fruition. Once ARKO—as commissioner—signs a contract with a curator on the art

exhibition at the Korean Pavilion, ARKO grants the curator almost all rights concerning the exhibition, and then a dedicated team of ARKO Art Center provides support. Roles hardly changed although commissioner is retitled as curator. The following major tasks that had continued until 2015 still fall within the scope of a curator's responsibilities even after 2017: ① planning and directing an exhibition; ② choosing and commissioning artists and artworks; ③ production of art catalogs and other handouts; ④ exhibition design; ⑤ shipping of artworks; ⑥ insurance on artworks; ⑦ installation and withdrawal of a show; ⑧ opening ceremony; ⑨ promotion; ⑩ operating an exhibition; and more. Rather, several clauses were added regarding ⑪ collecting and providing materials necessary for setting up archives of the Korean Pavilion, and ⑫ any activities associated with creative work, along with clauses on confidentiality and damages for breach of contract.

While managing the Korean Pavilion may seem focused on presenting a temporary exhibition, it is more about owning the property and continuously operating the local institution. This is why the rules and regulations of the Korean Pavilion need to be expanded to include not only opening an annual show but the overall operation of the Korean Pavilion. The operational plan devised upon its opening states that one or two employees from the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation will be dispatched for on-site management and operation during the exhibition period. The first operating regulations—which was introduced in 1996—included appointing operating managers for the Korean Pavilion, one coordinator (now referred to as manager) and one sponsor representative. And the coordinator was given the allowance to cover the expenses for various activities such as communication and transportation fees, other fees for collecting and translating relevant materials. The work details of Seon-Ah Kim who worked as a coordinator in the initial stage specified the duties of coordinator: managing the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale during periods when there are no exhibitions; communicating with the city of Venice and the Biennale Organization Committee and coordinating matters regarding the Korean Pavilion; collecting and sharing

the relevant materials; and responding to related requests from the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation. Apart from the expenses directly incurred from exhibitions, the annual maintenance expenditure exceeds 300 million KRW on average. This covers outsourced services such as guides at the pavilion, construction costs before and after a show, and utility fees. The annual fee of 140 EUR had been paid to the Venice Biennale Foundation for using the property, which has a gross floor area of 249 square meters, approximately equivalent to 73 *pyeong* (a traditional Korean unit of measuring lands). However, no further payments have been made since the lease expired in 2019.

Since its establishment, a local resident manager has played a critical role in the continuous management of the Korean Pavilion. Along with primary tasks of communicating and coordinating with the city of Venice and the Venice Biennale Foundation, the manager counts the number of visitors while a show is on display and reports it to ARKO. The manager oversees all the matters about the Korean Pavilion from repairing artworks in the event of malfunction and damage, to ensuring safety of viewers and controlling access. Inevitably, management of the space depends heavily on the manager. Additionally, the manager must possess a deep understanding of the specific systems of the city of Venice, requiring knowledge of tax or administrative laws, as well as expertise in selecting local service providers for exhibitions. In particular, the Venice Biennale Foundation's strict operating policies mandate advisory and supervision by architects after installation of artworks to preserve cultural heritage.⁵

Then, how have the roles of ARKO as commissioner changed? As it assumed the role of commissioner, going beyond that of an organizer, greater responsibilities and functions fell on ARKO including executing an exhibition on top of operating the pavilion. As to the French Pavilion, the French Cultural Center forms a committee as commissioner to determine participating artists first, and then artists themselves choose a curator who can work with them. In contrast, ARKO delegates the authority

over an exhibition to a curator except for its control over annual administrative activities. This aligns with its principle of respecting autonomy of the art scene on the ground by keeping its distance from culture and art support policies of government agencies. In fact, the power struggles surrounding the operation in the early days between the art community and the Ministry of Culture are no different from a current prevalent gap and conflict between the two. As commissioner in charge of operating the Korean Pavilion, ARKO mediates conflicting views; at the same time, it must actively embrace the public views of the art scene on the ground, and create an efficient operating framework by delivering a comprehensive vision.

One of the primary duties of ARKO as commissioner is to secure finances. In addition to tasks directly associated with creative productions, ARKO is increasingly asked to carry out various activities related to exhibitions of the Korean Pavilion with a high level of proficiency, such as archiving, promotion, networking, and more. Currently, ARKO allocates the Culture and Arts Promotion Fund—almost the same amount every year classified as a current subsidy to the private sector—to the exhibition planning team. However, ARKO must try harder to increase funding. As shown in Table 2, the annual budget for the Korean Pavilion has steadily risen for the past 10 years, with a marked increase in 2014 and 2015. The spike in the budget can be attributed to an additional appropriation of about 200 million KRW by the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The grant was provided on the condition of hosting a homecoming exhibition following the Korean Pavilion's winning the Golden Lion Award at the 2014 International Architecture Exhibition, which could be partly seen as another reward from the government. Next year, the ARKO Art Center hosted the homecoming architecture exhibition with the reward money. Although a return exhibition for the 2015 Art Exhibition was not held, ARKO invested a significant share of the government's reward in Korean artists participating in the main exhibition, and collateral events.

The budget for operating the Korean Pavilion has gone up gradually.

And the current subsidy to the private sector rose by nearly 200 million KRW from 10 years ago, which is not more than the inflation during the same period. Meanwhile, moving into the 2000s, international cultural events are becoming increasingly glamorous, and competition among nations is growing more intense. During the pre-opening period of the Venice Biennale, many luncheons and parties are vigorously hosted by many nations throughout the city. With the tendency to feature media or installation art as the highlight of the event, production costs for these events are bound to rise dramatically. Even artists are sharing the burden of the costs and going all lengths to cover the expenses by pre-selling their artworks to collectors. Under the circumstances, ARKO must actively seek ways to draw more sponsorship from outside. It must secure reliable sponsors just like Samsung Foundation of Culture which consistently made 30 million KRW of conditional donations from 2001 to 2015. Also, the overall budget spent can serve as a basis for determining the additional annual budget required, by combining external donations with the Korea Culture and Arts Promotion Fund.

Details of sponsorship for the Korean Pavilion in Table 3 indicates the need for a change and an increase in budget. In a bid to deliver a show with perfection, former curators and artists worked hard in their own capacities to secure sufficient budgets by attracting new sponsors every year. Art galleries whose artists participate in exhibitions saw it as a promotional opportunity and actively offered support as sponsor. Several companies also capitalized on the event to promote their companies globally by donating goods such as flights or shipping services. However, since the sponsorship is a part of promotional or marketing activities, sponsors focus on events or parties with high exposure to the public; hence, it is required to strike a balance between sponsors. In 2013, NXC made contributions of 150 million KRW in cash and became the main sponsor of the Korean Pavilion. At the early stage of the project, Kim Jeong-ju, then chairman and founder of NXC, took on the role of a technical advisor and conducted research on media equipment, which led the company to become the major sponsor. Since 2015,

Hyundai Motor Company has been the primary sponsor up to now, and discussion about a long-term sponsorship seems necessary.⁶ In 2015, the Korean Pavilion was supported by the major sponsor of Hyundai Motor Company which appropriated 350 million KRW, sponsorship of Samsung Foundation of Culture, and donations of many companies such as Asiana Airlines, Basictech Co. Ltd., Cheil Industries, Eusu Holdings, Gallery Hyundai, KOLON Lakai Sandpine, NAVER, Samsung Electronics, SBS Media Group. In 2017, besides its corporate sponsorship, participating artist Lee Wan used *tumblbug*, a South Korean crowdfunding platform, which was the first trial to raise donations from individuals. The contributions were intended for use in purchasing eight directional loudspeakers for a multi-channel sound and soundproofing equipment—required for his artwork *Proper Time*—and paying the fees to ship the artwork from South Korea to Italy. A total of 55 individual donors chose to contribute amounts ranging from 50,000 KRW to 5 million KRW, adding up to 22,520,000 KRW.

The Korean Pavilion, Another 30 Years Ahead

The Venice Biennale serves as a measure of South Korea's economic and cultural standing at the actual global art scene on the ground. In view of the symbolic authority of the Venice Biennale in the culture industry, the foundation of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale itself is a historic scene in South Korean art.⁷ Ever since 1995, the achievements of the Korean Pavilion's exhibitions have not been just limited to awards or active performance of participating artists; it has played a role in enabling South Korean art to gain ground in the international arena in many ways by fostering their participation in the main exhibition or collateral events. Given that being part of the Korean Pavilion is synonymous with "representing South Korea," revisiting the history and past exhibitions of the Korean Pavilion will allow us to reflect on how South Korean art has been making its presence in the global art scene.

(*Table2) Details of Annual Budget for the Korean Pavilion 2008–2024 (unit: KRW thousand / source: Arts Council Korea)

Year	General Expenses	Utility Charges & Taxes	Rental Fees	Overseas Business Trip Expenses	Expenses for Project Planning	Current Subsidy to Private Sector	Total
2008	121,673	6,420	1,201	24,164	8,670	250,000	412,128
2009	173,176	6,420	1,201	24,265	8,735	300,000	513,797
2010	173,154	6,420	1,201	24,265	8,735	300,000	513,775
2011	177,855	6,420	1,201	25,789	8,735	380,000	600,000
2012	157,850	6,420	1,206	24,976	8,735	400,000	599,187
2013	157,850	6,449	1,206	24,981	8,735	400,000	599,221
2014	157,850	7,007	1,206	25,202	8,735	500,000	700,000
2015	157,850	7,007	1,206	25,202	8,735	700,000	900,000
2016	157,850	7,007	1,206	25,202	8,735	700,000	900,000
2017	257,850	7,007	1,206	25,202	8,735	600,000	900,000
2018	257,850	7,007	1,206	25,202	8,735	600,000	900,000
2019	262,850	7,007	1,206	21,202	7,735	600,000	900,000
2020	262,850	7,007	1,206	21,202	7,735	600,000	900,000
2021	462,850	7,007	1,206	21,202	7,000	600,000	1,099,265
2022	463,000	-	-	-	-	600,000	1,063,000
2023	463,000	-	-	-	-	600,000	1,063,000
2024	463,000	-	-	-	-	600,000	1,063,000

(*Table3) Details of Sponsorship for Art Exhibitions at Korean Pavilion

Year	Corporate and individual sponsors
1995	Korean Air
1997	Korean Air
1999	Samsung Foundation of Culture, Korean Air
2001	Samsung Foundation of Culture LG Electronics , Korean Air
2003	Samsung Foundation of Culture, Ilshin Foundation, Ssamzie Co., Ltd., Hermès Korea, Seok Ju Art Foundation, Korean Air,, Gallery Hyundai, Kukje Gallery
2005	Samsung Foundation of Culture, Arario Gallery, PIL Korea Ltd
2007	Samsung Foundation of Culture, Arario Gallery
2009	Samsung Foundation of Culture, Hanjin Shipping, Kukje Gallery, New Museum, Galerie Barbara Wien
2011	Samsung Foundation of Culture, LG Electronics, Korean Air, Hanjin Shipping, Hakgojae Gallery, The Wise Hwang Hospital, PIN Gallery, Woohak Cultural Foundation
2013	NXC, Samsung Foundation of Culture, Samsung Electronics, Kukje Gallery, MO jain song, Kukje Gallery, Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Kewenig Galerie, La Fabrica, Galerie Tschudi
2015	Hyundai Motor Company, Samsung Foundation of Culture, Asiana Airlines, Basictech Co. Ltd., SAMSUNG Cheil Industries, EUSU Holdings, Gallery Hyundai, KOLON, Lakai Sandpine, NAVER, Samsung Electronics, SBS Media Group
2017	Hyundai Motor Company, Hansol Paper, Naver Cultural Foundation, Samsung Electronics, Samsung C&T, 313 Art Project, ARTPLACE, Asiana Airlines, Innocean, Korea Tomorrow, Samsung The Frame, 55 individual sponsors on tumbldug
2019	Hyundai Motor Company, Maeil Dairies, Asiana Airlines, SBS Foundation, Harper's Bazaar Korea, Danpal Korea, By Edit, Kyu Sung Woo Architects, Danish Arts Council, Knud Højgaards Fond
2022	Hyundai Motor Company, Korean Air, Barakat Contemporary
2024	Hyundai Motor Company, NONFICTION, LUMA Foundation, Dinesen, LUSH, ILJIN Culture Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Nicoletta Fiorucci Foundation, Agnès b, Bazaar Art, Art Hub Copenhagen

"It is open to question whether a national pavilion should be at the center of operating an art exhibition as in an Olympic event. Nevertheless, national pavilions' exhibitions in the Giardini seemed to be characterized by each nation's size, power, funds as well as its levels of stability and democratization,"⁸ said Kim Jung-heon, a member of ARKO in 2007. Indeed, with rising competition and promotion among nations, the Venice Biennale is no different than a miniature of the global cultural and political landscape. The number of visitors to the Venice Biennale recorded 500,000 annually on average for about six months of the exhibition period. Out of the total, the number of visitors to the Korean Pavilion was counted at 373,160 in 2015, 410,016 in 2017, 373,378 in 2019, with an average of more than 2,000 daily viewers. Especially in 2022, the Korean Pavilion had its highest-ever number of annual and daily visitors at 566,013 and 8,555 respectively. The pre-opening period alone, lasting only three to four days and exclusively open to professionals worldwide, registered a total of 25,000 visitors, including 8,000 from the press. It would be easy to estimate the total size of visitors by adding artists, curators, and staff from the main exhibition, national pavilion exhibitions, and collateral events.

It is widely understood that artists who were in the spotlight at the Venice Biennale may continue to exhibit their artworks at prestigious international art museums and galleries, consequently enhancing their profile to that of global artists. And a curator of the Korean Pavilion mediates between individual artists and government support projects, playing a bigger role in international exchange programs. Hou Hanru, Chinese curator, who directed the French Pavilion, remarked, "The Biennale is not so much an one-time event as a process of creating its own unique heritage, thereby creating a regional discourse and impacting political institutions and others. Though it is not intended, this role of the biennale invigorates the society by shedding a light on social issues." It is fair to suggest that so-called "global citizens" or "jet-setting" renowned art curators contribute to the reproduction of biennales, traveling across North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. On the other hand, we have to acknowledge that their presence and the

resulting biennales are driving changes in contemporary arts and society at large.⁹ Despite the intricate and complex ramifications of the Venice Biennale, its primary purpose remains clear: serving as an effective platform for participating artists and curators to showcase their viewpoints to a global audience.

