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Curating Arts on the Edge of an Unstable Society

Sunyoung Oh

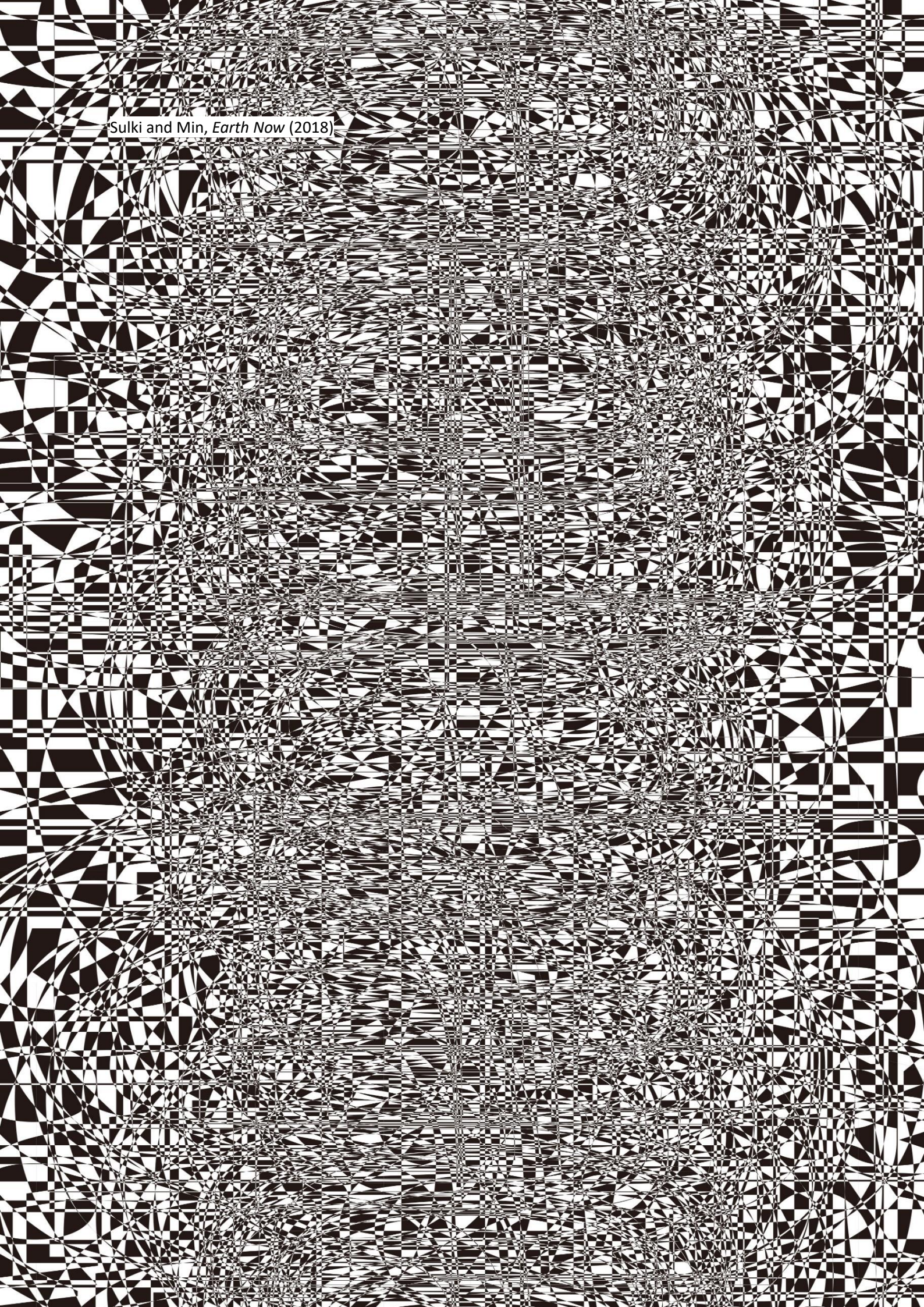
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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements
of the University of Westminster
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Sulki and Min, *Earth Now* (2018)



ABSTRACT

The curatorial practice and research of Project 7½ in Korea and Indonesia, from 2014 to 2019, aimed to consider the value of art in humanistic and existential terms, with the exhibitions and events seeking to positively impact the lives of local communities. In this respect, the commentary reflects how Project 7½ has been received and understood by audiences unfamiliar with contemporary artworks, exhibitions, and art institutions and on what kinds of projects can foster new dialogues and understandings between different social groups. Project 7½'s strategy of taking art outside the institution has sought to explore the role of socially collaborative art projects; it also underpinned its methodology of bringing artists, audiences, and other stakeholders into a dialogic or a 'Third Space' (Kester, 2004, 2011; Bhabha, 2004) to encourage all to openly discuss their different perspectives, including their understandings of art and its function/s. However, the forms of relational social engagement and their cooperative structures have followed different trajectories in the separate contexts of Korea and Indonesia. Project 7½'s approach to socially engaged art and collaboration aims to redress what the art world neglects when it operates in socially exclusive ways. Therefore, recognising 'the collaborative turn' and 'collaborative identities' of contemporary art, along with its inherent complications and potential agency, the commentary also emphasises the need to discuss the purpose of collaboration (Lind, 1999; 2005; 2007; 2009, Kester, 2006; 2011). The processes and outcomes of the projects demonstrate that socially engaged art activities intersect with other, non-artistic forms of cultural production, and along a scale from curatorial practice to social activism to radical pedagogy (Kester, 2006; 2015). The commentary argues that the development of dialogical situations, as part of collaborative processes involving targeted groups of people who do not usually attend art events, can make a significant methodological contribution to the success of a socially collaborative art project and its social value, particularly in Korea and Indonesia.

KEYWORDS. Contemporary Art, Socially Collaborative Art Projects, Relationships, Different Perspectives, Hidden and Forgotten Histories, Social Justice, Social Problems, Temporary Collectives, Solidarity, Collaboration, Social Value.

Sulki and Min, From the *Gray Letter* series (2016)

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Sulki and Min, From the *Gray Letter* series (2016)

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The long journey of Project 7½ was only made possible by the generosity of a significant number of colleagues and friends, not least the neighbours of the areas where the project was located. It is now commonplace to say that any art project is the product of collaboration rather than of singular authorship, but in this case, it has the virtue of being true. I am grateful to all participants who accompanied me on the long journey of this project process including the audience who became a part of the conversation as friendly neighbours in Mullae-dong and Jangsa-dong in Seoul. Thanks to these people, I was able to develop my thoughts constructively. Moreover, I'd like to give special thanks to the owners of the empty spaces in Seoul, who helped make the project possible. And I am grateful to Jung Heon Kim, Youngsik Choi, and all my Indonesian friends, including Ana Merliana, Ginggi Syar Hasyim, and Marco Kusumawijaya, for their generous support. I especially want to express my gratitude to Sunah Choi, Sulki Choi, Sung Min Choi, Irwan Ahmett, and Tita Salina who accompanied Project 7½ for most of the journey; their meaningful presence over the course of the project is marked by my inclusion of examples of their work between the sections of this commentary. I would like to mention the names of many more collaborators but space is limited. Finally, I would also like to thank Dr Andi Achdian and Charles Esche, who provided references supporting my PhD studies. And my deepest thanks to my supervisors Ms Tessa Peters, Dr Peter Goodwin, and Dr Clare Twomey, for sharing their time with me and listening carefully to my reflections on my experiences, enabling me to develop my ideas. As my thoughts are organised in Korean, translating my thoughts into English had to be analysed from a linguistic and cultural perspective. I would, therefore, like to express my special gratitude to Ms Tessa Peters for her generosity and broad understanding in helping me improve the English text. My final thanks are to the University of Westminster for providing the research context and the opportunity to publish this work.

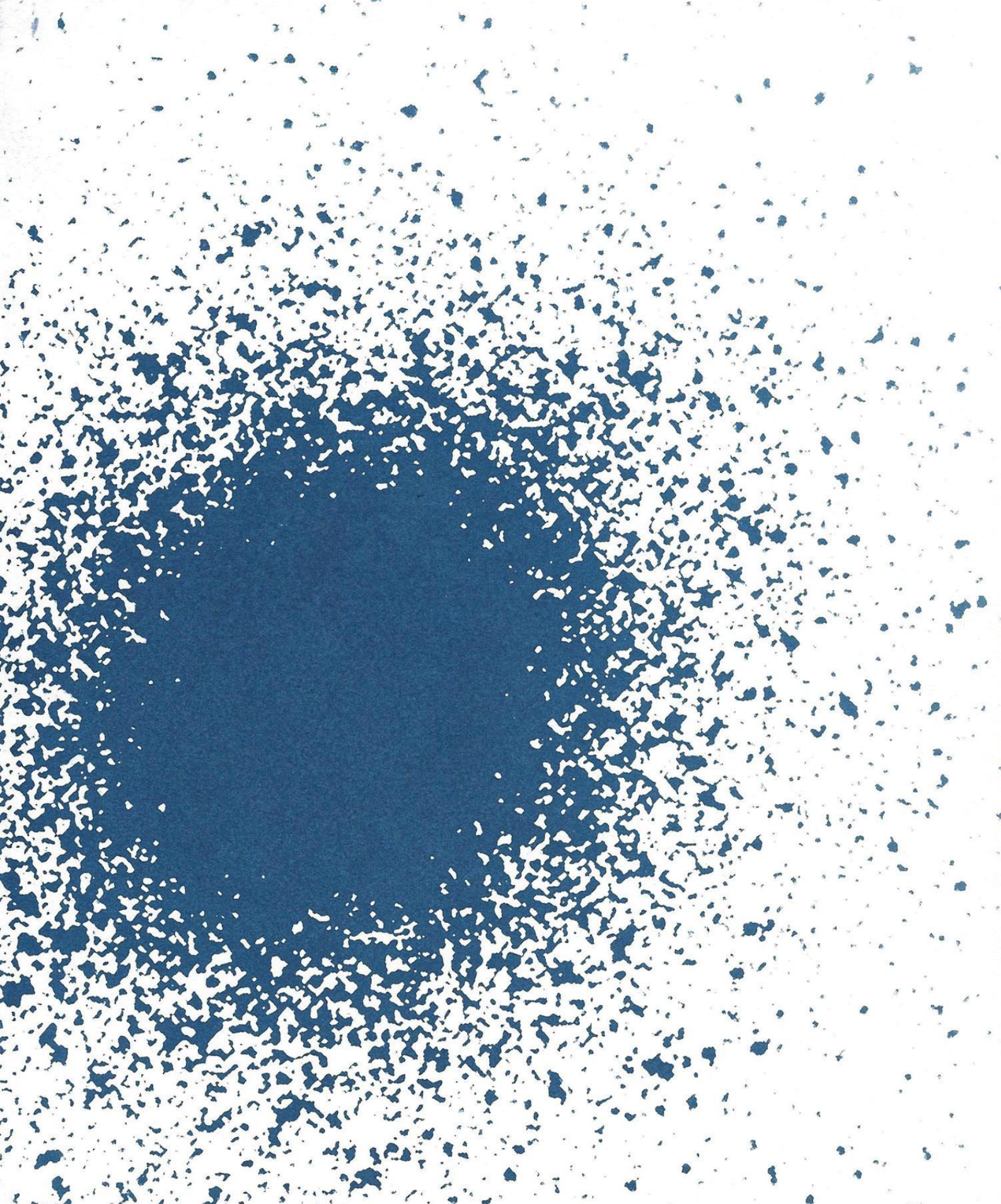
Author's declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Sunyoung Oh

1 October 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sunyoung Oh', written over the printed name.



Sunah Choi, From the *Blue Print* Series (2016)

INTRODUCTION

This commentary and accompanying portfolio of exhibitions and events, curated in Korea and Indonesia, between 2014 and 2019, under the name Project 7½¹ evidences the ways I have aimed to expand the contemporary art project's role in a social context and cultivate new locations for art in society beyond contemporary art institutions. In my curatorial practice, I have been seeking to positively impact the lives of local communities by creating new dialogical situations between art, artist and the non-art public.² In each situation, I have aimed to examine what perspectives are raised and what differences are made. The relational aspect of my curatorial practice has been to develop social connections between all participants, artists and spectators alike. Each situation has had a significant influence on the subsequent direction of Project 7½. The work of Project 7½ has involved activists, architects, actors, choreographers, educators, an experimental film director, fashion designers, historians, journalists, musicians, a philosopher, poets, a sociologist, visual artists, as well as local people and economic migrants living and working within different neighbourhoods and regions. My collaborators have also included organizations, such as the Rujak Centre for Urban Studies, Rumahtuli Jatiwangi, Jatiwangi Art Factory (all in Indonesia), Gimhae Migrant's House and Gimhae Culture Foundation (Korea).³

¹ 7½ was borrowed from the seven and a half floors in the movie *Being John Malkovich* (Dir. Spike Jonze, 1999). It underscores the project's intention to understand a range of human perspectives and to build relationships between different groups of people. This is also linked to creating a third space in which to understand the gap between the reality of people's lives and the ideals of the art world and develop new alternatives. Project 7½ started in 2014 and its work is ongoing.