It has been over three decades since the opening of the Korean Pavilion. According to the former Vice Minister Kim Do-hyeon of the Ministry of Culture and Sports who visited Venice at the time, South Korean architect Seok Chul Kim was desperately committed to building the pavilion amidst many hardships, even if it was just a temporary space like “a butterfly perching for a moment before taking flight,” not to mention the smaller-than-expected size of the pavilion upon construction, the ever-rising maintenance costs due to its aging necessitates a fundamental solution. The discussion on expansion and renovation of the Korean Pavilion gained momentum in 2015 when the Australian and Canadian pavilions completed their renovations. After the advisory meeting on its renovation with the art and architecture community, a feasibility study for reconstruction was conducted. After concluding a contract with Mancuso e Serena, an architectural studio based in Venice, detailed action plans were developed and submitted to the City of Venice, but no conclusion has been reached.

While ARKO contacted the City Council, Council of Venice, and other city departments such as the Division of Urban Planning, Architecture, Landscaping, and Bureau of Cultural Heritage Preservation for approval, the Korean Pavilion was put in the building registry of the City of Venice in 2020. However, renewing the lease contract for the property of the Korean Pavilion makes no progress after its termination in 2019. In the face of the challenges, Kang Hyung-Shik, South Korean Consulate General in Milan, is making every effort, meeting with a city councilor in Venice and Deputy Director General of the Biennale Foundation, driven by the determination that a diplomatic approach is crucial. As 2024 marks the 140th anniversary of diplomatic ties between South Korea and Italy, there is growing anticipation that positive news may be heard

soon regarding expansion and renovation.

However, the more pressing task than expansion or renovation is looking back on the history of the Korean Pavilion, and complementing internal conditions for better achievements in the future. Staff members assigned to the Korean Pavilion are frequently rotated, similar to other public institutions, and there is a severe shortage of competent experts for various activities for the pavilion such as operation, selection, management, expansion, renovation, global promotion, sponsorship, and more. Besides, similar to other curators at most biennales, an elected curator typically departs after finishing a single exhibition, leaving behind many crucial leads necessary for tracing the history of the Korean Pavilion. Each season, curators and artists invest significant effort into delivering an exhibition, yet not enough attention has been given to finalizing its achievements and implementation process.

With this room for improvement, the white paper for the Korean Pavilion at the International Art Exhibition has been published since 2013. As for the 2016 International Architecture Exhibition, materials containing the whole process of organizing the exhibition were donated to Art Archives, Seoul Museum of Art, building a foundation for follow-up studies. In addition, ARKO Arts Archives have been working on the Venice Biennale collection, while carrying out the oral history documentation project since 2003, collecting, preserving, and providing access to valuable records capturing the history of Korean modern and contemporary art. However, since exhibition photos and detailed materials are insufficient, or not registered, some of printed materials including exhibition catalogs and video materials are only accessible for now. In 2019, as part of the collection project, ARKO Arts Archives conducted four rounds of oral recordings with Eun Jung Kim, manager of the Korean Pavilion. Kim has been working for the Korean Pavilion as an on-site manager since 2006, playing a crucial role in managing the pavilion and organizing exhibitions with her know-how and expertise. In 2020, ARKO interviewed former commissioners in its special study on the arts policy titled "The Discovery and Collection of Materials to

Build Up the Archives of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: Focusing on the Art Exhibitions from Its Opening in 1995 to 2015.” The archives of the Venice Biennale have just taken their first step. Fortunately, 3,973 material items on the design of the Korean Pavilion were donated from Franco Mancuso and Ernesta Serena between 2022 and 2023. Cataloging these donated materials is now in full swing, together with the oral documentation project, which is expected to push related archiving activities forward.

Recently, studies on national pavilions at the Venice Biennale have been actively carried out around the world. In early 2024, Stephen Naylor—an Australian art historian—published a book summing up the history of national pavilions of Asia-Pacific: *The Venice Biennale and the Asia-Pacific in the Global Art World*. Also, many nations published archival books reflecting on the history of their pavilions at the Venice Biennale: Austria in 2013, Canada in 2020, Australia in 2021, and Germany and Japan in 2022. In 2022, Taiwan released its pavilion’s archives on the website as well as in the exhibition. In light of this, how will we record today and tomorrow of the Korean Pavilion? To ensure that the Korean Pavilion is more than just a typical biennial national event, it is imperative to outline a new vision by actively engaging with international contemporary arts and closely examining the intertwined relationships surrounding the Korean Pavilion.

How the Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion Came to Be

§ Young-chul Lee

“The social state, like the hypnotic state, is only a form of dreaming, a dream of command and a dream in action. Having only suggested ideas and believing them to be spontaneous: such is the illusion peculiar to the somnambulist, and to social man as well.”

— Gabriel Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation*, 1895

The Venice Biennale started with a conversation at the Caffè Florian in 1894, at the height of European colonial expansionism. It emerged from an international exhibition created on April 19 of the following year to commemorate the Italian king's silver wedding anniversary. The event was viewed by around 220,000 people, including many foreign visitors, at the twilight of a 1,100-year-old republic that had fallen to the Napoleonic invasions. The strategy was twofold: to inject energy into the economy through the parallel effects of industrialization, and to escape isolation by forging connections with the Western powers. In spite of the extremely conservative approach to new architecture, the biennale was successful at preventing the city from being relegated to the cultural periphery. The first national pavilion was founded in 1907 for Belgium. It was joined in 1909 by others for Germany, the UK, and Hungary, which presented works by Renoir and Klimt the following year. The 1908 opening of the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna in the Ca' Pesaro palace also contributed to cementing Venice's place in the international art scene.

Originating in the Giardini di Castello, with their lush vines and jasmine, the Venice Biennale became known as a “super salon” and the “perennial modern art salon.” The second of these names continues to be applied today. The Italian cognate of “perennial” is *perenne*, which has undergone another shift in meaning from the sense of a plant's growth cycle. It evokes the sense of a true spirit

and quality that emerges from an eternal pledge of love, no matter the situation or events. Like Venus arising from the deep waters of a lagoon, the dazzling cathedral, and the soaring golden luster of the Palazzo Ducale defy logic to transport Italians and foreign visitors alike into a fairytale world. For centuries, artists have tried to capture the essence of Venice and its culture in images, metaphors, and allusions. During the late 15th century, Venice had been a hub of European printing culture, and the city as a whole is a dazzling masterwork of architecture. The Teatro La Fenice, the city's first theater, was the stage for performances by John Cage, Merce Cunningham, David Tudor, and Nam June Paik in the 1960s. Even the very small structures in the hometown of Verdi, Marco Polo, and Casanova boast works by such world-famous artists as Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese.

Appearing just a decade after the Berlin Conference where the European powers forcibly partitioned Africa, the biennale offered a relatively harmless avenue for the different countries to compete for glory, but the only countries invited were Western ones. This policy at the time was a modernist one emphasizing both individualism and nationalism, positing—as Hegel noted—that the world's history occurred in Europe. The policy would begin weakening with the advent of the postmodern era. The 1990 biennale included Nigeria and Zimbabwe, while Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire were represented in 1993. Before 1990, the United States had never had a single female artist taking part in the Venice Biennale. That year, Jenny Holzer participated, with Louise Bourgeois appearing as a representative in 1993. In the case of Japan, Yayoi Kusama took part in 1993. At the very end of the last century, as the different countries' boundaries and prestige were rapidly weakening under the impact of optical communications technologies that linked the world together, South Korea scored a dramatic coup in acquiring its own permanent artistic home in Venice.

Commando-Style Happening (June 18, 1966, Midnight)

The opening day of the 33rd Venice Biennale saw the arrival of an uninvited guest: a young Asian American artist of 34 who appeared with the cellist Charlotte Moorman. Having met two years earlier, they had performed in Paris the year before and planned for Venice to be the first stop on their second European tour. The story behind this had to do with a “conspiracy” involving the biennale, which had sparked an uproar in the New York and European media. Nam June Paik had planned ahead of time to stage a guerrilla event where he would throw around salt and pepper during the opening event. As word spread, a crowd gathered by the Rialto Bridge—the oldest of four spanning Venice’s Grand Canal—to watch a small recital taking place on a gondola. A *jing* gong made of Korean brass hung there to announce the start and finish. A leaflet without a date, time, or location was printed with the following words:

“What’s happening, Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, you guys, births, deaths, love poems, television shows, murders, spring, flowers, wars, income taxes, and you’ll get as much as you want.”

— 1966, the US (Collection of Walker Art Center)

It was a summer night with moonlight cast over the water’s surface. Borrowing an old projector—the only one of its kind in Venice—Nam June Paik projected a video onto the wall of a building next to the Rialto Bridge. He asked himself the question, “How can one make a film without shooting film?” The work in question was *Zen for film*. This event in Venice in 1966 reused a film that Paik had made by allowing dust and random defects to appear on film so that zero-gravity information flowed over an empty screen. Moorman was lit by a spotlight that had been prepared on the bridge’s railing, as she gave a performance of the work *26’ 1.499” for a String Player* by John Cage, a composer both of them admired. While Ay-O sprinkled rose petals over Moorman from the bridge, she paused before beginning a performance of Paik’s composition *Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saens*. Following a spontaneous idea of Paik’s, Moorman used the Grand Canal as a gas canister. They

dove into the dirty water (as everyone had been expecting). There were some difficulties in getting Moorman back into the boat, but eventually the cellist climbed in—quite gracefully—and completed her performance while sopping wet. After she finished, Paik jumped back into the gondola from the canal, and the event came to a close. It drew passionate applause and cheers from the crowd that had observed the small-scale avant-garde opera, which included Peggy Guggenheim, Roy Lichtenstein, and Leo Castelli.¹⁰ The gondola that the artists had performed on slipped away from the Rialto and headed toward the venue for the biennale's opening party. Five months after their performance, Venice had its highest-ever *acqua alta* (seasonal flooding). High tides in Venice reach 80 centimeters, which is enough for the Piazza San Marco to begin flooding. Heavy flooding in 1966 brought devastation to Florence and left the city of Venice inundated for 20 hours. After a long period of experimenting and research, the city developed the MOSE system (short for "Experimental Electromechanical Module"), which uses a gate system to connect the city's islands; it entered operation in the autumn of 2020. When flooding is predicted, the dormant mobile gate is raised to form a barrier before the city is left underwater. It amounts to a miracle on the water.

Miracle of the Korean Pavilion

As recently as the 1960s, modernist paintings were welcomed at the Biennale, including works by artists such as Klimt, Chagall, Picasso, Rauschenberg, and Lichtenstein. In contrast, it remains extremely difficult to secure permission to build any new architecture in the city: Three renowned great modernist architects failed to bring their Venice projects to fruition. Frank Lloyd Wright designed a palace in the Grand Canal for the Masieri family but could not have it approved by the city. Le Corbusier's design for a city hospital and Louis Khan's plan for an art center within the biennale site were opposed and ended up not being built. In light of these struggles, it seems like a miracle that the Korean Pavilion was built at all—even as a small-scale project by architects Seok

Chul Kim and Franco Mancuso. The site of the Korean Pavilion is a section that brings together countries that had been major powers in the 19th century, including Russia, Britain, Germany, and Japan. It is an optimal location affording clear views of the Adriatic Sea and the Lido. The architect had to accept certain difficult design constraints. Despite the small size of the site, they were not allowed to cut down any trees or shrubs. A brick structure to the pavilion's rear had to be incorporated into the design based on the city's heritage laws, even though it conferred no architectural benefits. The rippling structure of one of the pavilion's walls was the result of its being designed to avoid protected greenery, while its placement on metal columns atop a foundation stone was meant to avoid the tangle of tree roots under the earth's surface. The designers were able to creatively work around this through the concept of the cornerstone in a traditional Korean hanok home.

The etymological origin of the word "pavilion" means "butterfly," conveying a sense of lightness. (The French cognate *papillon* is also the title of a film about an unjustly convicted prisoner who escapes from an island prison.) It refers to a temporary structure that is presumed to be mobile. Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace, which appeared at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London (the first world's fair), was a symbolic structure bringing together the metal and glass that were being produced in vast volumes as the Industrial Revolution continued. It altered the traditional concept of space and ushered in changes to both art and architecture. The Korean Pavilion emphasized characteristics of the same materials, becoming a "miniature Crystal Palace" commemorating the historic nature of the pavilion as well as a mobile control tower sharing news from a distant world beyond. We can imagine it as something less like a traditional gallery than like a large TV-Dada work serving a communication role. Indeed, Achille Bonito Oliva would refer to the 1993 Venice Biennale—where he served as artistic director—as being "post-television."

The current Korean Pavilion boasts a delicate solution and design concept that satisfies the different conditions, blending

characteristics of Venice as a city of lagoons and the imaginary hall of art envisioned by Nam June Paik. Rising up on its cornerstone, the structure reflects the concept of the traditional *hanok* structure, with a seemingly lightweight and well-ventilated steel structure. It boasts the sorts of curious elements that one might expect from a landing module designed for galactic travel. It has a circular turret, a broad modular awning that can be opened up, and a series of banisters that resemble a boat. It seems to combine an UFO with the motorboats symbolic of Venice.¹¹ It also resembles the rendering image of a transportation device that appears in *Hi Tech Gondola* (1993), a promotional video work that Paik created with Paul Garrin and Marco Giusti while preparing for the Venice Biennale's centennial. Gondolas are symbols of Venice, and some of the clips in Paik's videos show motorboats that represent faster and more modern versions of them. The boats are also redesigned into spaceships, as viewers are whisked along with images of mountains and canals. The Piazza San Marco appears, as do the Basilica interior, the Bridge of Sighs, the Palazzo Ducale, boats drifting along the Grand Canal, and the Rialto Bridge. Alongside the repeating video frame plays a 1988 live performance of "Hier kommt Alex" in Bonn by the German punk band Die Toten Hosen. The iterative rhythm of sentences emphasizes a sense of anticipation for a new arrival. These are part of *Wrap around the World* (1988), which Paik created for the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. In this way, the distinctive Korean Pavilion poses a new task for artworks that are accustomed to art museum and gallery settings: Faced with new challenges, they must seek their own creative solutions. For the past three decades, South Korean commissioners, artists, and architects have presented various exhibitions using the small, simple structure and its front yard and forest space, which is likely to have been a new experience for the artists.