² The term "non-art public" is used throughout to mean people who do not normally visit art museums and galleries. In the case of Project 7½, this sector of the audience has changed in composition from one exhibition or event to another and for each, the nature of the composition of the main audience group is indicated in the commentary.

³ The projects in Korea were funded by grants awarded by the Korean Arts Council and the Seoul Foundation of Arts

Since 2014, my curatorial practice and research have developed from a regular contemporary art world⁴ base to focus on the sector at the border of art and activism and encompass experimental productions that seek to engage with a wider public. Many of the artists I have worked with seek to understand the social circumstances of specific locations and use their creativity to improve conditions there; therefore, I have increasingly found myself working with socially and politically progressive artists. The title of my commentary, *Curating Arts on the Edge of an Unstable Society*, refers to the situation in South Korea, where social instability arises from the imbalance of power that favours *chaebols* (family-controlled corporate groups) who dominate the economy of the country, even the authority of government agencies. To acknowledge that I am working on the edge of such a society is to recognise my liminal situation as an independent curator who operates outside the mainstream art world⁵ on projects that aim to be accessible and relevant to a broad sector of society.

My curatorial work addresses the following research questions:

- How can art projects successfully facilitate new dialogues and understandings between different social groups in Korea and Indonesia?
- What kinds of social relationships, expectations, or productive acknowledgements of difference can emerge from socially collaborative art projects for Korean and Indonesian artists and communities?

and Culture. My work in Indonesia began with the active cooperation of the Indonesian Ministry of Culture and Education and the Jakarta City Government Tourism and Culture through the National Gallery of Indonesia and the Jakarta History Museum.

⁴ I use the term 'regular contemporary art world' to refer to the established functional system of museums and galleries, biennials and art fairs, also including the various professional roles of the artists, curators, critics, theorists and others that support the system and its institutions.

⁵ In this commentary, 'mainstream art world' is interchangeable with the term 'regular contemporary art world' and simply draws attention to its widely recognised and taken-for-granted character.

- What issues are at stake when considering the purpose and value of artistic interventions within community settings?

I believe that art should not be regarded as an élite sphere of production for those with specialist knowledge but should expand beyond that boundary to function productively across society, encouraging new dialogues and understandings between people to evolve. In the process of the project, I have come to understand art as a tool to raise ethical awareness and contend that Project 7½'s process of testing different collaborative approaches in various situations in Korea and Indonesia offers an alternative to the individualism of the art world. My reflections on how to develop effective collaborations that consider local, social, and economic factors have significantly informed my continuing curatorial practice.⁶

According to Tate, "Socially engaged practice, also referred to as social practice (...) can include any art form which involves people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction" (Tate, n.d.). While social engagement is clearly a part of public art projects, outreach or education programs, it is also an essential part of the practice of many artists.⁷ Socially-engaged curating—part of what has been termed the 'social turn' in art—is where

⁶ The term 'collaboration' was once used to describe "the behaviour of people who cooperate with an oppressive regime that dominates their country" (Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern World). The Oxford Dictionary of Organizational Behaviour explains that today, the term is most often used to describe, "two or more parties (individuals, groups, or organizations) working together to achieve something. Collaboration enables the bringing together of different expertise, skills, and knowledge and involves shared decision-making. This is a close, purposeful, cooperative relationship such as employees working on a joint project leading to mutual personal, social, and/or economic benefit. It is also associated with post-heroic forms of leadership in which leaders work in partnership with others, recognizing the need to work together". Definitions available at: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095623718> [Accessed 22 July 2021]

⁷ Some examples would be the 'Happenings' of Allan Kaprow (USA), the experimental pedagogy of Joseph Beuys (Germany), the environmental art of Hélio Oiticica (Brazil), the workplace residencies of the Artist Placement Group (UK), and other collaborative productions involving members of communities such as those of Tania Bruguera (Cuba), Suzanne Lacey (USA), Thomas Hirschhorn (Germany), Superflex (Denmark), Semsar Siahaan, Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, Jatiwangi Art Factory (Indonesia), and arts as a socio-political movement Sang-ho Lee, Sungdam Hong, Soon-taek Rho (Korea).

curators collaborate with artists and the non-art public in ways that seek to strengthen or repair the social bond (Kester, 2006; Bishop, 2012). Over the past five decades or so, the role of the curator has been changing, and, as Megan Johnston (2014) asserts, a curator “can no longer be the alleged standard-bearer of authority and expertise”. According to the Curatorial Dictionary: “Curatorial work no longer concerns solely the display of artworks and the task of exhibition-making; it is now also understood as a practice centred on longer-term, less object-orientated, discursive-educational projects that involve various people as instigators and actors” (Szakács, n.d.).⁸ Cognisant of this, I tend to describe my work as ‘socially collaborative’ to emphasise my aim of inclusivity to achieve positive social impact. However, it was not easy for me to find exhibitions or curatorial movements reflecting these intentions in Korea. Rather than responding to changing artist practice, curators working for institutions are often required to actively align themselves with national policy;⁹ art institutions in Korea are primarily interested in attracting audiences into art galleries, rather than expanding the role and scope of art outside the institution. In this respect, if one considers artists and exhibitions that are recognised as successful in Korean contemporary art circles, one finds that they still largely follow past models. While the curatorial approach of the Gwangju Biennale follows general global trends, it has not produced positive change in terms of social engagement in the Korean art world overall, possibly because it is only a temporary and relatively infrequent art event. By and large, the art

⁸ In Europe and the USA, expanded ‘curatorial’ work engages with social and political discourses, and in ways that are characteristically collaborative and collective in character. Eszter Szakács identifies a number of curators, critics and theorists who have discussed such social and educational turns in curating, its socio-political context, the changing role of museums, an interest in non-hierarchical methods and potential funding structures, including Beatrice von Bismarck et al, 2012; Annie Fletcher, 2005; Maria Lind 2009, 2012; Vanessa Müller, 2011; Paul O’Neill, 2007, 2010, 2012; Livia Páldi, 2011; Emily Pethick, 2011; Irit Rogoff, 2003, 2006; Anton Vidokle, 2010. See entry for: ‘Curatorial’, The Curatorial Dictionary: http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/curatorial/#_ftn8

⁹ The national policy of the Republic of Korea affects the field of culture and arts in that it has an impact on each local government’s cultural foundation through the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. As a result, the work of curators and artists needs to pay attention to current policy directives to receive state subsidies.

scene in Korea has remained the exclusive preserve of art market-orientated curators and collectors.

Between 2014 and 2016, the productions of Project 7½, presented at various sites in Seoul, aimed to find new ways to bring art out of exclusive gallery spaces and into more accessible locations to meet people—in their own locality—who do not usually visit art exhibitions. However, I noted that many Korean artists found it hard to embrace collaborative working models and share their creative credits with collaborators. In contrast, I was aware that numerous artist collectives were successfully working with local communities in Indonesia; therefore, in 2016, I decided to visit Indonesia to better understand how these collectives were organised. When developing the subsequent projects (2017 to 2019) that involved Indonesian and Korean artists collaborating with participants and audiences in different locations, I aimed to encourage conversations about people's lived experiences and recent social histories. These projects revealed buried or forgotten histories, collective memories, and unequally distributed social problems affecting the lives of the general population; they included their contributions and invited their further responses.

Sulki and Min, From the *Gray Letter* series (2016)

CONTEXT

The Relationship between the Art, Politics and Social Spheres of Korea and Indonesia

My ambitions for Project 7½ were initially influenced by the recent history of Korean art, especially the relationship between art and society. *Minjung* art¹⁰ and the anti-modernist tendency of the 1980s was associated with protests against the political oppression of the Chun Doo-hwan regime when many artists joined the democratic movement in the aftermath of the Gwangju massacre. *Minjung* art (literally, ‘people’s art’) reflected the harsh times experienced by ordinary people and Korean artists, such as Yoon Oh, Jae-hwan Joo, Jung Heon Kim, Oksang Lim, and critics such as Wan-kyung Sung and Min Choi emphasized the role of art in opposing the government. It revived popular traditions in Korean art, including Buddhist and Shamanistic art, woodcut, folk painting and mask dances. It was against élite and Western-influenced forms of art, which were thought to be escapist and not engaged in challenging the military dictatorship.¹¹ In the urgency of that decade, it was believed that it might be possible to achieve many things through art. However, works of literature, visual arts, music and movies produced within the field of anti-government activities were deemed taboo and their authors imprisoned.¹²

¹⁰ *Minjung* art was a social transformation movement centred on progressive artists in the 1980s. After the collapse of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the democratic movement took power, and the vital nature of this popular art movement weakened.

¹¹ See Birgit Mersmann. (2013). ‘Global Dawning: The Gwangju Biennial Factor in the Making and Marketing of Contemporary Asian Art’, *Third Text*, 27:4, pp. 525-535.

¹² Korean artists who could study abroad during or after Japanese Imperialism and the Korean War often came from affluent family backgrounds. After returning home, they greatly influenced the Korean culture and arts world. Artists from such a background found the creative activities of artists related to folk art relatively difficult to recognise as art.

My admiration for *Minjung* art comes from its emphasis on the role of the artist as a witness of society. It promoted critical reflection, awareness of the politics of everyday life, and the social role of art; it also helped working people to understand their own agency in addressing socio-political problems.¹³ The movement helped to bring about the social transformation that was so important to that generation.¹⁴ Collaborative in nature, *Minjung* art was opposed to the individualistic notion of artistic endeavour.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, in both Korea and Indonesia, artists' activities effectively opened up discursive spaces that engendered new possibilities afforded by postmodernism.¹⁵ Patrick D. Flores notes (with reference to Enwezor) that whereas the rupture between modernism and postmodernism in Western Eurocentrism dates from around 1968, more relevant dates in Indonesia would be 1974 with the emergence of the Indonesian New Art Movement, and 1980 in Korea, following the Gwangju uprising (2008, pp. 204-206).¹⁶

¹³ Kim, J. (2015) describes *Minjung* art as arising from two main issues: 1) "realistic critical realism," which tends to be an art transformation movement through exhibition-oriented activities, and 2) "democratic realism," which tends to value the social function of art, serving as a movement of transformation through activities in the social field. *Minjung* art divided gallery-based art from a more dynamic public-facing art, and in the context of Korea can be regarded as the start of social art practices, which began in earnest after the 2000s. See: <https://www.khan.co.kr/culture/art-architecture/article/201504172127185>

¹⁴ The late biennale director, Okwui Enwezor, likened the effect of *Minjung* to the artistic rupture in the Euro-American avant-garde that resulted from the May 1968 student protests in Paris. Flores (2008) quotes Enwezor as follows: "[The] specific example of *Minjung* represents the remarkably successful alignment of historically disparate communities - including student organizations, labour unions, and religious groups - into a cohesive movement dedicated to the redistribution of state power and the assertion of civic expression that defied modes of absolute state power" (p. 204).

¹⁵ If "realism" and "abstract painting" in the Cold War era were art languages that divided the communist and capitalist camps, Asian experimental art between the 1960s and the 1990s exposed the contradictions and absurdities caused by the Cold War through the third sector of art languages, such as performance, video, and photography.

¹⁶ In Korean modern art history, the decade from the late 1960s to the early 1970s is a period between Informal art, popular from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, and the monochromatic painting that formed the mainstream of the art scene after the mid-1970s. During this period, there was no clearly distinctive stylistic trend. Therefore, this time is regarded as a period of searching and confusion and, for a while, it was relatively neglected or not properly evaluated in art history research. New artworks performed by individual artists or small groups in that period were defined as 'experimental art', and the suitability of this designation began to be debated in the 1990s. The art of this period has been judged by the social changes in Korea, as much as artistic considerations. In-depth research to identify specific characteristics concerning the situation has been attempted only recently (Oh, 2001).

In a similar way to *Minjung*, the advanced Indonesian contemporary art of the mid-1970s New Art Movement (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia), also displayed an anti-modernist stance. The purpose of the movement was to first challenge the Indonesian art world and then the depoliticization of art under the Suharto regime. Nonetheless, the Indonesian artist, curator, critic and founder member of the New Art Movement, Jim Supangkat (2005), notes it was overtaken by the art market boom in the mid-1980s when a variety of realist paintings came to dominate. Such paintings expressed ideals of “serenity, beauty and pleasure” (Supangkat, 2005, p.219) and were praised by leading government figures of the 1980s and 1990s who saw them as displaying nationalism, whereas the Indonesian contemporary art was more concerned with social realities and critical of the government and the country’s uneven economic development; although favoured by prestigious international art events, the latter was regarded by its Indonesian critics as “a manifestation of anarchy”.¹⁷

The Asian financial crisis of 1997 would subsequently lead to widespread anti-government protests and the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998.¹⁸ Supangkat explains that a negative effect of the art market boom of the 1980s was that it had created an association between art and élite groups and, as a result, the post-Suharto movement for reform arrived at the general view

¹⁷ Supangkat asserts that, “Suharto’s regime reflected a symbiosis of heroic nationalism and international capitalism, which aimed to bring the great dream of industrial capitalism (modernisation) into reality” (2005, p.221). Under the Indonesian government of the time led by Suharto and known as ‘the New Order’ (1967-1998) many artists, such as Semsar Siahaan, Willibrordus Surendra Broto Rendra, and Wiji Tukul were killed or went missing. Semsar was a renowned human rights activist, who helped reveal the New Order’s ‘sins’ to the international world. Other contemporary Indonesian artists who have worked against the grain of government endorsement would include: Ugo and Teddy, who later developed sustainable communities of art practitioners in Jogja; Yustoni who became the long-standing president of the leftist collective Taring Padi; Ade Darmawan who would go on to co-found ruangrupa, a Jakarta based artist initiative that has been around for twenty years now, and which recently opened ruangrupa gudskul; Anusapati, one of the most influential lecturers in the Yogyakarta—Indonesia Institute of the Arts (ISI Yogyakarta); and F.X. Harsono who, along with Jim Supangkat, was one of the members of the Indonesia New Art Movement (1975-1989).