Two Eyes

The boat-shaped Korean Pavilion is anchored in a forest that sits beside a lagoon. This structure seems diametrically opposed to

the white cube buildings associated with modern states—the so-called “leviathans” that fill the Giardini. The space represents the fruit of 30 years of efforts by artists and commissioners who were otherwise familiar with art museums and gallery spaces as they responded to the challenges and found original solutions. In past years, South Korean commissioners, artists, architects, and designers have enjoyed some success in experiencing transformations as they have wrestled with the interior lighting conditions, undulations, and scale. They have presented different experimental exhibitions and artworks: artists Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho with the gallery’s transformation into a cyberbrain; Cody Choi with a postcolonial casino; artist Kimsooja with a womb of ultra-spectral light; commissioner Hyunjin Kim with a modern colonial women’s salon theater; artist Bahc Yiso with a Mont-Saint-Michel Abbey of bones; and commissioner Misook Song with a Korean identity corresponding to the crafts of Murano glass blowers. Commissioner Sunjung Kim has designed a holistic presentation of South Korean contemporary art, like a K-pop stage in a separate room in Venice. With 12 artists, the Korean Pavilion is either a fun school trip or a zombie laboratory of symbols of desire. It is a condensed satire of the Venice Biennale. Through their tremendous energy, they have given the fullest expression to new perceptions.

The 2014 Architecture Biennale, with Rem Koolhaas as artistic director, had 65 countries competing, and the Korean Pavilion eventually came away with Golden Lion honors for the exhibition *Crow’s Eye View: The Korean Peninsula*. Adopting the “crow’s-eye view” imagined by the poet Yi Sang, commissioner Minsuk Cho and the curators shared a frenzy of energy and analytical acumen that absorbed the modernity of 100 years’ worth of architecture in Korea as the world’s only remaining divided nation. “Initially, Arts Council Korea prepared for the Korean Pavilion exhibition with a ‘plan A’ where North Korean architects would be taking part in the exhibition’s work and a ‘plan B’ where they would not be able to. In the end, the North Korean architects could not be part of the exhibition. Nevertheless, an alternative approach was prepared

from the outside, and the exhibition presented was outstanding." The phenomena of North and South Korean architecture and spectacle were rigorously split into four conceptual categories ("Reconstructing Life," "Monumental State," "Borders," and "Utopian Tours") to present new patterns of viewing. The Korean Pavilion's research methods became a reference model for the production of image viewing knowledge. A blind spot in the piazza's brightness was discovered by the architect Minsuk Cho and the curators, who bore the full weight of meaning associated with the fact that the pavilion's name did not refer to "South Korea" or "the Republic of Korea" but simply to "Korea" (or "COREA," as the actual sign on the pavilion read). This was the ideal response and the most outstanding exhibition approach to underscore the biennale's title theme of *Fundamentals* and Koolhaas' emphasis on "architecture, not architects." It restored the vision necessary to see the darkness in the Piazza and a world that seeks brightness. The Cold War focus of the exhibition by Cho's team was a definite answer, 19 years after the fact, to Nam June Paik's devotion to establishing the pavilion and to his hope that "North and South Korea will work together." At the same time, it was a kind of prophetic message for the future. The following year, Im Heung-soon's film *Factory Complex* was invited for presentation at the biennale under artistic director Okwui Enwezor; it ultimately won a Silver Lion. The Nigerian Enwezor made a monument of the lives of the female migrant workers in Im's film, who appealed in voices that could not be heard. In the decades since globalization, the most important phenomenon for Venice has been the astronomical growth of its tourism industry. Between 1990 and 2020, the number of tourists visiting Venice rose from approximately 10 million a year to around 25 million, for a growth rate of over 150%. The increase in tourism and decline in the resident population has led to the loss of many small-scale businesses and shops catering to non-tourists. Their place has been taken by stores selling carnival masks and other souvenirs, most of which are not produced locally.

The vulnerability of the city, with its reliance on the tourism industry, was laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first

10 months of 2020, the industry suffered a decline of roughly 80%; many businesses closed their doors, some of them permanently.¹² The Giardini was a region where poor people lived, with convents and churches as well as lacemakers, bead stringers (known as *impiraresse*), and fishermen. As a way of commemorating and mourning the history and reality of Venetian labor that was being wiped out by the tourism tsunami, Enwezor presented the 90-minute film *Factory Complex* through a simple staging in a small room next to the Arsenale gallery's corridor. Because of its length, most visitors passed by without watching. At the 2001 biennale, Anri Sala used a similar approach—in more or less the same location—with the video work *Uomo Duomo*, which was also honored with an award. That video covertly captures a long scene of an anonymous old person sleeping in the Milan cathedral.

Within 10 years of the Korean Pavilion's opening, two South Korean artists created "two eyes" on the themes of the Cold War and labor. If Venice is perceived as a theme park for public and private culture, little analysis is needed. But the mechanisms of capitalism are not independent of context. Each country brings its capital to its respective house of art, where the pavilions compete as "agents" of financial corporations. Encountering the world of images while roaming through the maze of side streets and seeing all the different works in the national pavilions spread out among the Giardini, Arsenale, and neighboring sites, one experiences the sense of floating through the air—yet there is information flowing among them, and they take on a mutually transactional and representative quality. By referring to this as "mutual," I am viewing this as an entanglement of interests in which capital is one part. It is a mistake to vaguely assume that capital is some universal force that is present everywhere. The essence of art is resistance against the power that brings about a society of control, but shows of resistance are always different and never universal.

The Power of Governance

After Lee Ki-ju became the South Korean ambassador to Italy in April 1992, he sparked new interest when he sent official letters to and held meetings with the Mayor of Venice and biennale officials over the Korean Pavilion construction issue. On the advice of the president of the biennale, he sent a letter the following month to Mayor Ugo Bergamo, in which he wrote, "I believe that you have heard many explanations already on the issue of establishing the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, which my predecessor requested repeatedly through official letters and meetings with your predecessor as Mayor." He reiterated that the South Korean government very much hoped to see the construction finally come to fruition.

Two months later, South Korean Minister of Culture sent a letter to President of the Venice Biennale Paolo Portoghesi stating that the government was committed to the pavilion's construction and that his predecessors had reached an agreement with biennale authorities in which it was proposed that an initial estimate should be sent for the project, which could be amended at a later date. In August, Lee sent another letter to Achille Bonito Oliva, who was then working as the 1993 biennale's artistic director. Asking for his "sincere consideration and attention regarding the site and spaces for the Korean exhibition [in 1993]," he indicated that South Korea hoped to establish its own national pavilion in the longer term and asked for Oliva's contributions to that end.

Regulations on architecture in the Giardini that had been designated in 1939 had expired, freeing the biennale organizers and the city to request additional land. Competition was fierce, as many countries wanted their own pavilions—including China and Argentina, which boasted the largest number of immigrants in Italy. The current site of the Korean Pavilion—then a tangle of trees and bushes between the Japanese and German Pavilions—was one discovered by chance by Paolo de Grandis, a former curator at New York's PS1 who was looking for a site for a national pavilion for the display of

Taiwanese contemporary art while carrying out duties related to Asian countries' participation in the biennale. That plan ended up being overturned by the biennale authorities after it was learned that in Taiwan's case, the People's Republic of China was actually empowered to approve whether it could represent the "country."¹³ (Taiwan did in fact later obtain China's permission to acquire a gallery outside the Giardini, and several other countries would go on to adopt the approach of acquiring or renting national pavilions on the Giardini's exterior.) Biennale Manager Dario Ventimiglia sent a letter to Chairman of Korean Fine Arts Association (KFAA) SeDuk Lee informing him that he needed to hear an explanation from city authorities for the pavilion to be built, and that Ventimiglia's people were working on the preparations. 23 countries were in the race. In Nam June Paik's words, South Korea had "cut ahead in line," but this meant that the efforts had paid off and that it would become the last country to take up residence, 39 years after Japan became the first Asian country to do so.

The initial efforts that began in 1986 came from the South Korean ambassador to Italy, the KFAA, and the Ministry of Culture. In 1992, events truly began gathering momentum through the efforts of Paik, architect Seok Chul Kim, Minister of Culture and Sports Lee Min-seop, and Professor Yongwoo Lee. A building permit was received from the city in 1994, and in 1995, construction was completed on the Korean Pavilion design by Seok Chul Kim and IUAV Architecture Professor Franco Mancuso. On the Piazza San Marco, the minister sang a rendition of the Neapolitan song "O sole mio." Back in South Korea, the inaugural Gwangju Biennale opened.

Achille Bonito Oliva

Achille Bonito Oliva, who had visited South Korea on several occasions after taking part as a jury member in a 1990 international art event supervised by then Minister of Culture Lee O-young, hailed from Naples himself. Massimo Cacciari, eminent philosopher and professor of aesthetics, had become Mayor of Venice through

the first direct elections (serving from 1993 to 2000 and from 2005 to 2010), and the Venice Biennale invited Oliva to serve as artistic director for this moment that called for innovations. The event had fallen somewhat behind Documenta in terms of recognition, with successive low turnouts of 90,000 visitors in 1989 and 120,000 in 1991. Working with a small budget and a short preparation time, Oliva organized an event at nearly triple the scale of past years. The 1993 Venice Biennale bore the title *Cardinal Points of Art*. Originally, this had been *Winds of Art*; the approach was initially one that wove together different artworks by analogy to the winds that blow on the Earth's surface. It was altered to *Cardinal Points of Art* after the concept was deemed too ambiguous.

The *Cardinal Points of Art* originally referenced the astronomical directions of north, south, east, and west, but in the context of artistic creation, they came to represent elements of origination, inundation, and intersection. The exhibitions worked under 15 different themes and made use of the entire area of central Venice outside the Giardini, making for a rather chaotic summer. Oliva's premise was that many contemporary artists had identified their values in places that were "different" in a cosmic, geographical, mythological, and temporal sense, leading to the formation of north-south dualism during the first half of the century and east-west dualism during the second.

The biennale had 200 curators, researchers, and directors taking part. Oliva revived *Aperto* (a program first held in 1980), which was chaotic and filled with images of sex and death. He defined himself as a "cultural anarchist," and the frequent confusion for visitors prompted an outpouring of complaints. The event was scathingly reviewed as a "shambles" by Robert Hughes of *Time* magazine and the "death of Venice" by Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times*. A new board of directors was convened, and at the meeting to select the next artistic director, Oliva's four-year contract was disregarded in favor of selecting Jean Clair, Director of the Picasso Museum in Paris. Commenting on this, Okwui Enwezor said the following in 2012.

“If we are searching for ways in which to think of contemporary art, we need to think about the Venice Biennale.”

The 1993 biennale has long been underrated. Oliva’s exhibition-based approach to contemporary art was expressed, in his words, through a language of “exhibition zapping,” “post-television exhibitions,” or, more frequently, “mosaic exhibitions.” Both the ideas and language sound very close to Nam June Paik’s. A mosaic exhibition is one without beginning or end, where the viewer makes their own choices to combine, select, and move about between one work and another, acquainting themselves with fragmentation (the small-scale) as they each find their own way. The viewer’s creativity can be seen as lying in how they achieve their own understanding through these acts of consumption. The emphasis is on pluralism, the interdisciplinary, and cross-pollination (a botanical borrowing). It is an experiment with exhibitions as a way of achieving greater fascination through experiences that have not been orchestrated ahead of time. With its anti-art history, anti-criticism stance, this kind of exhibition conveys the sense of a powerful gesture of resistance against interpretation.

The exhibition encouraged open contemplation of contemporary art during a tumultuous period for culture, where European communism was disintegrating and globalization was intensifying. During its preparations, Paik and Oliva had an exchange of ideas on September 23, 1992, while discussing the production of promotional videos for the Venice Biennale’s centennial. Collaborating with the video editor Paul Garrin and the Italian television and film critic Marco Giusti (famous for his television program), Paik completed 21 short videos under the title *Hi Tech Gondola*. The clips were aired repeatedly on Italian TV (specifically the channel RAI 3) during the biennale. In her analysis of ways in which the Venice Biennale was represented in advertising during this period, Clarissa Ricci observed the characteristics of advertising in Paik’s work, analyzing self-appropriation mechanisms that were similar to the workings of memory.¹⁴

When commissioner Klaus Bussmann extended invitations to Paik

and Hans Haacke for the German Pavilion during the same period, this proved a successful example of curating that was quite novel and profound in its impact. Paik was not German but a Korean-born artist with US nationality; Haacke had distanced himself from his home country of Germany after leaving it 30 years prior. This meant that the first exhibition following Germany's reunification would not be a meeting between East and West German artists residing in the country; instead, it would adopt a perspective of viewing Germany from outside. The approach aligned perfectly with the "nomadism" and "transnationalism" that Oliva presented as mottos for the biennale. Is it overly reflective to note that it has taken more than 30 years for me to understand this as the philosophical and cultural backdrop—the womb from which the Korean Pavilion and Gwangju Biennale were born? The Cold War, nomadism, coexistence, the Other, labor, and interdisciplinary studies—these factors were the context behind South Korean contemporary art's new emergence, while severe institutional interference by bureaucrats, collusion with commercialism, and indiscriminate globalization have been toxic to art.

Klaus Bussmann

Klaus Bussmann was also commissioner in 1990. With participating artists Bernd and Hilla Becher having then received Golden Lions, Bussmann had a higher level of freedom in selecting artists. Ignoring social opinion and debates with the German art world, he appeared on the radio making an early announcement of the participants, who were also given ample time to work. In the biennale catalogue, he shared the following about his beliefs:

"The conclusion of the last Venice Biennale (1990) coincided with the fall of the second German state: Three years ago, the GDR was still present with its own contribution. Despite general international consensus, the accession (or annexation), that is, the absorption of the former GDR into the Federal Republic of Germany, has raised fears, albeit not clearly expressed, of a new 'Greater Germany,' which manifests itself aesthetically in Venice, still maintaining the German Pavilion dating

back to 1938. But can such fears diminish if the evidence of that past is destroyed? I think not. Furthermore, the initial concerns, albeit implicit, have largely given way to another anxiety: How will the new Germany resolve the economic collapse and the market of the old communist states and the territory of the former GDR? And how will it overcome these immense financial, social, and human problems, address the issue of immigration and national belonging, and combat xenophobic and racist outbursts? In what way will it define its role in Europe that, like the old Federal Republic, has shown itself unprepared for these sudden changes? Finally, how will it assume responsibility in world politics, derived from its geographical situation but also from its history? In this important and complex historical situation (to use a very engaging expression), it is not enough to present an internal debate, however interesting, on modern trends in the German art scene to an international audience. When, about two years ago, Hans Haacke and Nam June Paik were invited (the latter spontaneously expressed: 'It's a great honor for me to be in the German Pavilion') to participate in the German Pavilion at the biennale, such problems did not yet emerge with the clarity of the present. However, it was already evident that an immersion in internal German reality would have been the wrong approach to such a challenge."

In a speech after winning the Nam June Paik Art Center Prize in 2010, Bruno Latour quoted the title of his own book by declaring that Paik had "never been modern." The combination of technology with Paik's non-modern imagination ignited major interest from many poorer nations that had never had their own pavilions at the Venice Biennale. It was by necessity—though it seemed like by chance—that the success of the German Pavilion based on transnationalist ideas led, perhaps ironically, to South Korea securing the last empty spot in the Giardini for its own national pavilion. Paik surrounded the German Pavilion with a kind of epic surreal robot opera representing the history of nomadism. To one side of the hall, he placed his video work *Electronic Super Highway: "Bill Clinton stole my idea!"*.¹⁵ It served as a focal point around which he placed his own robots (Attila the Hun, Frederick I, Genghis Khan, Marco Polo, and so forth) based on temporal and spatial feedback. They provided a rich illustration of the course of history, from

travels over the Silk Road and Marco Polo's land and ocean journeys to predictions of post-industrialization globalization by means of the electronic superhighway.

One of these, Paik's Rehabilitation of Genghis Khan: 'Nomad' Work in Progress, was like an avatar of the artist himself. A circular bronze compass attached to the front of Genghis Khan's bicycle alluded to the "Cardinal Points" theme of the 1993 biennale exhibition as a whole. Among the figures involved, a strong spiritual bond could be sensed. Interestingly, as commissioner for the second Gwangju Biennale in 1997, Harald Szeemann raised questions by taking the copper diving bell that represented Genghis Khan's head in Paik's work and placing it at the front entrance to his *Speed* exhibition. Showing his exhibition technique, he placed a text just behind the bell reading "Slow Down," written by the French Fluxus artist Ben Vautier (a close friend of Paik's). Artistic communication and spiritual imitation transcended space and time, moving faster than the speed of light.

Nam June Paik Donates Golden Lion to Turkish Immigrants

Oliva actively encouraged the various national pavilions to invite artists from different countries rather than emphasizing their own national identity. This expressed a message of peace and a plea to the European society of the early 1990s, which had been wracked by severe violence and racial discrimination toward immigrants, refugees, and other foreigners since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Lichtenhagen district of the German city of Rostock was notorious as the scene of xenophobic riots against the Vietnamese and Roma communities in 1992; similar episodes of violence had also occurred in many other European countries. Giorgia Meloni, who was elected in 2022 as Italy's first-ever female prime minister, first became involved in politics as a 15-year-old in 1992, when she joined an Italian youth social movement group; she was nicknamed the "female Mussolini." Many in the European press saw her as a far-right fascist, although she has moderated her approach to

practical politics since taking office and is seen generally as more of a center-right figure. During the 1993 Venice Biennale, Paik referred to the award in a text, entitled "Venice—Turtleship—a Trial of Mr. Picasso."

"The highlight of the 1993 Venice Biennale was outside the Giardini (the biennale compound). There were 45 works of art, measuring exactly one meter by one meter, and sponsored partially by the Turkish government. These 45 boxes were made by 45 artists from 45 countries, and they will be sold in October to raise money to defend Turkish immigrants from the neo-Nazi violence in Germany. I decided to dedicate my gold prize of the German Pavilion (shared with Hans Haacke) to the Turkish immigrants. At the opening of the Hungarian Pavilion (Joseph Kosuth) I met an old friend from the former Yugoslavia, an attractive woman director of a Belgrade museum. I asked her, 'Which side are you on?'. 'I am on the peace side. Pray for peace now. I am Serbian, my husband is Croatian (a professor of art history). My daughter belongs nowhere.' She started crying amid the clinking of the champagne glasses. Later I visited the Korean section of the Italian Pavilion, and met again another pair of enemies: a Greek artist from Cyprus and a Turkish artist from Turkey, two countries that were at war just a few years ago. Mr. Achille Bonito Oliva, Director of this 45th biennale, compressed many unsolvable problems of today into a small pellet with the finesse of a 'Goldfinger' and through the prism of ART rather than any cheap idealism."

In 1963, Paik sold a pen-and-paper drawing entitled *Fluxus Island in Décollage Ocean 4/63* to the Frankfurt publishing company Tipos to raise funds for Fluxus. It resembled a printed circuit board, blending different objects, people, actions, places, numbers, contradictions, and moments: mutually hostile countries and spaces where peoples mixed, male prostitutes serving female clients, Stalingrad Station, sea channels, a torture history institute, a painless suicide institute, and a sperm bank for all Fluxus geniuses. Reading as a conceptual map of Fluxus, it aligns with Paik's characterization of the 45th biennale as "many of today's unresolved issues condensed into small kernels."

Since 1980, Paik and Oliva had grown closer. They agreed that the 1993 Venice Biennale should represent a new beginning, and they may have concocted a failed practical vision for the lagoon city of Venice to become a Fluxus island, laughing at how the contours of the drawing resembled the shape of our solar system, its coordinates permitting a free selection of "Cardinal Points." In an interview with Kim Hong-hee, Paik shared a plea ahead of the Korean Pavilion's opening in January 1995:

"It was shameful that there was no Korean Pavilion, but we should not simply boast now that there is one. We have now transformed from an inferior country to a normal one, and it is simply a joke to think we are progressing to become an advanced cultural power. We must also not believe that this is the only way to become 'first-class.' When we go on the way we did with the Olympics, it is an embarrassment internationally. Olympic competitions and art are different things. In sports, it is important to come in first, but in art, the key question is not who is 'better,' but how they are 'different.'"

These are words for ordinary people, artists, art councils, and officials of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism alike to take to heart. The Korean Pavilion is a gift bestowed by the heavens, and it should exist not as a place of rigidity, prestige, and pretensions but as a home abounding with conscientious humor and cleverness.

1. Gee Chil Lee, "The Meaning of Venice Biennale as a Center in Decentering Era," *Journal of Basic Design & Art*, Vol.13, No.8, 2012
2. Official document records of the Ministry of Culture and Sports. Recipient President of Korea Culture and Arts Foundation, Doc. no. Arts 86470-394, Enforcement Date July 31, 1996
3. The operating committee was convened in case the chair of the committee or the president of the Korea Culture and Arts Foundation agrees and 1/3 of the current members demand. More than 2/3 of the members must attend, and the decision will be made by majority vote of the attending members. The chair will have the vote, and he/she will have the casting vote in case of a tie.
4. Operating regulations on the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale were enacted on December 26, 2005, and revised on January 11, 2008; November 20, 2009; January 24, 2013; November 16, 2015; December 24, 2015; and February 25, 2022.
5. The Law on Approval for Remuneration of Architectural Technicians and Architects, "LEGGE 2 MARZO 1949, N.143—Approvazione della tariffa professionale degli ingegneri ed architetti (1)." Payment by association: As per Article 10 of L.3/1/1981, N.6, 2% of the total remuneration and supervision fees for architects will be paid.
6. Hyundai Motor Company entered into a global partnership with National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Korea in 2013, followed by a 10-year global partnership with Tate Modern of the UK in 2014, and Los Angeles County Museum of the US in 2015.
7. Yoo Jae-gil Kim Taek-yong, "A Study on the Korean Pavilion at Venice Biennale—Centered on Changes in Global Arts Discourse and their Relations with Korea," *Journal of Basic Design & Art*, Vol.11, No.6, 2010, p.391
8. Kim Jung-heon, *Art in Culture*, Vol.7, July 2007, p.95
9. The Venice Biennale and the Gwangju Biennale become deeply interconnected and gain ground globally. Okwui Enwezor, curator of the 2008 Gwangju Biennale was chosen to direct the 2015 Venice Biennale. Massimiliano Gioni was appointed as a curator of the 2010 Gwangju Biennale, and the 2013 Venice Biennale. Jessica Morgan served as a jury of the 2013 Venice Biennale, when she was already appointed as a curator of the 2014 Gwangju Biennale. Lee Yongwoo and Sunjung Kim served on a jury of the Venice Biennale in 2015 and 2019 respectively.

10. Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable life of Charlotte Moorman*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 147–148.
11. Hyungmin Pai, "Dwelling on the Korean Pavilion," ed. Diener & Diener Architects, *Common Pavilions* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2012). [http:// www.commonpavilions.com/ pavilion-republic-of-korea.html](http://www.commonpavilions.com/pavilion-republic-of-korea.html)
12. Dennis Romano, *VENICE: The Remarkable History of the Lagoon City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), e-book, p. 443.
13. Stephen Naylor, *The Venice Biennale and the Asia-Pacific in the Global Art World* (London: Routledge Research in Art Museums and Exhibitions, 2020), e-book, p. 168.
14. The two papers primarily referenced are "Towards a Contemporary Venice Biennale: Reassessing the Impact of the 1993 Exhibition" by Clarissa Ricci, Professor at the University of Bologna (*Journal of Biennales and Other Exhibitions*, 2020), and "Hi Tech Gondola. The Venice Biennale in an Advertisement" (*Journal of Arts*, 2020).
15. Nam June Paik explains the process of developing his idea for an electronic superhighway in early 1974 in "Media Planning for a Post-Industrial Society." However, the issue arose in 1992 when Bill Clinton prominently featured "Data Superhighway" as a key promise in his election campaign, allegedly using the same idea without permission.



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1986-2024

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1986

A

- Revival of the awards system suspended after the May 68 protest in France, establishment of the Gran Premi award (for young artists), and introduction of the Golden Lion award.

B

- 42nd Venice Biennale
- June 29 – September 28
- 40 participating nations

C

- *Arte e scienze (Art and Science)*
- Maurizio Calvesi

D

- International Prize/Golden Lion – Frank Auerbach, Sigmar Polke
- Golden Lion in memory of sculptor – Fausto Melotti
- Golden Lion for best national representation – French Pavilion
- Best young artist (Premio 2000) – Nunzio Di Stefano

H

- South Korea participates in the Venice Biennale for the first time in its 42nd edition.
- Commissioner – Lee Yil
- Exhibitors – Ko Young Hoon, Ha Dong-chul

I

- Supported the Asian Games Culture and Art Festival

J

- The Korean National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) relocated to Gwacheon.
- Nam June Paik's *Bye Bye Kipling* aired at 10 AM during the Asian Games marathon competition.

K

- Asian Games was held in Seoul.



▼ Exhibition poster for the main exhibition, *Art and Science*, at the Venice Biennale, 1986. Courtesy of Ko Younghoon.



A

- Actress Kang Soo-yeon won the Volpi Cup (Best Actress) at the Venice International Film Festival for *Surrogate Mother*.

I

- Opening of the Institute for Cultural Development (now the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Deoksugung)

J

- Inaugural publication of the academic journal *Art History* by the Korean Art History Education Research Association (Chairperson Hwi-jun Ahn)
- Publication of *30 Selections of Contemporary Art Criticism: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Socio-critical Perspectives (Quarterly Art*, by Young-cheol Lee)

K

- June Democracy Movement, the nationwide uprising



1988

A

- Australia Pavilion opened

B

- 43rd Venice Biennale
- June 26 – September 25
- 44 participating nations

C

- *Il luogo degli artisti (The Place of artists)*
- Giovanni Carandente

D

- International Prize/Golden Lion – Jasper Johns
- Golden Lion for best national participation – Italian Pavilion
- Best young artist (Premio 2000) – Barbara Bloom

H

- Commissioner – Ha Chong-hyun
- Exhibitors – Park Seo-bo, Kim Kwan Soo

I

- Supported the Seoul Olympic Arts Festival

J

- 88 Seoul Olympics: International Contemporary Art Festival, with the participation of over 300 artists from 72 countries, including South Korea
- Opening of Seoul Museum of Art (at the former Seoul High School Main Building on the site of Gyeonghee Palace)

K

- 13th President Roh Tae-woo sworn in
- Summer Olympic Games in Seoul



J

· Establishment of the Art
Criticism Research Association

K

· Revision of Passport Acts,
liberalization of overseas travel



▼ Red promotional signs symbolizing the Venice Biennale are placed throughout the city during the exhibition period. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho



1990

B

- 44th Venice Biennale
- May 27 – September 30
- 49 participating nations

C

- *Dimensione futuro (Future dimension)*
- Giovanni Carandente

D

- International Prize/Golden Lion – Giovanni Anselmo
- International Prize/Golden Lion for sculpture – Bernd and Hilla Becher
- Golden Lion for best national representation – American Pavilion
- Best young artist (Premio 2000) – Anish Kapoor

H

- Commissioner – Seung-taek Lee
- Exhibitors – Hong Myung-seop, Cho Sung-mook

I

- Establishment of a labor union

J

- The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art launched the biennial program *Young Korean Artists*, which initially started as *1981 Young Artists Exhibition*, to support emerging artists.