¹⁸ One might note that even after the end of the authoritarian Suharto regime, sanctions against critical art movements continued; during the student protests of 2019, Indonesian musician Ananda Badudu and filmmaker Dandy Laksono, AKA Watchdoc, who had participated in Project 7½ exhibitions, were arrested.

that art was of little use to society. This was to cause a lack of confidence among artists and much creative energy to be channelled into the production of propaganda artworks for political rallies (2005, p. 226).

The outcome of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 was different in Korea. Once the country returned to economic growth, the number of art galleries multiplied and art became a prime medium for investment (Robertson, 2018; Jackson & Park, 2012). Following the 2008 worldwide global financial crisis, the Korean art market again regained strength (Wang, 2011; Harris, 2017); however, it became more unstable overall, due to young collectors buying artworks for investment purposes. As a result, curators and critics seemed to be squeezed out—excluded from the market structure—creating a situation where it was not unusual to see collectors and art dealers trading directly with artists; in particular, the exclusion of galleries from this growing market sector has adversely affected the careers of young artists.¹⁹ Furthermore, the giant Korean corporations and prominent collectors' monopoly of the art market seemed to affect the development of Korean contemporary art in that, increasingly, young artists became attracted by financially profitable creative activities, whereas once they had pursued individual artistic interests. Such an effect of market forces on the production of art has been incisively summed up by the American art critic, Thomas McEvilley, in his assertion that: 'the problem is no longer that artworks will end up as commodities, but that they will start out as such (quoted by Wang, 2011, p. 464).

¹⁹ For an explanation of the workings of the Korean contemporary art market, see Park. Y. (2022) 'Festering conflict between galleries, auction houses laid bare in giddy Korean art market'. The Korea Herald. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20220104000767>

I had direct experience of this situation when, after working for the 2002 Gwangju Biennale, I took a position at the Artsonje Center (2002-2004),²⁰ followed by work on various international projects, such as the Venice Biennale (Korean Pavilion, 2005), Busan Biennale (2006), the Anyang Public Art Project (2007),²¹ and at the Artist Pension Trust Beijing (2008-2011). Over this period, I began to doubt the ability of Korean contemporary art to engage with society as a whole—as it had once done in the 1980s. I wondered if it was possible to recognise other values in art now that the art market had gained so much importance, and what artists might be gaining and losing from this situation?

Maria Lind has proposed an idea of 'the curatorial' which she characterizes as an attempt to create friction and experiment with new ideas.²² She describes it as:

"... not just representing but presenting and testing; it performs something here and now instead of merely mapping something from there and then. It is serious about addressing the query, what do we want to add to the world and why?" (Lind, 2009b, p. 103).

²⁰ At the Artsonje Center, Seoul, I was in charge of the museum's PR and corporate membership operations. When the Artsonje Center was first established by chaebol (the South Korean name for a large family-owned business conglomerate), it was the second private art museum for contemporary art in Korea and planned several experimental exhibitions.

²¹ From 2001 to 2007, I learned from the curating methods of several leading senior curators, how artists related to them, and the strategies of the contemporary art scene. Since that time, I have kept researching continuously in the field rather than settling down within an institution. In this process, I also gained an understanding of contemporary issues that I could not gain from theoretical study alone.

²² Lind explains that by 'the curatorial' she is referring to, "... a practice that goes beyond curating, which I see as the technical modality of making art go public in various ways. 'Curating' is 'business as usual' in terms of putting together an exhibition, organizing a commission, programming a screening series, et cetera. 'The curatorial' goes further, implying a methodology that takes art as its starting point but then situates it in relation to specific contexts, times, and questions in order to challenge the status quo. And it does so from various positions, such as that of a curator, an editor, an educator, a communications person, and so on. This means that the curatorial can be employed, or performed, by people in a number of different capacities within the ecosystem of art" (Hoffman & Lind, 2011).

Although Lind also provocatively asks if such an idea of ‘the curatorial’ “[has] produced more than an irritation in the art world, more than a temporary frisson?” and if it has “had any lasting effect on how we think about art and the rest of the world?” (Lind, 2009b, p. 103). Such questioning motivated me to develop my curatorial model. The problem I had identified was that, in conforming to the model of the Western art world, Korean curators with large budgets appeared to place emphasis on the production values of exhibitions, and to create a visual impact to gain the attention of influential figures. But meeting the expectations of art world audiences meant overlooking the interests of others and in ways that only seemed to serve to promote inequalities. Instead, I wished to find ways to narrow the gap.

By the start of the new millennium, Indonesian artists' collectives, such as Ruangrupa (from 2000) and Forum Lenteng (from 2003), had emerged as alternative forces outside Indonesian traditional art institutions;²³ I had initially become aware of these new approaches of Indonesian artists when I worked with Ruangrupa, and a founding member of Forum Lenteng,²⁴ in my first curatorial position in the art world at the Gwangju Biennale in 2002, when I assisted curators Wan-kyung Sung, Charles Esche and Hou Hanru, on the Biennale’s Project 1.²⁵ I was attracted to the activities of Indonesian artists’ collectives (as well as alternative art spaces in Korea and Indonesia) because they seemed to have the capacity to engage with social issues in ways that mainstream art institutions in Korea did not. This formative experience was also

²³ Since then, both collectives have moved towards the centre of the Indonesian art world, and are now a major influence on young artists and the wider art world.

²⁴ Forum Lenteng divided from Ruangrupa (recently stylised as ruangrupa and abbreviated as ruru) in 2003, to focus on their activities in film and media. Hafiz Rancajale the chairperson of Forum Lenteng was a member of Ruangrupa. Criteria for the membership of Ruangrupa are ambivalent. On the other hand, Forum Lenteng has strict criteria for the selection of its members.

²⁵ More information about the 4th Gwangju Biennale in 2002 is available at <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/43501/gwangju-biennale-2002/>

instrumental in leading me to further my research, which started in Korea in 2014, by visiting Indonesia in 2016 in a quest to gain a stronger understanding of socially engaged art practice.

Claire Bishop (2013), is not alone in pointing out that attempts to periodize contemporary art are mistaken, that it should not be understood as a global entity, but as a 'discursive' category. This is because the contemporary period in art can be understood to start at different points in different countries, dependent not only on factors such as regional politics, economic systems, cultural policies etc (as already discussed in terms of the recent historical circumstances of Korea and Indonesia) but on changing critical perspectives (Bishop, 2013, p 18). She invokes philosopher Peter Osborne's view that the contemporary is an 'operative fiction', as the contemporary must be recognised as linked to capitalist ideology and its need to construct the notion of a connected world (Osborne, 2013a, p. 30), whereas, Bishop notes, it is actually composed of "disjunctive global temporalities we can never grasp" (Bishop, 2013, p. 18). Although art biennales and similar international presentations give the impression that the contemporary might amount to reflecting similar kind of social experiences, in fact, the activities of Indonesian artists' collectives, such as those of Ruangrupa and Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF), provided me with distinctive models of practice to study, outside of my experience of the art world in Korea.²⁶ Such collectives have also influenced some Korean artists and yet, in Korea,

²⁶ Ruangrupa has had a great influence on young artists, mostly those with formal art education. The collective has become part of the mainstream of the Indonesian art world, notably as the principal force in creating and running the Jakarta Biennale. According to founding member Ade Darmawan, Ruangrupa began when a group of young people gathered in one space to live and work together in the late 1990s. At that time, his understanding of an alternative space was gained in Europe and, after graduating from the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, he returned home and applied it to the Indonesian situation. Within the group, there was a shared problem of "poverty," and there was a justification for carrying out community activities to overcome it. As their activities became known in Europe, the influence of artists' collectives in the Indonesian art world increased. Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF), founded by Arief Yudi, was based on the model of Ruangrupa. Its starting point was very similar: He made available part of his mother's house to young people so that they could live and work together. However, JaF had different ambitions in that its community focus included the development of the village where it is located. Recently, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of IDEAFEST2021 (<https://ideafest.id/>), JaF was honoured for its significant impact on the art industry of Indonesia.

the group activities of artists were not always so successful.²⁷ However, through my research at Jatiwangi art Factory and in working with Indonesian artists Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, I could see that these Indonesian artists could play an essential role in developing practical cooperative, socially engaged art projects.²⁸

As Ruangrupa has evolved to become an internationally recognised artist group, by the time of my first visit to Indonesia in 2016, I had found I was more attracted to study the work of JaF based in a village in Majalenka, West Java. This was mainly because JaF invited artists from *outside* their village to spend time with local people and they placed emphasis on the *quality* of this engagement, rather than primarily upon aesthetic outcomes. In addition, JaF's curatorial activities were meaningful for me because its members were part of the village community of Jatiwangi, and it seemed that their actions could lead to sustainable projects rather than temporary art events. I was inspired by the way members of the collective cooperated with visiting artists from other regions and countries, encouraging them to work with local people towards the 2016 Village Video Festival.²⁹ Of particular interest was the way in which JaF

²⁷ The reasons for failure are various, but nonetheless, it is a common problem. For example, artists Jin Shiu and Yi Joungmin, founder members of the Okin Collective, whose award-winning work focussed on social issues associated with urban development in Seoul committed suicide in 2019, following conflicts with another member of the group: <https://www.artforum.com/news/jin-shiu-and-yi-joungmin-of-south-korean-okin-collective-found-dead-80533>. mixrice, another Korean collective, comprised artists Cho Jieun and Yang Cheol-mo. However, for their work at JaF, they collaborated with the younger artists Kim Jungwon and Shin Ik-kyun, who were not recognised as equal members but served as assistants. Yang Chul-mo, a member of mixrice, whose work aimed to promote better conditions for migrant workers in Korea later withdrew from creative practice following allegations of sexual harassment in 2020: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/culture/2021/02/145_291564.html. Art Space Pool, founded in 1999, as an alternative space of the exhibition, discussion and education, curtailed its activities in 2021: <http://www.altpool.org/>

²⁸ Ahmett and Salina hope to positively influence society and do not seek the recognition of the international art world. When I asked, "If as artists your thoughts or attitudes have changed in the past few decades, how have you changed and at what stage?" they responded, "In the last few years, we have spent a lot of time abroad and gradually ... we realized that our thoughts and mindset were being 'poisoned,' as in the way to examine certain subjects, moral issues have become increasingly Westernized and politically correct. Somehow these make us suffer because many behaviours and customs that are considered common in Indonesia are immoral to the Western standard. We are still humans who naturally make mistakes and have local factors that contextually are difficult to be digested by different reasoning". (Email interview: Sunyoung Oh with Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, 10 - 26 Oct 2020)

²⁹ Village Video Festival was an international two-week residency program held between 2009 and 2018 in Jatiwangi, directed by Bandung based artist group Sunday Screen, collaborating with JaF.

members eliminated the boundaries between villagers and outsiders, instilling the sense that all were equal in their artistic activities; they transformed everyday village life into a festival atmosphere, where the general spirit of hospitality was not only extended to the artists but the whole community. The situation encouraged the visiting artists to consider new meanings and possibilities of "collaboration" through the process of completing an artwork with villagers and the enjoyment of viewing the completed production together.³⁰

Critiques of Social Engagement and Attempts to Create Social Integration through Art

Over the past three decades, I have been aware of steady developments in public art, community art and socially engaged art, and not least because these are among the art forms that attract funding from governments, who perceive their value in improving the built environment or in addressing social problems. A positive view of such projects is that artists can explore collective memory to add meaning to a place. But from the perspective of the general population, the funding of public art projects can seem little more than uninvited decorative additions to the local environment; they are often understood to reflect the interests of the public or private benefactor, rather than representing the direct concerns of a community; too many public art projects have been massive sculptures imposed on neighbourhoods not by the residents' choice but through decisions made by a government agency.³¹

An alternative positive view of the potential of art projects with ambitions of civil engagement

³⁰ Individual members of JaF are different from artists who have received regular arts education and are engaged in artistic practice. Nevertheless, their activities are well known as a group of artists worldwide.

³¹ See the article by Shin-koo Woo (2020) titled, 'The Situation and Issues of Urban Regeneration Projects for Urban Communities in South Korea' which discusses this situation in relation to recent public art projects. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/57035291/Critical_Reading_Functional_Dissonance?fbclid=IwAR3zLBHgwVjCCekmkW1FdPLhnUpNLOSjl58lfJydXbp5X5AT3ctGk-7uhs

has been raised by curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his theorisation of 'Relational Aesthetics'. In this he contends that art can be used to create a space for social experiments,³² contributing to people "learning to inhabit the world in a better way" and where "the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13). However, Juliane Rebentisch (2015) points out that one of the failings of Bourriaud's concept is, by proposing a change of focus for art from "individual reflection and aesthetic judgment" to "collective participation and open-ended encounters," he does not acknowledge that, in most cases, art tends to be a "space of privilege" (pp. 32-33). Therefore,

"... the old difference between art and life, which relational aesthetics claims to have overcome, sneaks in once again behind the agents' backs as a social difference instead of the distinction between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic" (2015, p. 32).

Among her further objections, to his theorisation of the role of art in creating social situations to be experienced or participated within directly is that, although the audience of a work of relational aesthetics is understood as forming a community (even one that is only based on a temporary coming together), the theory fails to recognise that each participant is ultimately "alone with the work" (2015, p. 38).

³² I must clarify that Nicolas Bourriaud's conceptualisation of *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), where relational art establishes new social relationships between people, is not central to my approach. According to Bourriaud, such artworks are not presented as completed entities, but their essence is only fulfilled once the artist brings spectators into space to participate in the unfinished artwork. However, he does not question the quality of relationships and the power relations within the relational artworks. In comparison, my curatorial projects include all the relationships that participants form in the process of producing artworks on-site and all the active negotiations that are subsequently derived from these and expanded. At the core of my curatorial approach is how to work with the public and empower them. Bourriaud argues that the space of inter-human relations formed by these artworks becomes a utopia in the realisation that it has overcome the Avant-garde utopianism through its micro-political disengagement from the capitalist exchange (Bourriaud, 2008 [1998], pp. 41-48). However, from my perspective, his theory is purely idealistic in its assertion that any form of inter-human relations formed from relational artworks will positively contribute to building a utopia. Utopia is a beautiful idea, but we already know it is fiction.

Grant Kester (2015) points out that another frequent criticism levelled at socially engaged art is that it is “little more than window dressing for a fundamentally corrupt system”. From this perspective, such projects are viewed as hypocritical, particularly when they form part of the programme of international exhibitions and biennials, where they serve as “the necessary scandal that demonstrates the openness of a system predicated on hierarchy and wealth” and “simply allow artists to pose as incendiary critics of capitalism while securing a comfortable living from the investment habits of the 1%, to whom they sell their work” (2015). This is a regular occurrence in the Korean contemporary art scene, where it can seem in awkward contrast with its relatively recent art history. For example, the works of some of the leading Korean artists who participated in the *Minjung* or pro-democracy student movement in the 1980s and who led socio-political art activities in the late 1990s and early 2000s, now feature prominently in the art market and major art institutions, ostensibly in recognition of their radical contributions. And other artists who chose to remain outside leading contemporary art institutions to continue to voice political criticism are also often now celebrated for their enduring political stance in high-profile events, such as the Gwangju Biennale.

In identifying the ways in which biennials operate, David Joselit notes their considerable political and economic force in serving as engines of development and gentrification for both established and ‘emerging’ world cities, and their role of selling cultural commodities “such as exhibitions and publications to international audiences”. However, he contends they can also serve a social dimension, and that,

“(…) to make an exhibition that establishes a realm for open dialogue, beyond existing institutions of government and commerce—a true civil society—means creating a setting where differences are encountered and debated, even through conflict” (Joselit, 2012).

He believes that a model for this was put into practice for the 2012 Busan Biennale whose main exhibition was titled *Garden of Learning*.³³ This was conceived by the biennale's Artistic Director, German curator Roger Buerger, who worked with artists and local residents to discuss the process of creating the exhibition within the structure of 'Learning Councils', each of which consisted of 10 to 12 people. The model aimed to acknowledge that the artists, and particularly those from overseas, would only be likely to achieve an understanding of South Korean society, its civil, economic and political systems, by engaging directly with local people and learning about the things that affected them. Members of the public were recruited for this forum through an 'open call', in which Buerger explained:

"Collaborative work is not a one-way street. I will do my best that all visitors to the *Garden of Learning*—especially the people who collaborate with the artists—stand to benefit from these lively encounters. Contemporary art tends to look dry and abstract if audiences are nothing but consumers of a finished product (be it a painting, a sculpture or an installation), or if they are mere participants in a game, the rules of which they cannot change" (Seismopolite, 2012).

By these means, residents of Busan were invited to actively contribute to the exhibition's creative process, coming together in monthly meetings or workshops over a period of 8 months, from February until the opening of the exhibition in September 2012. When artists visited, they met with the council members, whose local knowledge often enabled their projects. Although

³³ *The Garden of Learning* was curated by Roger M. Brugel with the exhibition layout by Ruth Noack, and it was held at the Busan Museum of Art and other venues in Busan, September-October in 2012. For more information, see: <https://seismopolite.com/busan-biennale-2012> (Open Call details), The Biennial Foundation, Oct 15, 2012. Available at: <https://biennialfoundation.org/2012/07/a-key-element-of-busan-biennale-2012-is-to-stage-collaborations-between-artists-and-the-audience/> ; and Cathy Rose Garcia, "Enter 'Garden of Learning' in Busan", The Korea Times, Oct 15, 2012. Available at: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2012/10/135_122280.html

Buergel presented themes and put forward artists, his choices were tested against the responses of the council members. These local recruits received modest expenses, and some accepted the invitation to work as educators during the exhibition run. It was envisaged that due to their insights gained as active participants, their artistic experience could enable the wider audience to engage with the exhibition. As Joselit comments, unlike art events created by curators and artists for the “compliant viewers” associated with relational aesthetics, this model engaged Busan residents as active collaborators. A further outcome was that the legacy of the 2012 biennale exhibition was experienced not so much by members of the international art world, as by local people (Joselit, 2012).

One might consider this model in relation to the certain sets of assumptions relating to socially engaged art that Kester has identified as especially problematic:

1) “(...) that any form of art practice that produces some concrete change in the world or is developed in alliance with specific social movements (via the creation or preservation of a park, the generation of new, prefigurative collective forms, shifts in the disposition of power in a given community etc.) is entirely pragmatic and has no critical or conceptually creative capacity. Or, alternately, that such projects, by suggesting that some meaningful change is possible within existing social and political structures, do nothing more than forestall the necessary, but inevitably deferred, revolution”.

2) “The assumption that any given art project is either radically disruptive or naively ameliorative (...) This is paired with the failure of many critics to understand that durational art practices, and forms of activism, always move through moments of both

provisional consensus or solidarity-formation and conflict and disruption” (Kester, 2015).

The first assumption suggests that a social engagement project can be written off in terms of artistic value, and merely understood as a form of social work, or is just seen as a temporary fix to a much larger problem that it will never be capable of resolving. The second assumption misunderstands the complexity of a project, assuming that it can be only one thing, although as Kester points out here and elsewhere (2015, 2017), through its diachronic nature it can move through a range of phases that might include “conciliation and contention or disagreement” (2017, p. 75).

In concurrence with Joselit, Kester describes the more successful socially engaged art projects as where:

“(…) the act of production (‘practice’ in the conventional sense) and reception are coincident (…) artistic practice at this level becomes ‘transgradient’ (…) with other, non-artistic, forms of cultural production, from participatory planning to environmental activism to radical pedagogy. Thus, we have a form of art production that requires us to reconceptualize our understanding of both the ‘viewer’ and the act of reception, and that also exhibits a promiscuous relationship to other modes of cultural action” (Kester, 2015).

Such alternative strategies, of which *Garden of Learning* is an example, aim to connect people through socially engaged art projects. It is these kinds of models I have aimed to develop on; from what I have learned in the process of my research, it is not enough to direct people to do

something or to visually entertain them. It is important to collaborate with members of the public as active participants who feel they have agency. The emphasis is on equality and trust so that artworks are 'made with residents' and 'not for them' (O'Neill and Doherty, 2011; Zweig 2013, pp. 134-135).

For *documenta 12* (2007) the strategy of gallery educator Carmen Mörsch and her team was to encourage visitors to interpret the art themselves, rather than to solely rely on the interpretations of art experts. According to Mörsch (2007), the idea was for the art educators and mediators to operate self-reflectively and to make the visitors aware of their formats and strategies. There was no single approach, as it differed from mediator to mediator depending on their knowledge background.³⁴ In the context of *documenta 12*, she explains that her involvement resulted in a thesis that gallery education fulfils a number of functions. The first two she describes are 1) "an *affirmative* function" which conveys the expected form of information to an established art audience, and 2) "a *reproductive* function," that effectively aims to attract new audiences (e.g., children, young people and others not previously initiated into visual culture) to ensure a continuing group of interested people for the future. Whereas functions 1 and 2 are widely accepted institutional strategies, a more contested shift comes with functions 3 and 4, where 3) "a *critical deconstructive* function" encourages participants, "to question, disclose and work on what is taken for granted in art and its institutions, and to develop knowledge that enables them to form their own judgements and become aware of their own position and its conditions".

Function 4) relates to "a *transformative* effect", capable "of changing society and its institutions",

³⁴ See the interview with Mörsch (2007). Available at <https://www.documenta12.de/en/100-tage/100-tage-archiv/documenta-12-art-education/poppy-field.html>

possibly by changing the perspectives under which an institution operates in favour of the additional concerns of an expanded audience (Mörsch, 2011, pp. 6-7).

In the work of Project 7½, the concept of ‘socially collaborative’ practice has been formed and re-formed out of extant social processes, political contestations, and external forces that can be associated with Mörsch’s “critical deconstructive function” and with an ambition to create a transformative affect. I also conceive social collaboration as a form of civic practice, as raised by Joselit (2012). By working outside art institutions, I could avoid the necessity of conforming to a time-limited idea of collaboration, to a more open-ended notion of ‘working together’ and ‘making together’ conceived without any pre-expectations and which could continue after the published end of a project. When working with people on projects that take place over time, negotiations continue throughout. Even when participants speak the same language and fully understand a situation, I have come to recognise that implied consent does not necessarily mean a perfect consensus—a situation that provides grounds for friction and debate with transformative potential.

Kester (1991) takes the view that a successful dialogic exchange can arise from a situation where someone is *open* to transformative experience through empathic listening, and this has some similarities with postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha’s “Third Space of Enunciation”. Both acknowledge the work of Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bahkin as a catalyst in their thinking.³⁵ For Bhabha, the notion of the Third Space is where hybrid identifications are

³⁵ Antony Easthope (1998) points out Bhabha’s notion of hybridity is developed from Bakhtin, “... who uses it to discriminate texts with a ‘single voice’ (lyrical poems) from those with a ‘double voice’ (such as novels, whose narrator cites characters speaking in their own voice—these texts are hybridic)”. For Bakhtin, discourse is interactive and therefore, dialogical situations are more objective and realistic than monological encounters where a person only

possible, ones that exist ‘in-between ... political polarities’ and ‘familiar divisions’. He also draws attention to the common ground of debate, within “the contestation and articulation of everyday life” (Bhabha, 2008, p. 50). He asserts that it is the:

“(...) *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture (...) And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves” (Bhabha, 2004, p. 56).

When I consider both Kester and Bhabha’s ideas in relation to my experiences of devising projects in Korea and Indonesia (discussed in the following Methodology chapter), I consider how they place emphasis on the forum of debate and my intention to provide opportunities for different social groups to meet and exchange views as equals. In doing so, my contention is that this is the space where we can potentially learn from the views of others and are subject to the sense of potential that emerges from this.

Raqs Media Collective³⁶ similarly refer to the significant potential of communication within their process of collective curating. As they explain:

“(...) once we began testing our solidarities in the rough waters of actual practice, we came to understand that the genesis and development of an idea or a work take place not within the sealed, hermetic spaces of our three individual consciousnesses, but at the intersection of all our communication. The history of every work that we make is traceable to a series of moves made in messages. Everything we work with is either

encounters the ideology of a single speaker or author.

³⁶ Raqs Media Collective were formed in 1992 by Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta.

found, fished or floated in the current of our constant chatter and the things understood in silences and incomplete sentences" (2009/2010, p. 5).

This is yet another view of the value of opening up channels of communication as a way of generating new shared perspectives. Through the Korean and Indonesian projects which I will discuss in the following chapter, Project 7½ has sought to create such a space of intersection, bringing artists and others together to encounter their differences of perspective and to 'enunciate' their respective positions in a way that enables dialogues between people to evolve and, hopefully, a place from where new possibilities can come into existence. Understandings among wider audiences about what art is and where it can exist are part of this negotiation; this is all part of the complexity of socially engaged projects as described by Kester.

As indicated earlier, I believe that the division between art and society has been a by-product of the dominance of art by the élite and their expression of power, not through the concerns of artists and their artworks but through their power exercised in the workings of the art market. Boris Groys raises a potential problem pertaining to the art market and the judgments it makes about what is deemed to be art in the first paragraph of his essay, *The Truth of Art*, when he writes:

"Is art capable of being a medium of truth? This question is central to the existence and survival of art because if art cannot be a medium of truth, art is only a matter of taste. One has to accept the truth even if one does not like it. But if art is only a matter of taste, then the art spectator becomes more important than the art producer. In this case, art can be treated only sociologically or in terms of the art market—it has no independence, no power. Art becomes identical to design" (Groys, 2016).