K

- Separation of Ministry of Culture from Ministry of Culture and Public Affairs (1969–)



J

- Establishment of Korea National University of Arts, a national school under Ministry of Culture to foster professional artists as part of national policy (official opening in 1992)

K

- South Korea joins the UN
- APEC Conference in Seoul

A

- In preparation of the biennale's centenary, two congresses were held in Venice and Rome to discuss the prospects for the reform of the organization.
- The 45th Venice Biennale, which should have been held the year before, was postponed to this year, in order to make the next exhibition coincide with the biennale's centenary.
- Establishment of Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts) ASAC

J

- Yook Keun Byung presented at the 9th dOCUMENTA in Kassel
- Opening of Gwangju Museum of Art, the first of its kind outside the Seoul metropolitan area, followed by Busan Museum of Art (1998), Gyeongnam Art Museum (2006), Jeju Museum of Art (2009), and Daegu Art Museum (2011)

K

- Museum and Art Gallery Support Act enacted
- The first satellite "WooriByul-1" launched



▼ Located in the VEGA complex, about 30 kilometers from the main island of Venice, the Venice Biennale Archive ASAC (Archive of Contemporary Arts) (by appointment only). Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.



1993

A

- Artist Nam June Paik's participation in the German Pavilion

B

- 45th Venice Biennale
- June 14 – October 10
- 45 participating nations

C

- *The Cardinal Points of Art*
- Achille Bonito Oliva

D

- International Prize/Golden Lion for painting – Richard Hamilton, Antoni Tàpies
- International Prize/Golden Lion for sculpture – Robert Wilson
- International Prize/Golden Lion for best national representation – German Pavilion with Hans Haacke and Nam June Paik
- Best Young Artist (Premio 2000, also called Duemila Prize) – Matthew Barney
- Special awards (also called Honourable Mention) – Louise Bourgeois, Ilya Kabakov, Joseph Kosuth, Jean Pierre Raynaud

F

- *Passagio ad Oriente* organized by Fondazione Mudima (curated by Seungduk Kim)

H

- Commissioner – Suh Seung-won
- Exhibitor – Ha Chong-hyun
- Under Nam June Paik's lead, architects Seok Chul Kim and Franco Mancuso searched for a site for the Korean Pavilion and reported to Ministry of Culture (June 20).
- Nam June Paik returned home after receiving the Golden Lion Award and met with President Kim Young-sam (August 20).
- Kim Soon-gyu, director of the Arts Promotion Bureau of Ministry of Culture and Sports, visited Venice and delivered a request for the establishment of the Korean Pavilion to the City of Venice (September 16)

I

- Integration of archives of Arts Council Korea and Seoul Arts Center. Relocation of Seoul Arts Center



1993

J

- Opening of *1993 Whitney Biennial Seoul* at MMCA, supported by artist Nam June Paik
- *The SeOUL of Fluxus* (Curator: René Block) held in March to commemorate the relocation of Seoul Arts Center



H

- The South Korean ambassador to Italy submitted an official application to establish the Korean Pavilion (May 5).
- A groundbreaking ceremony was held, and the Korean Pavilion model and design plan panel were displayed at Olivetti Hall (November 8).

I

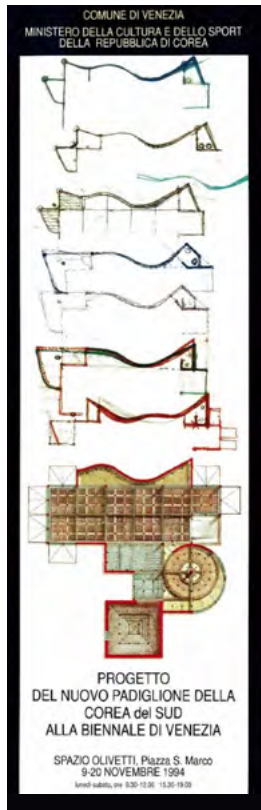
- Supported the establishment and operation of the Korean Business Council for Arts

J

- Two-person exhibition of Ik-Joong Kang and Nam June Paik held at the Whitney Museum of American Art
- Opening of the Korea Cultural Policy Development Institute (now Korea Culture and Tourism Institute), "A Study on Strategies for Activating Overseas Cultural Activities" conducted

K

- Death of North Korean leader Kim Il Sung



▼ Poster for the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, an exhibition held at the Olivetti Showroom in St. Mark's Square, 1994. ©Mancuso e Serena Architetti Associati. Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea.



1995

A

- The Korean Pavilion, the 26th and last independent architectural structure and 29th national pavilion in the Giardini, built in celebration of the Venice Biennale centennial
- First foreign artistic director appointed to the Venice Art Biennale
- Artist Jae-Eun Choi participated in the Japan Pavilion.

B

- 46th Venice Biennale
- June 11 – October 15
- 51 participating nations

C

- *Identity and Alterity—Figures of the Body 1895–1995*
- Jean Clair

D

- International Prizes/Golden Lion for painting – Ronald Brooks Kitaj
- International Prizes/Golden Lion for sculpture – Gary Hill
- International Prizes/Golden Lion for best national participation: Egypt Pavilion
- Premio 2000 (young artist): Kathy Prendergast
- Special awards: Nunzio Di Stefano, Hiroshi Senji, Jehon Soo Cheon, Richard Kriesche

F

- *Tiger's Tail* organized by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (curated by Soyeon Ahn, etc.)
- *Asiana* organized by Fondazione Mudima (curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, Gino Di Maggio, and Seungduk Kim)

G

- 1st Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Lee Yil
- Exhibitors – Kwak Hoon, Kim In Kyum, Yun Hyong-keun, Jheon Soocheon

H

- Completion of the construction of the Korean Pavilion (May 30)
- Opening ceremony of the Korean Pavilion (June 7)
- Completion of the establishment of the Korean Pavilion (December 22)

J

- The inaugural Gwangju Biennale, *Beyond Borders* (Organizing Chairperson: Yeong-bang Im). The biennale special exhibition *Info Art* (co-curated by Nam June Paik and Cynthia Goodman) held
- The year 1995 was designated as the “Year of Fine Arts” (as part of the “Year of Culture and Arts” project initiated in 1991)



1995
1996

K

- Introduction of the Real Estate Real Name Act

H

- Return Exhibition of the 46th Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion at Seoul Arts Center

K

- 1st Busan International Film Festival (Organizing Committee Chairperson: Dong-ho Kim)
- South Korea joined the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as the 29th member nation



▼ Bookstore located at the entrance to the Arsenale. There is also a bookstore in the Giardini. In addition to the bookstore, there is a library at the Arsenale. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.



1997

B

- 47th Venice Biennale
- June 15 – November 9
- 59 participating nations

C

- *Future, Present, Past*
- Germano Celant

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Agnes Martin and Emilio Vedova
- Golden Lion for best national participation – France Pavilion
- International Prize – Marina Abramović, Gerhard Richter
- Premio 2000 (young artists) – Douglas Gordon, Pipilotti Rist, Rachel Whiteread
- Special awards – Thierry De Cordier, Marie-Ange Guilleminot, Ik-Joong Kang, Mariko Mori

G

- 2nd Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Kwang-su Oh
- Exhibitors – Ik-Joong Kang, hyung woo Lee

J

- 2nd Gwangju Biennale
Unmapping the Earth
(Organizing Committee
Chairperson: Yoo Jun-sang,
Curator: Young-chul Lee)
- Lee Bul's *Majestic Splendor*
exhibited at *Project 57: Lee Bul, Chie Matsui* at MoMA in New York

K

- Foreign exchange crisis,
official request for IMF financial
assistance



1998

A

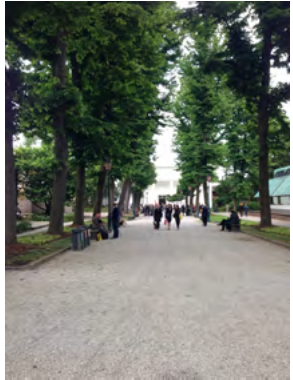
- The Venice Biennale was transformed into a legal personality in private law and renamed "Società di Cultura La Biennale di Venezia"
- The Venice Dance Biennale was founded.
- Appointment of Paolo Baratta as President of the Venice Biennale

J

- Inauguration of the Pusan (Busan) International Contemporary Art Festival (PICAF)
- Opening of SSamzie Space (Director: Kim Hong-hee)
- Opening of Art Sonje Center (Deputy Director: Sunjung Kim, who led the *Sprout* project at the former site of the museum since 1995)

K

- 15th President Kim Dae-jung sworn in
- Hyundai Group Chairman Chung Ju-yung visits North Korea via Panmunjom



▼ View of the courtyard in front of the Central Pavilion in the Giardini, where the main exhibition is held. Formerly known as the Italian Pavilion, it was renamed in 2009 to its current name. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.



1999

A

- Official establishment of the Collateral Events at the Venice Biennale
- The biennale renovated the historical spaces of the Arsenale (Artiglierie, Isolotto, Tese, Gaggiandre)

B

- 48th Venice Biennale
- June 12 – November 7
- 60 participating nations

C

- *d'APERTutto (Aperto over All)*
- Harald Szeemann

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Louise Bourgeois, Bruce Nauman
- Golden Lion for best national participation – Italy Pavilion
- International Prize – Doug Aitken, Cai Guo-Qiang, Shirin Neshat
- Special Awards – Georges Adéagbo, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Katarzyna Kozyra, Lee Bul

E

- Kimsooja, Lee Bul

G

- 3rd Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Misook Song
- Exhibitors – Noh Sang-Kyoon, Lee Bul

H

- Do Ho Suh selected for the cover of the Venice Biennale promotional material

J

- Opening of alternative art spaces: Alternative Space LOOP (Seoul) in February, Alternative Space POOL (Seoul) in April, and Project Space SARUBIA (Seoul) and Alternative Space Bandi (Busan) in October
- Inauguration of the 1st Women's Art Festival *99 Patjis on Parade* (Chairperson: Kim Hong-hee)

K

- Launch of Hanaro Telecom ADSL service



2000

I

- Opening of Insa Art Space

J

- 1st Seoul International Media Art Biennale 2000 (now Seoul Mediacity Biennale) *City: between 0 and 1* (Artistic Director: Missok Song; venues: Seoul Museum of Art, screens in public spaces, and subway stations)
- 3rd Gwangju Biennale *Man + Space* (General Director: Kwang-su Oh)

K

- First inter-Korean summit
- ASEM conference held in Seoul



2001

- B**
 - 49th Venice Biennale
 - June 10 – November 4
 - 65 participating nations
- C**
 - *Plateau of Humankind*
 - Harald Szeemann
- D**
 - Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Richard Serra, Cy Twombly
 - Golden Lion for best national participation – German Pavilion
 - International Prize – Janet Cardiff, George Bures Miller, Marisa Merz, Pierre Huyghe
 - Special award – Yinka Shonibare, Tiong Ang, Samuel Beckett/Marin Karmitz, Juan Downey
 - Special awards for young artists – Federico Herrero, Anri Sala, John Pilson
- E**
 - Do Ho Suh
- G**
 - 4th Korean Pavilion
 - Commissioner – Kyung-mee Park
 - Exhibitors – Michael Joo, Do Ho Suh
- J**
 - Inauguration of the 1st Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale
- K**
 - National Human Rights Commission of Korea
 - Opening of Incheon International Airport



2002

A

- Appointment of Franco Bernabè as the President of the Venice Biennale
- Film director Lee Chang-dong won the Silver Lion award (Best Director) for *Oasis*

I

- Renaming of Korea Culture and Arts Foundation's Fine Art Center to Marronnier Art Center

J

- 4th Gwangju Biennale *Pause* (Artistic Director: Sung Wankyung)
- Opening of the 1st Korea International Art Fair (KIAF)

K

- Joint hosting of the FIFA World Cup by South Korea and Japan



2003

B

- 50th Venice Biennale
- June 15 – November 2
- 64 participating nations

C

- *Dreams and Conflicts—The Viewer's Dictatorship*
- Francesco Bonami

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Michelangelo Pistoletto, Carol Rama
- Golden Lion for best work shown – Peter Fischli & David Weiss
- Golden Lion for artists less than 35 years old – Oliver Payne, Nick Relph
- Golden Lion for best national participation – Luxembourg Pavilion
- Golden Lion for young Italian female artist – Avish Khebrehzadeh

E

- KOO JEONG A, Gimhongsok and Sora Kim, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, Jae-hwan Joo

G

- 5th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Kim Hong-hee
- Exhibitors – Bahc Yiso, Chung Seoyoung, Inkie Whang

I

- Abolishment of the Culture and Arts Promotion Fund collection system

K

- 16th President Roh Moo-hyun sworn in



2004

A

- The Venice Biennale was transformed into a foundation.
- Appointment of Davide Croff as President of Venice Biennale Foundation

J

- Inauguration of the 1st Incheon Women's Art Biennale
- 5th Gwangju Biennale *History Repeats Itself* (Artistic Director: Yongwoo Lee)

I

- Passage of the amendment to the Culture and Arts Promotion Act by the National Assembly plenary session

K

- Deployment of South Korean troops to Iraq



▼ Venice Biennale Press Room located within the Arsenale. Journalists from Italy and abroad register to receive a press kit and freely access the press room to work on articles during the exhibition. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.



2005

A

- Relocation of the China Pavilion to the Arsénale

B

- 51st Venice Biennale
- June 12 – November 6
- 73 participating nations

C

- *The Experience of Art—Always a Little Further*
- Maria de Corral, Rosa Martinez

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Barbara Kruger
- International Prize/Golden Lion for best national representation – French Pavilion
- Golden Lion for best in International Exhibition – Thomas Schütte
- Golden Lion for best young artist – Regina José Galindo

E

- Kimsooja

G

- 6th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Sunjung Kim
- Exhibitors – Kim Beom, Sora Kim, Gimhongsok, Nakyoung Sung, Sungsic Moon, Kiwon Park, Park Sejin, Bahc Yiso, Nakhee Sung, Bae Young-whan, Heinkuhn Oh, Jewyo Rhii, Yeondoo Jung, Choi Jeong Hwa, Ham Jin

H

- 1st enactment of the Korean Pavilion operating policies (December 26)

I

- Foundation of Arts Council Korea founded (Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, founded in 1973) 1st Chairperson, Kim Byeong-ik
- Renaming of Marronnier Art Center to ARKO Art Center

J

- Inauguration of the Gwangju Design Biennale
- The Frankfurt Book Fair hosted South Korea as the Guest of Honor.



2006

I

- Declaration of the future plan of the Arts Council Korea (ARKO Vision 2010)
- Joining the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) as a full member

J

- Passing of Nam June Paik in Miami
- 6th Gwangju Biennale *Fever Variations* (Artistic Director: Kim Hong-hee)

K

- North Korea's first nuclear test



2007

A

- The Italian Pavilion at Giardini was relocated and opened behind the Arsenale.