Here Groys considers what artists stand to lose if they simply pay attention to the market and the ability of art to probe, interrogate, and to affect the rest of the world is lost. Charles Esche has argued for the need to renew our thinking about the role of art so that it can move forward in beneficial ways. In his essay, *Include Me Out: Helping Artists Undo the Art World*, he writes that this can be regarded as:

“(…) a critical way of thinking about art’s relation to society and social change; a scepticism toward doctrines and given truths; a recognition of our cultural specificity and an openness to other cultural specificities (…) and that emancipation and justice remain ideals to be realized, not facts on the ground. These opinions are my own, but I believe that they must be at the core of an educational encounter with contemporary art if that encounter is to have meaning beyond satisfying the latest market trend” (2009, p. 104).

Esche contends that art progresses through movements where thinking is renewed, and this allows the balance of power to perceptively shift. In support of his argument, he cites some significant moments in Western art education that helped to change people’s thinking productively, e.g., the Bauhaus in Germany, NKhUK in post-revolutionary Russia, CalArts in Los Angeles (late 1960s–early ‘70s), and the Free International Universities in the 1970s.³⁷ He points out, however, that even these only lasted a relatively short time before more renewal in thinking became necessary—although he believes that all the examples, he gives can be seen to share three main impulses: 1) anti-specialization, 2) anti-autonomy and 3) anti-hierarchy.

³⁷ The Bauhaus in Weimar Germany was post-WW1; the era of INKhUK was in 1920s post-revolutionary Russia; CalArts in Los Angeles was in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, and the Free International Universities associated with Joseph Beuys, among others, was in the 1970s.

These three impulses were surely at work within the *Minjung* movement in 1980s Korea and in Indonesia's New Art Movement of the 1970s and its artists' collectives of the 2000s. I similarly regard my approach as anti-specialist in that it seeks to involve a wide public, and I don't see artists and curators as rarified specialists but as agents who can cross boundaries and challenge assumptions. Project 7½ has also sought to promote collaborative actions and open up dialogues with non-art communities, rather than focus on autonomous artistic productions; it has always aimed to encourage engagement between social sectors. My approach can also be recognised as anti-hierarchical in that it seeks to work with an egalitarian model that empowers the non-specialist audience and invites their perspectives, rather than just addressing art world experts and art collectors.

The question of what role and function socially engaged art serves in society has also been a concern of the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn. Hirschhorn speaks of art as "A tool to encounter the world, a tool to confront reality and a tool for life, in the time I live in" (Schum, 2016). He created his diagram *Spectrum of Evaluation* (2010) (Fig. i) as a way of considering who he wishes his art to affect. I respond to this idea as, while working on projects with artists, I had to find direct or indirect ways to communicate with the audience and I needed to urge the artists in that direction too; as such, I served as a mediator between the artists and the non-art public. I aimed to explore how the artists' works were understood by and affected local people (rather than promoting the artists and their work). By bringing together artists and local people to contemplate the impact of art on society, I hoped it could lead to some kind of positive change.

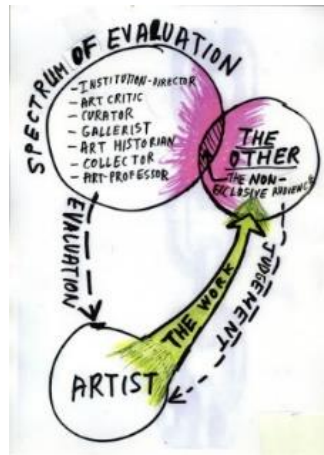


Figure i. Thomas Hirschhorn «Spectrum of Evaluation», 2008-2010, Private Collection³⁸

In Figure i, Hirschhorn defines the division of roles in the art world's structure and identifies his position. His visualisation challenges the idea of art made for an 'exclusive' audience; he argues that 'art is inclusive; art never excludes'. It demonstrates his aim to address what he terms 'The Other' (which, for him, includes, "the neighbour (...) the person who is hostile to me (...) the person who appears unexpectedly, who happens to pass by (...)"), rather than those who occupy the 'Spectrum of Evaluation' (constituted of art experts who claim to understand and who express a love of art). He argues that art should not primarily address this group of evaluators (defined as those who together discuss, analyse, argue and who, he notes, only actually compare an artist's work with that of other artists). For Hirschhorn, it is important that his work is always made for 'The Other' as this group is constituted of people who are the source of the most useful and valuable judgments. He seeks to emphasize, however, that,

"What is crucial in my diagram is the fact that the 'Spectrum of Evaluation' OVERLAPS with the circle of the other; the core of the 'non-exclusive audience' is located in this overlap. No one is excluded from my work, no one is excluded from being able to judge it. I do not wish to create a new or other exclusivity with my diagram; on the contrary,

³⁸ Source: <http://www.thomashirschhorn.com/maps-schemas/>

I want to exclude nothing. But as an artist, I think I must determine the dynamic, the line of force, or the DIRECTION OF IMPACT” (Hirschhorn, 2010).

The notion of making a judgment about the work, rather than a comparison, appears significant for Hirschhorn, as he believes that such a judgment “(...) is always also an engagement with the person who is making it.” I empathize with this view, as I have found a big difference between the standards of art experts and the non-specialist audiences in the evaluation of art. I draw attention to the limitation of the art experts' evaluation, as it focuses on aspects that are only held in high regard by members of the art world. I would regard my position as a curator as occupying the space of overlap that visualizes where the curator's traditional role can be extended in socially engaged art, supporting artists to achieve their goals through creative activities and functioning well in society. I differ from Hirschhorn in that, unlike him, I see my work as politically motivated. I am also suspicious of the autonomy he claims as an artist which means he is absolved of any responsibility to create a legacy for his collaborative projects at the end of their term (Kester, 2006; Lind, 2009).

Social Integration through Art and Broadening the Boundaries of Art

The questions and positions raised by Kester, Groys, Esche, Hirschhorn (in part), Bishop, Osborne, Rebentisch, Joselit, and Mörsch resonate with my reflections on what issues are at stake when considering the purpose and value of artistic interventions in society (see Fig. ii). In the case of my project in Indonesia, I knew that I would need to understand the country's anthropological and historical contexts. In relation to Buerger's *Garden of Learning*, I would say that this situation led me to speak with artists, activists and local people to gain a better overview of the situation; from this, I saw that cooperation among people was an essential

feature of daily life. I learned that such a strategy of engagement is also a feature of the practice of socially engaged artists in Indonesia.³⁹

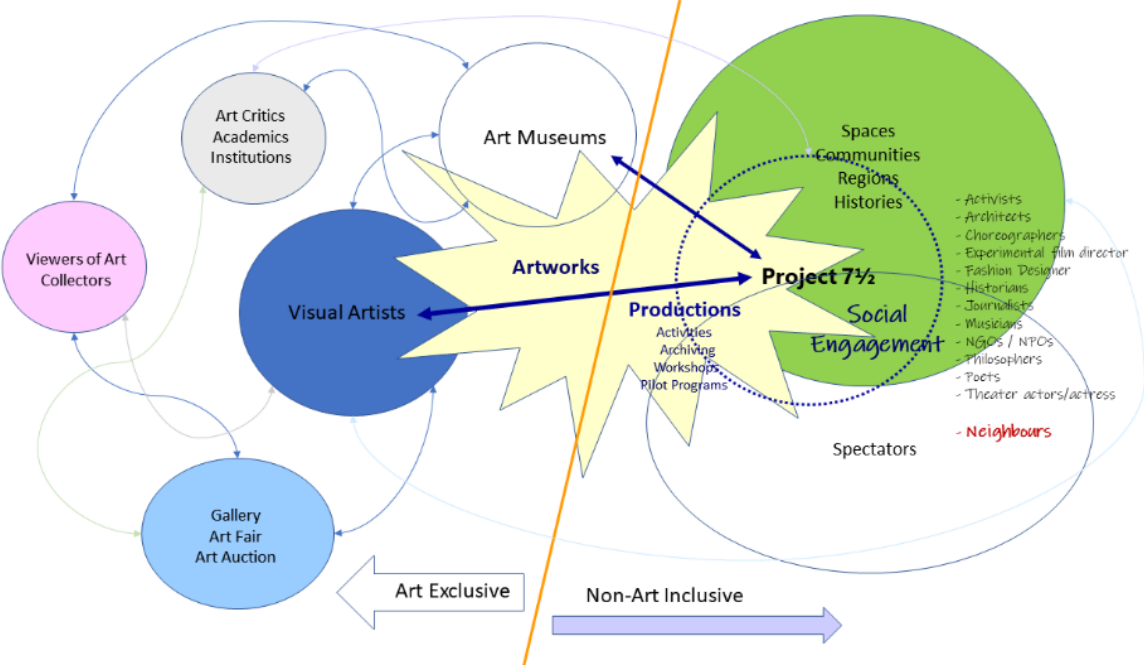


Figure ii. «Project 7½: How to Expand the Function of Art Projects in Korea and Indonesia», 2014-2019

Throughout my research, from starting to work with artists who, like me, were interested in engaging with non-art specialist audiences, I have developed the strategy of acting as a curatorial intermediary with the aims of connecting artists and audiences via exhibitions and events that create a dialogic space for different ideas and experiences of life to meet. I have encouraged participating artists to engage in discussions with potential audiences, with one another and with me when developing their works, and the breadth of these discussions are significantly different to those which take place within the art system. Some of the participating artists, such as the Indonesian artists Ahmett and Salina, fully engaged with this process,

³⁹ This is not to deny that social collaboration projects of some artists in both Korea and Indonesia are motivated by funding and are not embedded in their ongoing practices. However, such temporary interventions are generally less successful than when the artists' motivation is to achieve long-term community development.

identifying the most relevant methods for each regional situation, and this was something they had not done before (see the accompanying portfolio, pp.144-147 for examples of their artworks). This was entirely possible in a non-commercial, process-oriented socially collaborative art project.

The initial Project 7½ exhibitions and events in Seoul between 2014 and 2016 were broadly connected by their themes of 'relationships' and 'shifts of perspective'. These subjects can be seen to extend and connect to other regions and historical points of view by the exhibitions and events in Gimhae and Jakarta between 2017 and 2019. In these projects, my curatorial aim was to adopt a sociological approach to examine and understand the response of all participants (artists and members of the non-art audience gathered through Project 7½). As such, my projects engage with and are informed by other perspectives and voices. They admit people's earlier experiences, meanings and understandings, responding to others while also anticipating their responses. As Bakhtin writes:

“We open the boundaries when we ‘identify’ ourselves with the hero and experience his life from within: and we close them again when we consummate him aesthetically from without” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 91).

Through Project 7½ in Korea and Indonesia between 2015 and 2019, I aimed to assist people to understand their current positions and the circumstances that have affected them. In the case of the exhibitions *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* and *Elephant in the Room*, presented in Korea and Indonesia between 2017 and 2019, I wanted to look at the modern histories of both countries since 1945, and reveal the stories that are hidden or forgotten in authorised accounts. As I will discuss in the following chapter, the notion of

opening up new conceptual spaces in which to foster the possibility of human identification and empathy has been a defining feature of the variety of exhibitions and events staged by Project 7½. These have been conceived to convey messages that might have the potential to encourage an appetite for social change, principally by ensuring the different perspectives of the participating artists and other contributors were accessible, but also relevant to the experiences of the project's primary audiences.

Sulki and Min, From the *Gray Letter* series (2016)

METHODOLOGY

Locating the Coordinates of Art through a Nomadic Project

From the start of Project 7½, I sought to rethink conventional curatorial methodologies to develop a more socially orientated approach beyond the art institution. I observed how the inhabitants and workers from the neighbourhoods where Project 7½ was located interacted with works of art, and the attitudes of artists to these situations.⁴⁰ I would describe my principal methodology as a variety of ‘action research’ (Elliot, 2000; Tripp, 2005), an iterative process of action and reflection to discover the most appropriate ways of collaborating with artists and the non-art public in response to local contexts through art projects; each exhibition and event has been a testing ground, providing opportunities for me to learn, with my findings informing subsequent productions that have probed the question of how art can serve a more comprehensive social purpose.⁴¹

Regarding the methodology of action research, Elliott recommends practitioners should “gather evidence about their practices and critique assumptions, beliefs and values embedded in them” (2000, p. 209). In the Context chapter, I offered a brief autoethnography to expose my personal experiences and observations, thereby providing more background to the socio-political context of Project 7½ and the circumstances that have motivated my work. In this, I mentioned

⁴⁰ The projects sought to harness existing relationships between people, whereas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) only addresses the art world. I have approached the relationship between the art world and those outside the art world from a sociological point of view.

⁴¹ Through this approach, I have sought to identify the plural factors that underpin a given situation and critical questions to consider in developing the project. I thought about what I wanted to test and achieve through my curatorial interventions.

that before Project 7½, I had worked within leading contemporary art institutions, where the relationship between artist and curator is subject to a set of conventional expectations.⁴² While as an independent curator, I had scope to pursue an alternative agenda. I realised that I needed to find artists who shared similar concerns to my own and discover ways of working with them to forge the necessary relationship of trust and mutual understanding. This was on my mind when devising events for the *Art and the Unconscious* theme of 2014.⁴³

Art and the Unconscious

I invited critic Kim Nam Soo to give a series of eight monthly lectures titled *Anthropological Exploration of Art and Unconscious*.⁴⁴ I saw these as a way of discovering young, emerging artists who might be interested in working on experimental projects. Alongside the first lecture, I devised the event *Impromptu Choreography for Fashion Shows* (Figs. 1-6) as an experimental strategy to trigger a shift of perspective: when the performers moved from inside the ‘private’ space of the designer store to the outside ‘public’ streetscape, the artists attending the event and unsuspecting passers-by were surprised to suddenly find themselves the focus of each other’s attention.⁴⁵ As an element of my action inquiry (Tripp, 2005), I was able to assess its

⁴² All the participants in the projects under discussion were able to contribute their own ideas so that my role was that of mediator, rather than director or producer. In addition, in the process of producing and installing works, cooperation from neighbours was needed. In that respect, my curating method was different from the customary curating method of the museums.

⁴³ From my previous experience of working in art institutions, I was aware that established artists tend to have certain expectations of an exhibition and the role of a curator, and such expectations would not fit with my ambitions for Project 7½. I therefore actively sought artists working on the edge of the Korean art scene. In my view, a periphery is a place with infinite potential, as it is less subject to normative patterns of thought.

⁴⁴ This nomadic lecture series was conceived to encourage networking, providing me with an opportunity to converse with the artist attendees, discover their artistic interests, and start to develop good relationships. Crucially, this allowed me to identify artists to involve in the exhibitions, events, workshops, and residencies of 2014 and 2015.

⁴⁵ *Impromptu Choreography for Fashion Shows* (2014) led to the experimental presentation *Human after Garment* (2014) (Fig. 7). In *Human after Garment*, the garment on display was initially taken by the audience to be an example of avant-garde clothing. Staff encouraged people to try it on and only then explained that it was a design made to comfortably fit the asymmetric body of an artist with cerebral palsy. Both these events are also connected to the later *Functional Dissonance* event titled *Costumes Serving Functional Dissonance* (2015).

value in meeting my aim to create new spaces for an exchange of ideas, ones where different sectors of society could meet.

The artists, experimental film directors, critics, and academics who attended the lecture series were attracted by the prospect of learning how they might find new ways of communicating the value and meaning inherent in their work to a specialist art audience. However, during the 2014 lecture project, I began to question whether human beings could achieve perfect physical and mental symmetry, and I explored the idea through the design of a fashion garment in a pilot project, titled *Human after Garment* (2014) with fashion designer Taewook Kim (see the accompanying portfolio, Fig. 7). This project was successful in its primary aim, of opening up discussions on the theme with visitors, but it proved difficult to sustain and develop our collaboration. This is because Kim needed to focus his attention on his commercial work and could not commit much of his time to a more conceptual practice. What I discovered was that even if artists and designers shared a similar vision to my own, it was not always practically possible to achieve the desired outcomes. I realised I had to make sure I understood their perspectives and to narrow the gap between our expectations. I came to think of the situation as a kind of "functional dissonance".⁴⁶

Relationships with Others

Having established a network of like-minded artists, I began to explore how art can be used to connect and communicate with others in a specific geographical area and its social environment.

⁴⁶ I borrow the term 'Functional Dissonance' from music theory and liken it to the effects of the unstable society that I perceive in Korea. When the human ear perceives dissonance in a chord or interval, it introduces a degree of tension or heightened emotion that demands resolution. Something similar occurs in human relationships, with the process of people perceiving and/or accepting differences. A functional society involves resolving instances of dissonance.

The projects of 2015 expanded on the experimental elements that I established in 2014; united by the theme *Relationships with Others*, they took place in Seoul's iron district at 54 Mullae-dong 3-ga.⁴⁷ The first project, titled *Functional Dissonance*, was a performative scenario of four constituent parts (film script, participatory walking tour, planned encounter with workers wearing couture uniforms, and two exhibitions) (Figs. 8-18). Collectively this enabled me to consider the relationship between the place and art project, between performers, participants and local people, and the relationship between artefacts and situations perceived as art and those that are not. With artists from various genres participating in the project, I began to learn how to foster a spirit of collaboration whilst discovering differences in outlook that I would need to address in future.

The main event connecting the various elements was *Performance Serving Functional Dissonance* (Figs. 8, 9). For this, audience participants were led through the district and encouraged to view it as if a *mise-en-scène* of a film, a scenario that deconstructed elements of the filmmaking process. Sook Hyun Kim's script offered the audience a sequence of changing roles, experiences and points of focus. The tour triggered both a sense of the participants' understanding of Mullae-dong as outsiders and a curiosity about the area. However, there was an unexpected episode mid-tour. This occurred at a point when the audience was encouraged

⁴⁷ Mullae-dong, a region of Yeongdeungpo-gu, 'iron district' is an alley that was formed naturally when small-scale steel mills opened in the area at the start of the economic and industrial boom in Korea in the 1960s. The unique character of the area today comes from its enduring industrial activity. In the 2000s, artists also started to move into Mullae-dong, so that it became an art district as well. However, the distinctive look and feel of Mullae-dong set it apart from other art districts such as Seongsu-dong and Yeonnam-dong. The way that the area was being redeveloped was also quite different from these neighbourhoods. Here, the usual effects that can be observed in other art districts whereby interested parties try to exploit the presence of artists to drive up real estate prices or attract young people in pursuit of the latest trends have been discouraged, at least up to now. In fact, there are quite a few artists who came here thinking that it was another 'hot place' not unlike Seongsu-dong or Yeonnam-dong but who were unable to adapt to the neighbourhood and left. Despite the apparent differences, however, real estate agents all say that rent has gone up significantly in the area, especially in comparison with similar industrial districts. The reality is especially hard for those who do not have a steady income, whether they are artists or iron workers.

to reflect on the history of the place by the Tour Guide, who said: “The outer covering of the entire building, which has been stuck for a long time and has been waiting for us to come, is wary of us”. At this point, two factory workers suddenly appeared to object to the perceived critical gaze of the audience. One shouted angrily: "Who are you to come and say this place is old? (Fig. 9)⁴⁸ Simultaneously, the participants realized that they were not the only spectators of the alley’s streetscape. They realised they were being viewed by the workers in the iron alley; again, it was the moment each group could see themselves from the position of the other. However, the local workers did not perceive the event as art and their confusion as to what was happening led to anger. Due to the workers’ unforeseen protest, the artists, the audience and I were left feeling anxious that we had inadvertently caused offence. This situation caused me to consider the different perspectives of others, particularly those with which I was unfamiliar. It proved to be a significant turning point, leading me to completely review the relationship of Project 7½ with the local community; I became more determined to understand how art might positively function in a wider field of Korean society.

Beginning to doubt if it was right to conceive an art project in this neighbourhood, I became cautious, and I invited emerging artist Seoyoung Bae to embed herself within the area through a four-month artists’ residency, using the project space as her studio. Together we aimed to devise ways to form good relationships and engage with the local community. Following a chance introduction, the owner of the Daeryuk Steel Company⁴⁹ asked if Project 7½ would be

⁴⁸ Coincidentally, this incident where a local worker objected to the perceived critical gaze of the audience was linked to the next lines in the script: “Traditionally, the controversial point in the production of *Mise-en-Scène* was the distinction between 'record' and 'fiction'. And we are on the border of realism. Events are directed, and as part of the undirected world, they retain something called their vividness. Is our genre a documentary? As an actor who is diligent in everyday life, are you faithful to the realism level like the neorealist that André Bazin praised so much?”

⁴⁹ The owner of Daeryuk Steel Company would later participate in the play *Here, I am...* (2015) as an actor. (Figs. 25, 27)

able to make a new signboard for his business. Bae agreed to do this, and it helped us connect with Mullae-dong. As Bae embarked on the mural painting phase of her *Pollination* project (Fig. 19), the local community came together to create the artwork; the activity fostered a spirit of goodwill, opening up new conversations. It was clear that relationships between local people and their physical surroundings were changing because of our work.

The *Pollination* project served to bridge the events and experiences that linked the *Functional Dissonance* project to the final phase of 2015, an outdoor theatrical project, titled *Who in the World am I?* (Figs. 21-27). This was a series of collaborations between artists from various fields and neighbours, which I directed, encompassing an experimental film, modern dance, works by visual artists, a play and the audience, who also had parts within the play. Everyone came together in their active roles in this event, where functional dissonance seemed a more desirable catalyst for action than perfect harmony. The event took place in an ordinary alley, without a stage or other formal division between actors and audience, and in these circumstances, I learned that the distance between artists and local people, and between art and life could disappear. The resulting general spirit of conviviality was fostered by serving street food.

In 2015, the Seoul Museum of Art administered a government initiative to support artists during the MERS pandemic, but it did not benefit very many of them, nor the local people. The project funded artists to create new signs for local businesses to visually enhance the area, but the general view of local people was that new signage was unnecessary and many artists felt they

were just being given something to do,⁵⁰ effectively being forced to give up their work as critical and creative thinkers to gain government support. It exemplifies the kind of social art project that the theorist Grant Kester (2015) has characterised as problematically naïve. It appeared to lack any confidence in the potential of artists to be generative and transformative—a significant issue when considering the purpose and value of artistic interventions within community settings. The government agency’s approach of getting artists to carry out prescribed actions within a neighbourhood, rather than fostering an open and direct engagement between artists and communities seemed to have no real benefit other than to salve the local government’s conscience. I consequently met with representatives of the museum to present the perspectives of local people and artists and suggested an alternative. As a result, I gained funding to curate three further exhibitions in Mullaedong to represent some critical artistic responses to the situation (Figs. 28-34).⁵¹

By the end of the final project of 2015, I had started to better understand how my curatorial process might encourage positive social change by priming the artists' responses to the needs of neighbours and local workers. Neighbours became involved in setting up exhibitions and events, gaining more ownership of them, also entering into conversations with the artists and one another about the artworks. But I was still finding it hard to persuade many participating artists that the projects required them not to just focus on their personal creative activities but to use the situation to develop new relationships across social groups.

⁵⁰ The actual support budget to artists was to produce the signboards, and there was no recompense for the artists' labour.

⁵¹ The Seoul Museum of Art project was funded by the Seoul Metropolitan government agency.

Cryptographic Imagination

In 2016, I adopted the theme of *Cryptographic Imagination* to frame my attempts to find other ways of interrogating what the non-art public perceived to be art that excluded them and what stimulated greater interest.⁵² This project consisted of five exhibitions in the vicinity of Jongno-gu, Seoul (Fig. 35).⁵³ The theme sought to acknowledge that it can be challenging to understand each other, as well as to identify the exact boundaries between art and non-art, but attempts to understand can lead to imaginative responses and personally meaningful interpretations. The participating artists were required to gain knowledge of the neighbourhoods of Jongno 2-3ga, and the theme stimulated a range of artistic responses.⁵⁴

Many of the artists chose to make works using objects and materials that were familiar to locals in the Jongno neighbourhood. Bae and Lee made use of sheet steel, moss, flowerpots and plants (Figs. 36, 37) and their artworks were displayed both within the gallery space and outside on the street. It was hoped that the familiarity of the materials and the distribution of the artworks in the neighbourhood might help remove a barrier between what local people

⁵² The title, *Cryptographic Imagination*, refers to the process of looking at unfamiliar objects and deciphering what they mean. It originally came from my thoughts about what distinguishes a work of art from other kinds of artefacts. I was interested to see how a general audience might decipher the artworks. At the same time, the project required the artists to reflect on the conceptual aspects of their works. Ultimately, this project aimed to blur the boundary between what most people consider to be art and not art.

⁵³ The exhibitions took place in an area between Seoul Theater (established in 1979 by Hapdongfilm) and Sewoon Arcade (a first-generation residential and commercial complex in Seoul, linking Jongno 3-ga and Toegye-ro 3-ga) at 15 Jongno 22-gil. Jongno is a representative commercial district in Seoul, where shopping malls are concentrated around roads. Jongno is the main road that crosses the city centre from east to west. It is also referred to as National Road No. 6. It is one of the most popular downtown areas in Seoul and is a concentrated commercial district. The western end, close to Sejong Boulevard, is a considerable downtown area. It is where Jongno Tower and other high-rise office buildings are concentrated, along with several large companies, such as Hanwha Group's headquarters. Dongdaemun Market is located in the east. The headquarters and Seoul branches of financial institutions are also gathered in Jongno. Whereas Sejong-ro and Taepyeong-ro (currently Sejong-daero) are political centres, Jongno is an economic centre whose daily population is as high as 1.5 million.

⁵⁴ The artists were: Seoyoung Bae, Hyunji Lee (March-April 2016), Chan Kyung Sung + Kiwan Sung (May -June 2016), Genevieve Chua (June-July 2016), Sulki and Min (August-October 2016), and Sunah Choi (October -November 2016).

considered art and what they thought to be elements from their everyday environment.⁵⁵

Having seen the poet Sung Chan-kyung's memorial exhibition⁵⁶ at a commercial art gallery in Insa-dong in 2016, I felt as if the works—which the poet referred to as orphans—were trapped and I wanted to set them free. I proposed my idea for an exhibition in the Jongno alley to the poet's family, and this was how this phase of the project 'Sung Chan-kyung + Sung Kiwan' (2016) started. The works by the deceased poet and his son, poet and musician Sung Kiwan, were closely connected to the area and its history. In particular, Sung Chan-kyung's collection of scrap metal and screws were familiar artefacts in the local junk shops and evoked memories of the area's traditional trades. His poems also reflected aspects of people's lives, so there were few barriers to understanding among local audiences. For example, his *Screw* poems displayed in the street alongside items of metal picked up from the road seemed to call to the audience to stop and read them, and they moved many to tears (Fig. 39). This was a lesson in the emotional power of connecting or reconnecting art to people who share a similar experience.