B

- 52nd Venice Biennale
- June 10 – November 21
- 76 participating nations

C

- *Think with Senses, Feel with Mind*
- Robert Storr

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Malick Sidibé
- Golden Lion for an artist of the international exhibition – León Ferrari
- Golden Lion for a young artist – Emily Jacir
- Golden Lion for a critic or art historian for contributions to contemporary art – Benjamin H.D. Buchloh
- Golden Lion for best national participation – Hungarian Pavilion

F

- Lee Ufan's solo exhibitoin

G

- 7th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Soyeon Ahn
- Exhibitor – Hyungkoo Lee

H

- The Korean Pavilion presents a solo exhibition of a single artist for the first time.

I

- Academic seminar held on the documentation project of Korean modern and contemporary art history at the ARKO Arts Information Center
- Inauguration of the 2nd Chairperson, Kim Jung-heon

J

- Participation of Korea at the ARCO International Contemporary Art Fair in Spain as the first guest country of honor from Asia

K

- South Korea-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) concluded
- Appointment of Ban Ki-moon as the 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations



A

- Reappointment of Paolo Baratta as President of Venice Biennale Foundation

I

- Inauguration of the 2nd term committee

J

- Opening of Nam June Paik Art Center (Inaugural Director: Young-chul Lee)
- 7th Gwangju Biennale *Annual Report: A Year in Exhibitions* (Artistic Director: Okwui Enwezor, Curator: Hyunjin Kim, Ranjit Hoskote)
*A foreign artistic director was appointed for the first time.

K

- 17th President Lee Myung-bak sworn in
- Global financial crisis



▼ The late Okwui Enwezor, artistic director for the 2015 Venice Biennale, guiding musician Ye (Kanye West) during his visit. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.



2009

A

- The 1st-ever joint exhibition by the Danish and Nordic Pavilions at the Venice Biennale
- Conversion of the former Italian Pavilion in the Giardini to the current Central Pavilion

B

- 53rd Venice Biennale
- June 7 – November 22
- 77 participating nations

C

- *Making Worlds*
- Daniel Birnbaum

D

- Golden Lions for lifetime achievement – Yoko Ono and John Baldessari
- Golden Lion for best artist of the exhibition – Tobias Rehberger
- Silver Lion for the most promising young artist of the exhibition – Nathalie Djurberg
- Golden Lion for best national participation – American Pavilion

E

- Koo Jeong A, Haegue Yang

F

- Atta Kim's solo exhibition

G

- 8th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Eungie Joo
- Exhibitor – Haegue Yang

H

- Lecture of Eungie Joo and Haegue Yang and screening of Haegue Yang's new video work (Seminar Room, ARKO Art Center)
- *An Offering: A Public Resource* (Art Sonje Center) conducted as a side project to the Korean Pavilion; over 1,500 books donated are now housed in the Korea National University of Arts library.

I

- Inauguration of the 3rd Chairperson, Kwang-su Oh (2nd Korean Pavilion commissioner)
- The 1st invitation program for overseas artists
- A symposium held to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the ARKO Art Center



2009

J

- *Your Bright Future: 12 Contemporary Artist from Korea*, LACMA, the Houston Museum of Fine Arts
- Establishment of Korea Creative Content Agency

K

- Outbreak of novel influenza A



2010

A

- The 1st edition of the Kids' Carnival ran February 6–16: a special program of educational activities dedicated to children, families, and the general public, connected to the Venice Carnival
- Official opening of the Venice Biennale Library inside the Central Pavilion

I

- Inauguration of the 3rd term committee
- Separation of the ARKO Arts Library & Information Center (Arts Library) and establishment of the National

Arts Archive (now ARKO Arts Archive)

- Opening of Artist House

J

- Establishment of the International Biennale Association (Inaugural Chairman: Yongwoo Lee, President of Gwangju Biennale Foundation)
- 8th Gwangju Biennale *10000 Lives* (Artistic Director: Massimiliano Gioni)

K

- G20 summit in Seoul



▼ View of the reading room of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea, 2024. Photo by CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.



2011

A

- Film director Kim Ki-duk won the Golden Lion award for *Pieta*.

B

- 54th Venice Biennale
- June 4 – November 7
- 89 participating nations

C

- ILLUMInations
- Bice Curiger

D

- Golden Lions for lifetime achievement – Elaine Sturtevant, Franz West
- Golden Lion for best artist of the exhibition – Christian Marclay
- Silver Lion for the most promising young artist of the exhibition – Haroon Mirza
- Golden Lion for best national participation – German pavilion

G

- 9th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Yun Cheagab
- Exhibitor – Lee Yongbaek

I

- Introduction of the selective funding scheme for public art
- Introduction of the cultural voucher card system

J

- Amendment of provisions relating to artworks for new buildings in the Culture and Arts Promotion Act

K

- Enforcement of South Korea-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA)
- Death of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il



2012

H

- Introduction of the public recommendation system for the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale commissioner (now curator)

I

- Inauguration of the 4th term committee and the 4th Chairperson, Young-bin Kwon
- Launching ceremony of the Arts Tree Campaign

J

- Invitation of artists Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho, and Haegue Yang to the 13th dOCUMENTA in Kassel
- *Dansaekhwa: Korean Monochrome Painting*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA)
- 9th Gwangju Biennale *Round Table* (Artistic Directors: Sunjung Kim and 5 others)

K

- Yeosu Expo



▼ The late artist Park Seo-bo and the late Young-bin Kwon (4th ARKO Chairperson) conversing at the opening of the Collateral Event *Dansaekhwa* in 2015. Photo by Kyoung-yun Ho.



2013

B

- 55th Venice Biennale
- June 1 – November 24
- 88 participating nations

C

- *The Encyclopedic Palace*
- Massimiliano Gioni

D

- Golden Lions for lifetime achievement – Marisa Merz and Maria Lassnig
- Golden Lion for best artist of the exhibition – Tino Sehgal
- Silver Lion for the most promising young artist of main exhibition – Camille Henrot
- Golden Lion for best national participation – Angolan Pavilion

F

- *Who is Alice?*, organized by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA)
- *Corea Campanella* organized by Total Museum of Contemporary Art

G

- 10th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Seungduk Kim
- Exhibitor – Kimsooja

H

- Signing of an MOU by the Arts Council Korea, MMCA, and the Gwangju Biennale to promote the globalization of South Korean visual arts and international exchanges

I

- Declaration of the future plan of Arts Council Korea (ARKO Vision 2020)
- Roundtable discussion on “Today and Tomorrow of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale” (Artist House)

J

- MMCA opened its Seoul branch, MMCA Seoul.
- The 1st Pyeongchang Biennale and the 1st Gangwon International Art Exhibition

K

- 18th President Park Geun-hye sworn in



D

- Minsuk Cho wins Golden Lion for *Crow's Eye View: The Korean Peninsula* with the keyword 'tragedy of division' at the 14th Venice Architecture Biennale

I

- Merger of the National Arts Archive (now ARKO Arts Archive) into Arts Council Korea
- Relocation of the headquarters of Arts Council Korea to Naju, Jeollanam-do
- Okwui Enwezor's special lecture "Intense Proximity: Contemporary Art between Near & the Far," held at Artist House

J

- 2014 AICA (International Association of Art Critics) Seoul Congress held at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) Seoul
- 10th Gwangju Biennale *Burning Down the House* (Artistic Director: Jessica Morgan)

K

- Asian Games held in Incheon



▼ Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion Catalogs (1995-2019)
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea. Photo by
CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho.



2015

A

- Yongwoo Lee selected as the first South Korean curator to serve on the jury of the Venice Biennale

B

- 56th Venice Biennale
- May 9 – November 22
- 88 participating nations

C

- *All The World's Futures*
- Okwui Enwezor

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – El Anatsui
- Golden Lion for best artist in the central exhibition – Adrian Piper
- Silver Lion for a promising young artist – Im Heung-soon
- Golden Lion for best national participation – Armenia Pavilion
- Special Golden Lion for services to the arts – Susanne Ghez

E

- Ayoung Kim, Hwayeon Nam, Im Heung-soon

F

- *Dansaekhwa* organized by Boghossian Foundation, hosted by Kukje Gallery

G

- 11th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – Sook-Kyung Lee
- Exhibitors – Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho

H

- Symposium “Exhibition Results of the Korean Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale” (Artist House)
- Return exhibition of the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale’s Korean Pavilion (ARKO Art Center)

I

- Inauguration of the 5th term committee and the 5th Chairperson, Myung Jin Park



▼ Artist Im Heung-soon, awarded the Silver Lion for his work exhibited at the main exhibition of the Venice Biennale in 2015, with then Director of ARKO Art Center Hyunjin Kim (Curator of the 2019 Korean Pavilion).



2016

I

- Consultative meeting held to review the feasibility of the Korean Pavilion expansion for the Venice Art and Architecture Biennale

J

- Release of the "Statement on Sexual Violence in the Art World" in December by the Association of Women Artists (AWA)
- 11th Gwangju Biennale *The Eighth Climate (What does art do?)* (Artistic Director: Maria Lind)

K

- AlphaGo versus Lee Sedol Go match



2017

A

- “Nexus Pavilion,” an international symposium on the relationship and exchange between technology, art, and science, held at the Venice Biennale headquarters in cooperation with the European Union.

B

- 57th Venice Biennale
- May 13 – November 26
- 80 participating nations

C

- *Viva Arte Viva*
- Christine Macel

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Carolee Schneemann
- Golden Lion for best artist in the central exhibition – Franz Erhard Walther
- Silver Lion for most promising young artist in the central exhibition – Hassan Khan
- Golden Lion for best national participation – German Pavilion
- Special mention as national participation – Brazilian Pavilion (Cinthia Marcelle)
- Special mentions – Charles Atlas, Petrit Halilaj

E

- Sung Hwan Kim, Yeesookyung

G

- 12th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – ARKO, Arts Council Korea
- Artistic Director/Curator – Lee Daehyung
- Exhibitors – Lee Wan, Cody Choi

H

- Introduction of the public recommendation system for the Venice Art Biennale’s Korean Pavilion commissioner and renaming of commissioner to curator

I

- Inauguration of the 6th term committee
- Served as commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale
- Conducted the second phase of the feasibility research for the reconstruction of the Korean Pavilion, received the final report, and agreed on the expansion plan



2017 2018

J

- Opening of the Nam June Paik Memorial House (on the site of his former home in Changshin-dong)

K

- 19th President, Moon Jae-in sworn in

H

- Return exhibition of the 2017 Venice Art Biennale's Korean Pavilion (ARKO Art Center)

I

- Establishment of the ARKO Innovation TF
- Inauguration of the 7th Chairperson, Park Jong Kwan
- Preparation of a master plan for the expansion and renovation of the Korean Pavilion and signing of a contract (Mancuso e Serena Architetti Associati)

J

- 12th Gwangju Biennale, *Imagined Boundaries* (Curators: Clara Kim, Yeonsim Jung, and 11 others)
- * Adoption of a multi-curator system, not the previous single-artistic-director system

K

- Pyeongchang Winter Olympics



2019

A

- Sunjung Kim selected to serve on the jury of the Venice Biennale

B

- 58th Venice Biennale
- May 11 – November 24
- 90 participating nations

C

- *May You Live in Interesting Times*
- Ralph Rugoff

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Jimmie Durham
- Golden Lion for best artist of the central exhibition – Arthur Jafa
- Silver Lion for the most promising young artist of the exhibition – Haris Epaminonda
- Golden Lion for best national participation – Lithuanian Pavilion

E

- Suki Seokyeong Kang, Lee Bul

F

- *Tilted Scenes—What Do You See*, organized by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), and Yun Hyong-keun's solo exhibition
- *Lee Kang-So* organized by Gallery Hyundai

G

- 13th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – ARKO, Arts Council Korea
- Curator – Hyunjin Kim
- Exhibitors – Hwayeon Nam, siren eun young jung, Jane Jin Kaisen

H

- Termination of the lease contract for the Korean Pavilion site

I

- Declaration of the future plan of Arts Council Korea (ARKO Vision 2030)
- "2019 Documentation Research Series 001" organized by the ARKO Arts Archive conducted by Eun Jeong Kim (Korean Pavilion Manager)
- Submission of the design plan for the expansion and renovation of the Korean



2019

Pavilion to the Cultural
Heritage Protection Agency in
Venice

J

- Nam June Paik retrospective
*Nam June Paik: The Future is
Now* held at Tate Modern in
London



2020

A

- It was delayed to 2021 due to the continuation of the health emergency caused by the Covid-19
- Roberto Cicutto appointed as President of Venice Biennale Foundation
- In October, during the opening week of Expo Dubai 2020, the Venice Biennale announced the start of a new structure, the Centro Internazionale della Ricerca sulle Arti Contemporanea, and the launch of a new research project; this initiative was the result of the enhancements for the Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts (ASAC) and its activities

G

- Return exhibition of the 2019 Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion (ARKO Art Center)

I

- Inauguration of the 7th term committee
- Completion of the registration of the Korean Pavilion in the Venice city building register (accatastamento)
- Research conducted on "2020 Special Study on Art Policy of the Arts Council Korea - Discovery and Collection of Data to Build an Archive of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: Focusing on Art Exhibitions from 1995 to 2015" (Lead Researcher: Geummi Kim)

J

- *Connect, BTS* held at Serpentine Gallery, London, and other exhibition spaces in 5 countries (Curator: Lee Daehyung)

K

- *Parasite*, winner of four awards at the 92nd Academy Awards
- *Dynamite* by BTS No.1 on the Billboard



2021

A

- In 2021 the Venice Architecture Biennale took place after the pandemic stopped its course in 2020

G

- Reassessment of the selection of curator for the Korean Pavilion

I

- Signing of the MSCT-ARKO joint declaration to ensure the autonomous operation of ARKO

J

- National donation of Lee Kun-hee Collection (23,000 artworks)
- 13th Gwangju Biennale *Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning* (Artistic Directors: Defne Ayas, Natasha Ginwala)

K

- Launch of space rocket Nuri



2022

A

- The Venice Art Biennale rescheduled from 2021 to 2022 due to the pandemic
- The Venice Biennale recorded the highest number of visitors (800,000, the highest attendance ever in 127 years)

B

- 59th Venice Biennale
- April 23 – November 27
- 80 participating nations

C

- *The Milk of Dreams*
- Cecilia Alemani

D

- Golden Lion for lifetime achievement – Katharina Fritsch, Cecilia Vicuña
- Golden Lion for best artist of the central exhibition – Simone Leigh
- Silver Lion for the most promising young artist of the exhibition – Ali Cherri
- Golden Lion for best national participation – British Pavilion
- Special recognition – French Pavilion, Ugandan Pavilion
- Special recognition – Shuvini Ashoona, Lynn Herschman Leeson

E

- Mire Lee, Geumhyung Jeong

F

- Lee Kun-yong organized by Gallery Hyundai

G

- 14th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – ARKO, Arts Council Korea
- Curator – Young-chul Lee
- Exhibitor – Yunchul Kim

H

- Commencement of the donation process of 3,973 design documents for the Korean Pavilion by architects Franco Mancuso and Ernesta Serena to the ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea

I

- Consul General Hyeong-Sik Kang met with Venice city councilors and Secretary General of Venice Biennale Foundation

J

- Concurrent hosting of Korea International Art Fair (KIAF) and Frieze Seoul

K

- 20th President Yoon Suk-yul sworn in



H

- Roundtable discussion "Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: Issues and Possibilities for a New Future" (October 25)
- Nationwide public hearing "Discussing the Sustainability of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale" (November 30)

I

- 50th anniversary of ARKO
- Inauguration of the 8th term committee and the 8th Chairperson, Byoung Gug Choung

J

- 14th Gwangju Biennale *soft and weak like water* (Artistic Director: Sook-Kyung Lee)
- Overseas debut of South Korean experimental art exhibition *Korean Experimental Art 1960-70s* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York

K

- Management disputes at SM Entertainment and acquisition by Kakao



▼ Professor Franco Mancuso, Korean Pavilion manager (licensed architect) Eun Jun Kim, architect Ernesta Serena, and professor Jinyoung Chun at the roundtable discussion, "Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: Issues and Possibilities for a New Future" 2023. Photo by Dayoung Lee.



2024

A

- Appointment of Pietrangelo Buttafuoco as President of Venice Biennale Foundation
- Sook-Kyung Lee selected as curator of the Japan Pavilion
- Haeju Kim selected as curator of the Singapore Pavilion

B

- 60th Venice Biennale
- April 20 – November 24
- 88 participating nations

C

- *Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere*
- Adriano Pedrosa

E

- Kim Yunshin, Kang Seung Lee

F

- *Every Island is a Mountain*, a special exhibition commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale
- *Madang—Where We Become Us*, a special exhibition commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Gwangju Biennale

G

- 15th Korean Pavilion
- Commissioner – ARKO, Arts Council Korea
- Curators – Seolhui Lee, Jacob Fabricius
- Exhibitor – KOO JEONG A

I

- 50th anniversary of AKRO Art Center

J

- 30th anniversary of the Gwangju Biennale

K

- 140th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between South Korea and Italy



Biography

Seok Chul Kim (1943–2016)

Seok Chul Kim graduated from Kyunggi High School and studied at Seoul National University, where he majored in Architecture. He studied under the direction of Kim Chung-up and Kim Swoo Geun. In 1970, Seok Chul Kim founded the Research Institute for Convergence Science at Seoul National University with Huichun Kim and Chang-geol Cho, and in the same year, he published the first issue of Contemporary Architecture, for which he was the chief editor. Kim then established the Archiban Seok Chul Kim & Associates in 1972. He was a visiting professor at multiple universities, including the IUAV University of Venice (Venice, Italy), Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation (New York, U.S.A), Tsinghua University (Beijing, China), and Chongqing University (Chongqing, China). Kim also served as the chair professor at the University of Venice and Myongji University as well as Dean Emeritus of the Myongji University College of Architecture. Kim's key architectural works include the Seoul Arts Center, for which he was awarded the Commandeur of the Order of the Star of the Italian Solidarity by the Italian government; Shinyoung Cinema Museum in Jeju, which won the Gold Award presented by ARCASIA Awards for Architecture; HANSSEM Shihwa Factory, winner of the Grand Prize of the first Korean Architecture Award; Cinecity and HANSSEM DBEW Research Center, for which he won the Grand Prize of the 1st Architect of the Year Awards; and the Korean Pavilion of the Venice Biennale that he designed in cooperation with Professor Franco Mancuso. Kim was also behind many urban planning and design projects, including the Hangang Master Plan and Yeouido Development plan, which were the first ever reformation plans for the City of Seoul, Jahra new town in Kuwait, iCBD, the creative urban hub of Beijing in the university district, Nanhu Culture and Tourism City that passed the final deliberations of the City of Chongqing; and Baku new town, which was promoted by the presidents of South Korea and Azerbaijan. Some notable writings by Kim include *Seok Chul Kim's World Architecture Tour* (Changbi Publishers, 2000), *A Stroll through 20th Century Architecture* (Thinking Tree Publishing Co., 2002), *URBAN DREAMS* (Archiworld, 2007), and *Hieroglyphs of Space* (Thinking Tree Publishing Co., 2009).

Sunjung Kim (b.1965)

Sunjung Kim worked as Chief Curator/Deputy Director (1993–2004) and director (2016–2017) of Art Sonje Center in Seoul, where she is currently Artistic Director (2022–). She is also chair of ICOM Republic of Korea (2023–) and board member of ICOM ASPAC (International Council of Museums Asia-Pacific Alliance). She was selected as Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion for the Venice Biennale (2005), and Artistic Director of ACC Archive & Research at Asia Art Culture Center (2014–2015), and President of Gwangju Biennale Foundation (2017–2021). Additionally, she is founder and Artistic Director of REAL DMZ PROJECT, an art and research project designed to cross the boundaries of art institutions and launched to explore the (in)visible borders of DMZ through the critical lens of art and to raise awareness about the division of Korea since 2011. At Art Sonje Center, she has curated exhibitions since 2007 focusing on artists such as Martin Creed, Kim Beom, Haegue Yang, Lee Bul, Sung Hwan Kim, Abraham Cruzvillegas, among others. Furthermore she co-curated Heidi Bucher and Tarek Atoui's show in 2023 and Rinus Van de Velde's show in 2024.

Seungduk Kim (b.1954)

Seungduk Kim was born in South Korea, and lives in Paris. In 2000, she joined Le Consortium, the contemporary art center (Dijon, France), where she now works as Co-Director. She was also invited as Associated Curator in the Collection dept. at the National Museum of Modern Art, George Pompidou Center (1996–1998), Project Director/Art Consultant on an overall art strategy for Urban development in Doha, Qatar (2011–2013), and Committee Member of Programmation for Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2011–2017). She was selected as Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion for the Venice Biennale (2013), and among many important international shows; Lynda Benglis traveling shows; Yayoi Kusama traveling shows, APAP 2007, Valencia Biennale 2005, and *Flower Power*, Lille 2004. Asia Culture Center, Artistic Director for common space area (along with Franck Gautherot as Le Consortium team) 2014–2016. She was awarded Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres by French Ministry of Culture, in July 2022.

Hyunjin Kim (b.1975)

Hyunjin Kim is curator and writer in Seoul. Kim has worked independently on her own exhibitions and curatorial projects for many years, and she also held various positions, including Artistic Director of Incheon Art Platform (2021), Director of Arko Art Center, Seoul (2014–2015), and Co-Curator of the 7th Gwangju Biennale (2008). As Lead Curator for Asia at KADIST (2018-2020), Kim curated her three-year regional program and the touring exhibition *Frequencies of Tradition*. At the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019, she curated *History Has Failed Us, but No Matter* for the Korean Pavilion. Her numerous exhibition includes *2 or 3 Tiger* (HKW, Berlin, 2017), *Two Hours* (Tina Kim Gallery, New York, 2016), *Plug-In #3: Undeclared Crowd* (Van abbe museum, Eindhoven, 2006).

Kim Hong-hee (b.1948)

Dr. Kim Hong-hee, now Chairperson of Board, Nam June Paik Cultural Foundation, had served as Director of Seoul Museum of Art (2012-2016); Director of Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art (2006-2010); and Director of Ssamzie Space (1998-2008), the first alternative art space in South Korea. With her main field of expertise in video art and feminist art, she has been working as art historian, curator, and critic. Her main activities include a member of the Finding Committee of Kassel Documenta 14 (2013); Artistic Director of the Gwangju Biennale (2006); Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at Venice Biennale (2003); Commissioner of the Gwangju Biennale (2000); Curator of special exhibition *InfoART* of Gwangju Biennale (1995). In 1998 Kim received her Ph.D. with a dissertation on feminist video from Hongik University in Seoul, and in 1989 her master's degree from Concordia University in Montreal with a thesis on Nam June Paik's video art. Her main publications include *Curators Live Off Artists* (Noonbit, 2014); *True Color of Curator* (Hangil Art, 2012); *Good Morning Mr. Paik* (Design House, 2007); *Women and Art* (Noonbit, 2003); *Feminism. Video. Art* (Jaewon, 1998).

Kyung-mee Park (b.1957)

Kyung-mee Park has been running PKM Gallery since she founded it in 2001. She completed her undergraduate studies in the Department of English Language and Literature in 1980 and obtained her master's

degree in Fine Arts in 1983 from Ewha Womans University in Seoul. Before her role at PKM Gallery, Park held the position of Director at Kukje Gallery in Seoul from 1989 to 2000. She also served as Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001, where she presented artists Do Ho Suh and Michael Joo.

Misook Song (b. 1943)

Misook Song graduated with a B.A. in French at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, and then went to earn her M.A. and Ph.D. in art history at University of Oregon and Pennsylvania State University, respectively. She was appointed Professor of Sungshin Women's University in Seoul in 1982 and currently holds title as Professor Emeritus. Song has served many positions over the years, including Chairwoman of the founding committee and the first Vice President of the Association of Western Art History (1989); President of the 2nd board of executives of the Association of Western Art History (1991); Curatorial Director and Advisor to director of Samsung Museum of Art (1995-1999, division of contemporary art at Hoam Museum of Art underwent name change); Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion of the 48th Venice Biennale (1999); and General/Artistic Director of the first Seoul International Media Art Biennale 2000 (now Seoul Mediacity Biennale). She also planned the 1st International Curatorial Workshop as part of the biennale in 2000 and held the 2nd International Curatorial Workshop at Art Center Nabi in 2002. In 2003, she established the Association of East Asian Art and Culture, for which Song organized symposiums and exhibitions under the themes of taeguk, feng shui, myths, and language. In 2005, she became Director of Sungshin Women's University Museum and curated the special exhibition *Map and Mapping*. Song is the author of *Art Theories of Charles Blanc, 1813-1882*, published by the UMI Research Press (Ann Arbor, MI) in 1984, and *Art History and the Modern and Contemporary* (2003), published by the Sungshin Press. Books she translated include *The American Century: Art and Culture, 1950-2000* (translation published by Jian Books, 2008) and *Kenneth Frampton's Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (translation published by Mati Books, 2017).

Soyeon Ahn (b.1961)

Born in Seoul, Soyeon Ahn studied French literature and art history at Ewha Womans University, and communication in visual art in Yonsei University. In addition to her previous positions as Senior Curator of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), South Korea, Chief Curator of Leeum Museum of Art, and Deputy Director of PLATEAU Samsung Museum of Art, she served as Co-Curator of Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Australia (1996) and Commissioner for the Korean Pavilion of Venice Biennale (2007). She has held the position of Artistic Director of Atelier Hermès in Seoul since 2020. Among her curated exhibitions are major solo exhibitions Michelangelo Pistoletto (1994), Nam June Paik (2000), Lee Bul (2002), Ahn Kyuchul (2004), Matthew Barney (2005), Hyungkoo Lee_ *The Homo Species* (Korean Pavilion, Venice, 2007), Felix González-Torres (2012), Bae Young-Whan (2012), Takashi Murakami (2013), Gimhongsok (2013), Minsuk Cho (2014), Elmgreen & Dragset (2015), Minouk Lim (2015), Cyprien Gaillard (2020), Laure Prouvost (2022), Hwayeon Nam (2022), Meena Park (2023), Claire Fontaine (2024), along with numerous group exhibitions including *Tiger's Tail* (Venice, 1995), *Mind Space* (2003), *Symptoms of Adolescence* (2006), *(Im)Possible Landscape* (2013), *Spectrum-Spectrum* (2014) and *Elsewhere* (2020).

Jacob Fabricius (b.1970)

Jacob Fabricius is Director of Art Hub Copenhagen in Denmark (2021–present). Prior to this, Fabricius was Artistic Director at Kunsthall Aarhus (2016–2021), where he curated several exhibitions by South Korean artists. In 2019, he was appointed as Artistic Director for the Busan Biennale in 2020 and curated *Words at an Exhibition: an exhibition in ten chapters and five poems*. Fabricius has also served as Director at Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Denmark (2013–2014), Artistic Director at Malmö Konsthall, Sweden (2008–2012), Associate Curator at Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Spain (2006–2008) and at Cneai = Centre National Édition Art Image, France (2015–2016), and Artistic Director of Contour (2013), 6th Biennial of Moving Image, Belgium (2012–2013).

Haegue Yang (b.1971)

Haegue Yang lives and works between Berlin and Seoul. Spanning a vast range of media—from collage to kinetic sculpture and room-scaled installations—Yang’s work links disparate histories and traditions in her distinctive visual idiom. The artist draws on a variety of craft techniques and materials, and the cultural connotations they carry: from drying racks to venetian blinds, *hanji* to artificial straw. Yang’s multisensory environments activate perception beyond the visual, creating immersive experiences that treat issues such as labor, migration, and displacement from the oblique vantage of the aesthetic. Her recent solo exhibitions have taken place at venues including: Helsinki Art Museum (2024); National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2023), S.M.A.K. – Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent (2023); Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2023); SMK – National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen (2022); MMCA, Seoul (2020); Tate St Ives (2020); MoMA – The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2019); and Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2018).