The works by Sulki and Min followed a set of codified forms, although being stripped of clues necessary for their decoding, they were transformed from a means of communication to enigmatic symbols. Whilst the works failed to fulfil the purpose of conveying information clearly, they fitted with the concept and intention of the project (Figs. 51-55). The designers also used different security envelope patterns to fill the space, so that information was partially obscured.

⁵⁵ I was aware that for the wider audience of *Cryptographic Imagination*—especially the people who worked in nearby stores—contemporary artworks can be difficult to understand. Such people say they are not interested in modern art and believe art to be esoteric. In contrast, for those who are more comfortable with the concerns of recent visual art, the Jongno area can be fascinating: the industrial artefacts in the stores are so unfamiliar and therefore mysterious, leaving scope for the imagination. When looking at a store's well-organized displays of mechanical accessories, I often thought that I could display them as a contemporary cabinet of curiosities within a museum of contemporary art.

⁵⁶ The exhibition *Eungam-dong Material Orphanage* (2016) was held at the Baegak Art Space in Insa-dong, Seoul.

But while all their materials and graphic references were generally familiar, local people perceived the artworks as remote, abstract images; they did not find them offensive, but neither did the images provoke any deep thought. Yet, in contrast, the experimental images of Sulki and Min stimulated significant excitement and curiosity among artists and designers who visited the exhibition.

I also wanted to show more abstract and conceptual art that I anticipated ordinary people of the area might find difficult and, from my conversations with locals, I hoped to gain a better idea of why that might be. Therefore, for the third exhibition, I invited Singaporean artist Genevieve Chua. Her works, titled *Vestigial and Halves*, comprised stickers of typographic symbols and modular paintings (Fig. 45). After the exhibition, Chua and I attached several of her typographic symbol works to the walls of the alley, between its shop signs, and through the changed context, we erased the gap between the everyday streetscape and the artworks (Figs. 46-50). However, perhaps because the emotional effect of the poet's exhibition was so strong, this legacy of the third exhibition felt prosaic in comparison, and our intention was not so widely understood.⁵⁷

Sunah Choi's *Cryptographic Imagination* exhibition included 13 postcards which she posted from Berlin to Jongno (Fig. 56).⁵⁸ As a series of unique artworks sent through the post, *Postcard Work* picked up additional chance marks in transit, adding to their individual characteristics.

⁵⁷ As the artist, Genevieve Chua, could not speak Korean, she was not able to verbally communicate with the Jongno locals. Despite this difficulty, the local audiences were still interested in seeing and discussing the artworks. I also noted that the way in which the public approach an artist's work can have a significant effect on how the artist shapes their subsequent communications.

⁵⁸ See Sunah Choi's website: <http://sunahchoi.com/works/2016-postcard-work/> [Accessed 17 May 2021]

Some hand-painted postcards with handwriting and postage stamps were displayed in a vitrine on the alley. In another part of the exhibition, there was a mailbox and postcards on the floor, as if recently delivered. In both instances, there was confusion over whether these were regular postcards or should be seen artworks. Yet spectators thought that her murals, painted on the walls inside the exhibition space, contained profound meaning. Conversations with visitors indicated a belief that decoding artworks required a special kind of insight.

Even when critics were interested in the curatorial intentions of the project, the articles and reviews that featured this series of exhibitions indicate that they preferred to only write about aesthetic matters and the context of the site.⁵⁹ They were not at all concerned with how the neighbours⁶⁰ responded to the exhibitions. In contrast, people working in neighbouring businesses said they appreciated the opportunity to unexpectedly encounter the artworks. While they did not necessarily understand the meaning of the artists' creative activities, the neighbours enjoyed the new ideas and the conversations they provoked, reporting that they enhanced their daily lives and stimulated their curiosity. From this project, I gained more confidence that when people are encouraged to bring their own experiences to a situation, and their opinions are listened to, they are more comfortable in engaging with ideas that they might otherwise find alien or distant. Whereas in the art markets of Korea and Indonesia, experts appear to take the view that ordinary people's response to art is not their concern, it was vital for me to understand how local audiences were responding to my productions; it assisted me in meeting my objective of challenging the outlooks of both artists and audiences, to both

⁵⁹ See, for example, Jung Hyun (2016). *Reproduction of Sensation*. Access available from www.sevannahalf.com. His article is re-quoted in his book *Composite Emotions* (published by Superellipse, 2019).

⁶⁰ Neighbours in this context are merchants and residents of this area Jongno where Project 7½ was held in 2016.

achieve effective outcomes and to give agency to the latter. There is an interface between my curatorial approach and the perspectives of Kester and Lind here. In particular, Kester upholds creative dialogue and empathetic insight as models for successful communication and collaboration with diverse audiences (Kester, 2004; Lind, 2009).⁶¹

Having started to invite local people to participate in the project during Bae's *Pollination* project, I continued to encourage them to get involved. I wanted everyone to feel they had the right to participate and to reduce any perceived gap between the art, artists and the non-art public. However, I had to acknowledge that some aspects of artistic thinking are learned through a process of acculturation within the art world, and temporary exposure to such ideas is unlikely to make a difference. I didn't provide the local audience with curatorial interpretations of the artworks, as would be expected by an art-specialist audience; instead, such explanations arose through informal conversations. When talking with local people about the relative effect of different art productions and their contexts, I found a clear preference for narrative instead of symbolic works, especially ones where people felt the content related to their own lives. Sung Chan-kyung's poems elicited an emotional response from the local community more than any of the other four *Cryptographic Imagination* exhibitions, and by placing these works in the Jongno alley, rather than in a conventional gallery, the implications of the poem were amplified. The audience was able to relate to the poet's likening of a rusty screw abandoned on the floor to a person's life. The five exhibitions represented different modes of action inquiry where I made things happen to see what actually happened (Tripp, 2005) and the audiences' responses

⁶¹ In his book *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), Kester discusses dialogical art using examples of work mainly from the 1990s. In a discussion of Kester's position, Lind draws attention to his view that "dialogical art is ... based on a critical time sense that takes into account cumulative effects, i.e., things happening today have an effect on the future." (Lind, 2009, pp. 61-62)

helped me understand which could be the most appropriate methods to engage participants in a particular situation.

In these curatorial examples of Project 7½, real-life circumstances were juxtaposed with an art event or production with no specific expected outcomes. I did not offer interpretations of the artworks but invited the responses of local workers and residents of the area and together we discussed the meanings and issues raised by the works (cf. Mörsch, 2011); the conversations might focus on a person's personal experience or raise social and cultural enigmas, for example, a factory owner in Mullaedong expressed concern for the precarious financial state of the participating artists, as he could not understand how they could survive without a regular source of income. As such, many aspects of my engagement with local people operated along the lines of Mörsch's critical constructive function of gallery education, where the neighbours were encouraged to form their own judgments and become aware of their own position and condition in relation to an artist's themes. My active social intervention, positioned between the artist's work and the non-art public can be compared to her call to expand the potential of art education and examine its customary power relations; to ask questions such as: "who determines what it is important to communicate?" and 'what is considered inappropriate and by whom?' (Mörsch, 2011, p. 7).

A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories

As indicated in the Context chapter, aiming to build on what I had learned from the Seoul projects and intending to develop my work of engaging communities through art, in 2016 I decided to research the activities of artists' collectives in Indonesia. Understanding the

approaches of Indonesian artists' collectives was significant because these involve the development of the community. I was drawn to Jatiwangi Art Factory's focus on "how contemporary art and cultural practices can be contextualized [within] the local life [of the] rural area" (JAF, n.d.), an approach with a clear relationship to the aims of Project 7½.⁶²



Figure iii. Protestors in Seoul, at the beginning of the impeachment of former president Park Geun-Hye in 2016.⁶³ Unlike the street protests of the 1980s, in which Korean artists had been active participants, the banners held by the protesters in 2016 were uniformly produced. Artists were not so visible on the streets in 2016 but produced protest exhibitions in the public spaces, such as Gwanghwamun Plaza.⁶⁴

Coincidentally, on the final day of Project 7½ in Jongno in 2016, I had encountered a group of Korean protesters (Fig. iii). It was the beginning of the impeachment of former president Park Geun-Hye, following charges of corruption. From the 1980s democratisation movement to the 2016 protests and candlelight vigils, Korean citizens constantly strived to democratise. But whereas in the 1980s artists had played a prominent role in the Korean democratisation movement, young artists were not visible at the protests in 2016. It seemed that Korean artists

⁶² Indonesian cultural centres such as Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Bali all feature significantly in the art discourses of the region. In contrast, Jatiwangi Art Factory is a less well-studied community-based organisation established in 2005 and is not yet part of the federal government intervention. (See: <https://jatiwangiartfactory.tumblr.com>)

⁶³ See: Benjamin Hass. 'South Korea: former president Park Geun-hye sentenced to 24 years in jail'. The Guardian, April 6, 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/06/former-south-korea-president-park-geun-hye-guilty-of-corruption> [Accessed 3 September 2021]

⁶⁴ See: Jong Hwan Park. 'Artists on the Plaza for 127 Days [Gwangjangui Yaesulgadeul, 127 Ganui Girok]'. News 1, 1 March 2017. Available at: <https://www.news1.kr/articles/?2933184> [Accessed 3 September 2021]

were no longer so concerned with urgent socio-political issues. Then soon after I arrived in Indonesia to start my research, I came across an impeachment protest against the governor of Jakarta (Fig. iv).⁶⁵



Figure iv. Protestors in Jakarta, Indonesia on Friday, 02 December 2016.⁶⁶

Encountering the two protests, around the same time, led me to consider the history of the two countries. The protests in Korea raised problems that had long been buried during the conservative control of the Korean government, and the protests in Jakarta developed from a long-standing conflict linked to race, religion, social and economic issues. Both Korea and Indonesia had gained independence from the Japanese in August 1945, and since that time had experienced military governments, dictatorships, democratization, industrialization and IMF bailouts. From thinking about their similarities and differences, I started to look more deeply into the historical background of both countries, and this informed the exhibition *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2017-2018).

⁶⁵ The November - December 2016 Jakarta Protests or Aksi Bela Islam (Action for Defending Islam) were against the governor of Jakarta who was accused of having insulted the Quran. The governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, was the first ethnic Chinese to hold the post. (See: BBC, 'Indonesia protest: Jakarta anti-governor rally turns violent'. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-37856476>). In May 2017 he was sentenced to two years in prison but he was released in January 2019.

⁶⁶ I took this photo when I travelled to Jakarta in 2016. The demonstrators held banners that read "Jail Ahok, the law must be fair" ('Ahok' was a nickname of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama).

My historical research led me to ask: ‘Are people aware that events that they believe to have happened may not have happened exactly in the way they imagine?’ This is something that chimes with Osborne’s belief that “... the contemporary is an operative fiction” one that “regulates the division between the past and the present (via its sense of the future) within the present” (2013, p.26). So, even though *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* aimed to present the history of Korea and Indonesia since 1945, that does not mean that the exhibition was a non-fiction documentary. The forgotten and hidden histories summoned by the participating artists and activists revealed how much of this information people were not aware of, meaning that they were living an illusion. Collectively the exhibition revealed the lives of Koreans who migrated to Japan and Indonesia in order to survive during the Japanese colonial period, as well as the reality of the Indonesian economic migrants, who are currently suffering poor working conditions in Korea and Indonesia; it delivered a strong and clear message.

The first iteration of *A Tale of Two Cities* (2017) was held at the Arko Art Center in Seoul. The exhibition then travelled to other cities: Gimhae (Korea) and Jakarta (Indonesia) in 2018 (Figs. 68-106). As the tour progressed, the exhibition also introduced additional narratives based on the recent histories of the Korean and Indonesian people, specifically from the histories of Gimhae, Jatiwangi, and Jakarta, where associated events were held. These offered points of comparison and contrast between the responses to events of the different populations,⁶⁷ revealing some of the local social and political themes that art exhibitions in Korea and

⁶⁷ In particular, the Netherlands ruled Indonesia for more than 300 years (1602-1908) and in the early 1940s during World War II, Japan occupied and ruled Dutch Indonesia. The Japanese occupation of Korea was for a period of 35 years (1910-1945). The exhibition examined how the two countries have developed since their independence in August 1945, and the history of Seoul, Gimhae, Jakarta and Jatiwangi.

Indonesia had previously neglected. After the final iteration of the exhibition at the National Gallery of Indonesia, an extension of the project, *Elephant in the Room* (2018-2019) took place at the Jakarta History Museum.

For these exhibitions, I did not wish to undermine the communicative power of the works by emulating the production standards of an art museum (e.g., accompanied by a glossy catalogue and promotional activity signalling the exhibition was made for art audiences). From my earlier curatorial career in institutions, I had learned that such supplements could deter many members of the wider audience I hoped to reach. Instead, each iteration of the exhibition was accompanied by a leaflet that presented stories behind the artworks (see accompanying materials 1, 2, 3 & 4); the human stories came first, and documentation of the artists' works appeared as footnotes that placed them in a historical context. The leaflets did not include photographs of the exhibition to permanently fix memories of the artworks but aimed to allow individuals to reconsider the narratives carried by the works and develop their own personal responses to them. Also, unlike an exhibition made to meet the expectations of an art audience, there were no exclusive private views. The exhibition brought together my findings and experiences to date into how art projects could foster social engagement, contribute to social justice and benefit the underprivileged whose lived experiences are not always given due attention in society.