Kwang-su Oh (b. 1938)

Kwang-su Oh graduated from Hongik University, College of Fine Arts with a bachelor’s degree in Oriental Painting. He made his debut as an art critic on the Dong-A Ilbo Annual Literary Contest, Division of Art Criticism in 1963 and has been working actively as an art critic and visual arts expert ever since. He gave lectures at Hongik University, Ewha Womans University, and Chung-Ang University. Oh served as the editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *SPACE*, and was among the juries of the Hankook Ilbo Art Awards, Dong-A Art Festival, and Korea National Art Exhibition. Oh represented South Korea at the International Festival of Painting Cagnes-sur-Mer (1985) and the 47th Venice Biennale’s Korean Pavilion as Commissioner (1997), and then was named Artistic Director of the Gwangju Biennale (2000) and chairman of the organizing committee of the Seoul Mediacity Biennale (2006). After serving as a specialist at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), South Korea and a member of the 2nd committee of Arts Council Korea (ARKO), he held office as Director of the Whanki Museum, MMCA (1999-2003), and Museum SAN, as well as Chairperson of ARKO. Most prominent publications by Oh include *Notes on Korean Modern Art Concepts* (Iljisa, 1987), *Korean Art Scene* (The Chosun Ilbo, 1988),

The Aesthetic Consciousness of Korean Contemporary Art (Jaewon, 1995), *Told Korean Contemporary Art*, *Korean Contemporary Art Stories* (Jungwoosa, 1998), *Finding 21 Korean Contemporary Artists* (Sigong Art, 2003), and *100 Years of Korean Art: From the 1910s to the 2010s* (Maronie Books, 2023).

Yun Cheagab (b. 1968)

Yun Cheagab majored in art history and theory at Hongik University in South Korea, studied Chinese art history and Indian art history at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in China and Tagore University in India, respectively. Yun was Co-Director of Alternative Space LOOP (2003-2006) and Director of Arario Gallery (Seoul, Beijing, and New York), from 2005 to 2010. Notable exhibitions curated by Yun include *Korean Contemporary Art: Plastic Garden* (2010, Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum), *Borderless Generation: Contemporary Art of Latin America* (2009, KF Gallery at the Korea Foundation Cultural Center), *Absolute Image: Chinese Contemporary Art* (2007, Arario Gallery New York), *Hungry God* (2007, Busan Museum of Art), and *Move on Asia* (2006, Seoul-Tokyo-Nagoya-Osaka), all of which he organized as an independent curator. He was Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), Artistic Director of the 2016 Busan Biennale held under the theme *Hybridizing Earth, Discussing Multitude*, and Director of the How Art Museum in Shanghai, China (2012-2024). Since 2024, Yun has been serving as Director of Ground Seoul.

Lee Daehyung (b.1974)

Curator and art consultant, Lee launched the international art project *CONNECT, BTS*, with Serpentine Galleries in London, Gropius Bau in Berlin, Kirchner Cultural Centre (CCK) in Buenos Aires, DDP in Seoul and Brooklyn Bridge Foundation in New York. From 2013 to 2019, as Hyundai Motor Company's founding Art Director, he facilitated partnerships with Tate Modern, MMCA, LACMA, and Bloomberg. He curated the Korean Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. Currently, he is a board member of Nam June Paik Cultural Foundation and Art Center Nabi, and serves on the international advisory board for the ArtScience Museum in Singapore. Additionally, he was Executive Co-Producer for Nam

June Paik's film *Moon Is the Oldest TV*, screened at Sundance, V&A, Guggenheim, and MoMA in 2023.

Seolhui Lee (b.1987)

Seolhui Lee is Chief Curator at Kunsthal Aarhus in Denmark (2023–present). She previously served as head of Exhibition Team for the Busan Biennale (2020), was Curator at Seoul Museum of Art (2018–2019), and worked for the *Korea Artist Prize* 2012 at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), South Korea (2012–2013). In addition, Lee has served as Adjunct Professor at Korea National University of Arts (2019–2022) and Kaywon University of Art & Design, South Korea (2022–2023). In conjunction with her studies, Lee's essays have been published in *Korean Contemporary Art Since 1990* (2017) and *Reading Korean Contemporary Art with Keywords* (2019). She is also a contributor for various art publications, including the contemporary South Korean art magazine *Art In Culture* since 2020.

Sook-Kyung Lee (b.1969)

Dr. Sook-Kyung Lee is Director of the Whitworth and Professor of Curatorial Practices at The University of Manchester. She was Artistic Director of the 14th Gwangju Biennale in 2023, titled *soft and weak like water*, which explored themes of resistance, indigeneity, decoloniality, and ecology. Lee was Senior Curator, International Art at Tate Modern, working in exhibitions, collection displays and acquisitions, she also headed a major multi-year research initiative Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational at Tate Modern, overseeing its strategic vision and associated programming. Lee served as Commissioner and Curator of the Korea Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015 and Curator of the Japan Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024. Selected exhibitions include *A Year in Art: Australia 1992* (Tate Modern, 2021–2023), *Nam June Paik* (Tate Modern, Stedelijk Amsterdam, Museum of Modern Art San Francisco, National Gallery Singapore, 2019–2022), and *Doug Aitken: The Source* (Tate Liverpool, 2012).

Young-chul Lee (b. 1957)

Young-chul Lee is curator, art critic, and expert in art institution operations and urban public design. He graduated from Korea University in 1983 with a bachelor's degree in sociology and earned his master's degree in aesthetics from Seoul National University in 1986. He then joined the Ph.D. program in art history at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (1995–1996), and returned to South Korea to serve as Artistic Director of the second edition of the Gwangju Biennale (1997). Lee was also a member of Research Society of Art Criticism, one of the people's arts and culture movement organizations, from 1989 until its dissolution in 1993. He co-curated *Across the Pacific* (1993) at the Queens Museum of Art in New York, after which he relocated to the United States and prepared to open a non-profit gallery in SoHo, New York. He was Professor at Kaywon University of Arts & Design from 1998 to 2022, Artistic Director of Anyang Public Art Project (2005), Artistic Director of the 2nd Gwangju Biennale (1997), Co-Curator of the 2nd Pusan (Busan) International Contemporary Art Festival (2000), and the first Director of Nam June Paik Art Center (2008). More recently, he served as the first President of the Institute of Asian Cultural Development (now Asia Culture Institute) and the first Artistic Director of the Asia Culture Center, as well as Curator of the Korean Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022). Lee is also the editor and author of many publications, including *30 Critical Essays on Contemporary Art* (JoongAng Ilbo, 1987), *Contemporary Art and the Theory of Modernism*, *The Topography of Contemporary Art*, and *A Preview of the 20th Century* (Sigakgwa Eoneo, 1996-1997).

Lee Yil (1932-1997)

Lee Yil was born in Gangseo, Pyeongannum-do. While studying French language and literature at Seoul National University, he went to France in 1956 and completed his study in French literature and art history at Sorbonne, and began to work as Paris correspondent for Chosun Ilbo. He returned to South Korea and was appointed as Professor at Hongik University in 1966 and assigned to be a dedicated art writer of Donga Ilbo in 1968. He was a founding member of the Korean Avant-Garde Association and played a role in publishing its journal AG in 1969, significantly contributing to a higher awareness of the concept

of art criticism and critic in the South Korean art world. He served as a jury of the Tokyo International Print Biennale (1972), Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at the Paris Biennale (1975), jury of the Cagnes International Painting Festival in France (1977), and Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at the 46th Venice Biennale (1995). Lee served as an operating committee member and jury of the Seoul International Print Biennale, the Taipei International Print Biennale, the Seoul International Art Festival as well as President of the Korean Art Critics Association (1986-1992). His major publications include *The Face of Korean Art Now* (Space magazine, 1982), *The vision of Contemporary art* (Mijinsa, 1985), *Reduction and Expansion in Contemporary Art* (Youlhwadang, 1991). He also led the Korean Art Critics Association to first publish Korean art critics review in 1986. After Lee passed away in January 1997, he received the Order of Bogwan Culture Merit in 1999 and the Special Merit Award by International Association of Art Critic in 2014.

Jane da Mosto (b.1966)

Jane da Mosto (University of Oxford and Imperial College London) is environmental scientist and activist based in Venice, co-founder and Executive Director of the NGO We are here Venice (WahV). Operating across disciplines, WahV has a mission to ensure Venice remains a living city and to highlight the interdependence of the urban and lagoon systems. Interdisciplinary projects address the biodiversity and climate crises while developing a new paradigm for development based on Venice's natural capital via regeneration of wetlands.

Eungie Joo (b.1969)

Eungie Joo is curator and head of Contemporary Art at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In addition to exhibition making and collection building, Joo's curatorial practice is deeply engaged with discursive and performative practices as well as the development of new works. She has served as Artistic Director of the 5th Anyang Public Art Project/ APAP 5 (2016); Curator of Sharjah Biennial 12: *The past, the present, the possible* (2015); and Curator of the New Museum Generational Triennial: *The Ungovernables* (2012). As Director and Curator of Education and Public Programs at the New Museum from 2007-2012, Joo led the

Museum as Hub initiative and co-edited *The Art Spaces Directory* (2012) and *Rethinking Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education* (2009). She has published widely, including recent essays on the work of Cinthia Marcelle, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, and Adrián Villar Rojas. Joo was Commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009, where she presented *Condensation: Haegue Yang*.

Franco Mancuso (b.1937)

Franco Mancuso was born in Venice, where he lives and works. He has been full Professor of Urban Design at the IUAV University of Venice, and has taught in the past years as Visiting Professor at EPAU (Algeri, Algiers), Kwansei Gakuin University (Sanda/Kobe, Japan) and at CUJAE (Havana, Cuba). He has given lectures and seminars at ILAUD (International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design) in Urbino, Siena, and Venice, and in many universities and institutions in Italy and abroad. He works professionally in the field of architecture and urban design (as part of the firm Mancuso e Serena Architetti Associati), accompanying his work with publications and reports at national and international conferences on the subjects of architectural heritage valorisation in historical towns, including Venice. Due to the presence of South Korean researchers and professors at IUAV, he developed a growing interest in South Korea, participating in numerous meetings, seminars and debates organized in collaboration with Myongji University/CAMU, bringing to Seoul exhibitions and contributions related to Italy and Europe. In this context, Mancuso had the extraordinary opportunity to design, in collaboration with architect Seok Chul Kim, the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, inaugurated in 1995.

Kyoung-yun Ho (b.1981)

Kyoung-yun Ho led the archives of the special exhibition *Every Mountain is an Island* in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale as researcher. Ho worked as journalist and Chief Editor of *Art in Culture*, the South Korean monthly contemporary art magazine, between 2004 and 2015. Since her first visit to the 2005 Venice Biennale, she has overseen many exhibitions held at the Korean Pavilion until 2019 in various roles such as journalist, audience,

and participant. After she participated in the exhibition of the Korean Pavilion in 2013 as Deputy Commissioner (Commissioner Seungduk Kim, participating artist Kimsooja), Ho produced the first report (White Paper), and organized a forum titled *Today and Tomorrow of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale* (2013) held at ARKO Artist House in Seoul. She worked for the editorial team of the Korean Pavilion in 2017 (Curator Lee Daehyung) and as producer for participating artist Hwayeon Nam's artwork at the Korean Pavilion in 2019. At *Art in Culture*, in collaboration with Arts Council Korea, Ho planned and published a special edition for the Venice Biennale (2013-2015) *art in ASIA*, which was distributed at the official bookstore of the Venice Biennale. She wrote her master's thesis on *Study on the system and operation of the art exhibition of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale* (2020, Sungkonghoe University), and is currently pursuing a PhD at the Department of International Cultural Studies of Sungkonghoe University.

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* Note: In addition to above mentioned sources, the editorial team consulted other Arts Council Korea (ARKO) archival sources on the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale as follows, including but not limited to: press releases from 2009 to 2024, proceedings, contracts, drafts, and reports.



[Cover]

Collage of photos of the Korean Pavilion after its completion, 1995 (presumably)
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea
Photo by CJYART STUDIO
Junyong Cho



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Celebrating the opening of the Korean Pavilion in 1995, Kwak Hoon, *Kalpa/Sound; What Marco Polo Left Behind*, Performance
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist



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Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho, *The Ways of Folding Space & Flying*, Exhibition view, 2015
©Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho
Courtesy of Arts Council Korea and the Artist



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Celebrating the opening of the Korean Pavilion in 1995, Kwak Hoon, *Kalpa/Sound; What Marco Polo Left Behind*, Performance
Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist



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Ik-Joong Kang, *Throw everything together and add*, 1997

Courtesy of ARKO Arts Archive, Arts Council Korea and the Artist



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Chung Seoyoung, *A New Life*, 2003

Courtesy of the Artist
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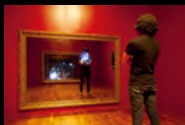
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 Courtesy of Arts Council
 Korea and Kimsooja Studio
 Photo by Jaeho Chong



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 Moon Kyungwon & Jeon
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Cody Choi, *Venetian*

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Korea and the Artist



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Yunchul Kim, *Gyre*,

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Courtesy of the Artist,

Photo by Roman März

The Last Pavilion — The Archival Publication of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

This archival publication was launched in conjunction with *Every Island is a Mountain*, a special exhibition commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

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Researchers

Bf (Kyoung-yun Ho, Dayoung Lee)

Contributors

Seok Chul Kim, Kim Hong-hee, Young-chul Lee, Jane da Mosto, Franco Mancuso & Ernesta Serena, Kyoung-yun Ho

Chronology

Dayoung Lee

Translation

Hyo Jung Kim, Yujin Moon, Sophie Soohyun Jang, Jin Young Chun, Susie Cho, Colin Mouat, Yujin Ha

English Proofreading

Young-jun Tak

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Graphic Design

Bf (Studio Eunji Jo)

Photographer

CJYART STUDIO Junyong Cho

Previous Commissioners/Curators

Lee Yil, Kwang-su Oh, Misook Song, Kyung-mee Park, Kim Hong-hee, Sunjung Kim, Soyeon Ahn, Eungie Joo, Yun Cheagab, Seungduk Kim, Sook-Kyung Lee, Lee Daehyung, Hyunjin Kim, Young-chul Lee, Seolhui Lee & Jacob Fabricius

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