In addition to the narratives of the exhibitions, I devised a series of events to attract visitors. These brought artists, experts and audiences into the same space for an interchange of ideas. It was important for me to work with individuals and institutions with local credibility. For

example, in 2017, I invited the journalist Lim to give a talk at the exhibition in Seoul.⁶⁸ He explained the modern history of Seoul since Independence through a collection of newspaper cuttings, raising some alternative human perspectives on the recent past. In the first iteration of the exhibition the situation of the illegal residents of North Jakarta was raised in through videos by Indonesian activists 'Watchdoc' (Figs. 71, 72) and archive materials chosen by Rujak Center for Urban Studies (Fig. 73). For the exhibition's subsequent iteration in Gimhae (2018), Indonesian historian Kanumoyoso; journalist Kim; human rights activist Subedi Yagya Raj; and Gimhae Migrants' House were all invited to contribute to the exhibition-related events. Following an open call for migrant workers, I commissioned a group of Nepalese migrant workers to make a video on their life in Gimhae.⁶⁹ Indonesian artists Ahmett & Salina's exhibition-related workshop involved Indonesian and Nepalese migrant workers, and a video made by the artists in collaboration with the Indonesian workers introduced aspects of their lives in Gimhae to museum audiences. For the exhibition at the National Gallery of Indonesia in Jakarta (2018), I invited Korean artists, mixrice, to undertake a month's residency to produce video works in collaboration with JaF, Jatiwangi's Lair musicians, and Indonesian deaf community, Rumahtuli Jatiwangi (Fig. v).⁷⁰ The significant contribution of these groups was celebrated at the opening event of the exhibition.

⁶⁸ Lim worked at the Hankyoreh newspaper and is now retired.

⁶⁹ On their return to Nepal, the Nepalese workers who made the video contacted me for a letter to certify their work as its makers so that they could enter the work in a Nepalese film festival. I was pleased to grant permission, as this was the kind of trajectory of influence that I had hoped the projects might enable.

⁷⁰ Rumahtuli Jatiwangi, along with other residents of Jatiwangi who helped in the video production process, were among those who I invited to the exhibition opening at the National Gallery of Indonesia. It was the first time that members of the group had been invited to the opening reception of an exhibition at an art museum, and it was their first-ever visit to Jakarta.



Figure v. Collaborators from Jatiwangi, Majalengka, at the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2018), Jakarta

Elephant in the Room

I noted during work on *A Tale of Two Cities* in Indonesia that the typical profiles of visitors to the National Gallery of Indonesia and the Jakarta History Museum are significantly different. Whereas the National Gallery primarily attracts an art audience, the audience of the History Museum is composed of tourists and the wider public. Visitor numbers are also much higher at the History Museum. Because it was important to me to communicate with a wide audience sector and gauge their responses, I developed a new exhibition proposal, as an extension of the historical theme, specifically for the Jakarta History Museum. Its title, *Elephant in the Room*, referred to the historical narratives that are present in the memories of ordinary people but which fail to be acknowledged in official accounts.⁷¹ For the first *Elephant in the Room*

⁷¹ The Jakarta History Museum tells the story of the lives of Dutch aristocrats who occupied North Jakarta during the Dutch colonial period and therefore does not accurately reflect the history of Indonesians living in North Jakarta, where it is located. The Indonesian government, which has allowed these people to live as illegal immigrants since independence, currently treats them worse than they were treated over the hundreds of years of Dutch jurisdiction:

exhibition, the participating artists responded to aspects of the museum's collections, and their works were placed as interventions within the permanent displays. I was interested to see if the audience could grasp the stories behind the artworks without overt textual explanations. For an accompanying event, I asked a popular tour guide team 'Kommunitas Historia Indonesia' in Jakarta to interact with the museum's visitors; they were able to interpret Indonesia's historical sites for both tourists and local people, informing them about North Jakarta's history while introducing the museum's collections and the exhibition. On this tour, visitors were invited to consider ideas raised by a collaboration between Ahmett and Salina and local street artist Yos (Figs. vi, 110, 111); through the creation of a series of 'life-size standees', the artists sought to reconstruct the lives of slaves, whose stories were missing from the Museum's historical displays. Their aim was to provoke visitors to reflect on the position of Indonesia in the modern world, as a nation that still sends labourers abroad, and where such migrant workers are marginalized. However, most Indonesian visitors seemed to accept this situation, along with the museum's dominant historical narrative of the Dutch colonial occupation. The slave characters were seen as a form of entertainment, used to take amusing photos of friends and family (Figs. 113-116). However, whilst Ahmett and Salina's interventions did not elicit the new conversations we had hoped for, we had both agreed that the works should be considered as a test of audience response that could help in an understanding of how to develop the project to increase its impact. This audience response, therefore, guided my work for the second edition of the exhibition in 2019. Again, understanding the importance of collaborating

Following the independence of Indonesia in 1945 the land on which these people live was assigned to the Indonesian military and government. Therefore, if the Indonesian government agencies notify the local people to leave, they have no right of appeal. A further issue is that Indonesian visitors, especially those visiting Jakarta from other cities, are not made aware of the contemporary situation and continue to accept the history of Dutch imperialism without questioning its legacy.

with credible local experts, I invited two Indonesian historians, Dr Bondan Kanumoyoso and Dr Andi Achdian⁷² to present a chronicle of Jakarta's history since 1945, and this was illustrated by photographic images that I selected from the National Archives of Indonesia to represent the lives of Indonesians from the 1950s (Figs. 124-125). In this context, the material evidence presented caused both visitors and museum staff to reflect on the modern history of Jakarta; ultimately this proved more successful in provoking the Indonesian audience to think about which visions of the future had failed to develop—and even what might have regressed—amidst the changing times (Figs. 126-127).

The two *Elephant in the Room* exhibitions at the Jakarta History Museum aimed to encourage compassionate identification with 'the other' and, therefore, have a connection to the previous projects in Korea (2015-2017) that were inaugurated by recognition of difference. However, this recognition of difference expanded to concerns about human rights and the protection of fundamental liberties in Indonesia, which I sought to raise in cooperation with Indonesian artists with socially engaged practices.

I was able to critique Indonesian museum discourse because I was an outsider, but one whose alternative communications involved credible Indonesian artists and thinkers. Presented as an art project, Project 7½'s work was not viewed as an overtly strong protest against the government but a more tolerable way of inciting solidarity and inducing ideas of positive social change within the audience. Instead of seeking to direct how people think, I encouraged a

⁷² Indonesian historian Dr Bondan Kanumoyoso (University of Indonesia) compiled the Chronicle of modern and contemporary history in Jakarta after Indonesian independence in 1945, and Dr Andi Achdian (Universitas Nasional) was responsible for editorial supervision.

dialogic situation, finding this to be the best way of facilitating exchanges of views and understandings between different social groups, promoting the positive development of a community and maintaining the vitality of a place. My work *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Elephant in the Room* on the Indonesian projects has taught me that effective projects arise from shared understandings of the needs of a region, as well as empathy, trust, and strong interpersonal relationships.

Bishop has suggested that one of the tasks of a contemporary museum is to open up,

“(...) to a dynamic rereading of history that pulls into the foreground that which has been sidelined, repressed, and discarded in the eyes of the dominant classes. Culture becomes a primary means for visualizing alternatives; rather than thinking of the museum collection as a storehouse of treasures, it can be reimagined as an archive of the commons” (2013. p. 56).

Indeed, I consider the *Tale of Two Cities* and *Elephant in the Room* exhibitions to have been the start of a long-term process of introducing alternative histories. It would be naïve to suppose that the ideas they raised would have an immediate, transformational effect. Rather, I see this as a durational project and it is still ongoing, with another exhibition planned. The Jakarta History Museum's curators have told me that the two *Elephant* exhibitions so far, have helped them to understand how they might shift the museum's narrative to better reflect the history of Jakarta.



Figure vi. Opening of *Elephant in the Room* (2018), Jakarta.
Local street artist, Yos, who worked in collaboration with Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina

Sulki and Min, From the *Gray Letter* series (2016)

CONCLUSION

The motivating aim of Project 7½ was to create new spaces for people to encounter art outside of exclusive art institutions. Over the course of this research, I came to understand the importance of devising inclusive projects, particularly ones with boundaries permeable enough to admit members of an audience who expressed a desire to be part of the activity, and at the point when they wanted to do so. Whilst the forms of social engagement and the cooperative structures I have devised have followed different trajectories in Korea and Indonesia, in each regional context the participants have worked together to create events and set up exhibitions outside the perceived sphere of the dominance of any particular group. As such, I gained new insights into how art could be used as a tool to help people expand their perspectives and understand the value of each person's contribution.

From my experimental projects in Seoul, and from reflecting on instances of failure, I developed strategies to bridge the perceived gap between artists and local people, and between 'art' objects and the artefacts that were part of people's everyday lives. The principal lesson I learned was that I needed to devise situations where different groups could mix, comment and ask questions without anyone feeling that they were either serving or being subservient to another. This helped to achieve a more equal social balance within encounters framed by the project, where all could gain new insights and an appreciation of the views of others. But, while the outcomes of one project may inform plans for another, it is also necessary to be aware that when starting to work with a new group of people, they will come with widely differing sets of

experiences that cannot be foreseen; for example, my findings from the Mullaedong project in 2015 were not applied in their entirety to the Jongno project in 2016 because even though the participants were all Korean, their attitudes varied due to their jobs and lifestyles. I also realised from observing the different activities and approaches of artists in Korea and Indonesia that the circumstances of collaboration between artists and local audiences needed to differ according to the pertaining situation.

The kinds of social relationships, expectations and productive acknowledgements of difference that have emerged from my social engagement projects arise from the in-between dialogic or 'Third Spaces' (Kester, 2004, 2011; Bhabha, 2004) that have become central to the curatorial methodology of Project 7½. This entails gathering people together and paying attention to their voices. It involves understanding different perspectives as much as critical thinking and developing and delivering projects of relevance. My role is to ensure that "participation" in an art project not only results in a collection of artworks at a particular site but can be seen to develop towards a 'collective action' that has an impact on the wider world.⁷³ In both Korea and Indonesia, I established informal collaborative situations where artists and performers joined with local people to openly discuss their life experiences and different views, including their understandings of art and its function/s. It involved identifying relevant expertise among artists, activists, historians and others who shared an ambition to work towards social change and supporting the discussions and efforts of these different stakeholders, to share

⁷³ As Maria Lind explains: "'Collective action' refers precisely to acting collectively, while 'interaction' can mean that several people interact with each other, just as a single individual might interact with an apparatus by pressing a button; for example, 'participation' is more associated with the creation of a context in which participants can take part in something that someone else has created, but where there are nevertheless opportunities to have an impact". (Lind, 2007, p. 185).

understandings of a region's political and social problems so as to develop relevant and timely interventions together.

Issues at stake when considering the purpose and value of artistic interventions within community settings are numerous. One of the most challenging issues is to accept that the reasons why participants elect to be involved in a project will vary and will not be entirely consistent with mine. For me, learning to work collaboratively meant that I had first to challenge my frame of reference, embrace uncertainty and form more extended relationships with artists and the non-art public than are usual in a regular art project. I found it was also significant to find artists who understood the point of working collaboratively and who trusted me to successfully negotiate with a community; we all had to learn to be open to feedback, to sensitively interpret needs and respond positively to any criticism to recalibrate our ideas; the artists and I also had to work in a spirit of open dialogue. In a situation where opinions cannot be fully agreed upon, it is essential to establish an area of mutual agreement to facilitate collaboration.

My subsequent experience of working collaboratively on the iterative exhibitions *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Elephant in the Room* with artists, activists, historians, migrant workers, communities of musicians and deaf people associated with Jatiwangi art Factory and so forth, has helped me to develop key elements in a model that could be applied more widely. From reflecting on the development processes of these two exhibitions, I have come to recognise that my search for artists and other collaborators at the start of every new project, i.e., people who shared similar ethical values and socially orientated aims to me, need not mean a period of protracted negotiation and anxiety as to whether the 'right' personnel were on board.

Features of an Ethically Motivated Curatorial Model of Temporary Collectives

These insights have led me to develop and theorise the model of a *temporary* collective. In this, the idea of the collective of artists and/or other agents that share a common vision and goal becomes a more flexible entity. This might mean, for example, that after a project or even just a stage of a project is completed, the collective of selected personnel might change; artists and others can leave to pursue other interests and then come together again at a later stage and in a different combination for a further iteration of an exhibition. As such, my research contributes to an understanding of how to create a more sustainable model that employs the expertise, energy, and goodwill of communities, artists, and other stakeholders in ways that are agile and responsive, but which do not exhaust the valuable resource of my collaborators. The time-consuming, yet fundamental, dialogic process of forming relationships and understandings with collaborators can be reduced when there is the ability to form temporary collectives comprising a core number of individuals where necessary understandings and goals are already established. Just as members of JaF have a cohesive vision about what they want to achieve, I have found that when I can bring together a critical core of artists and other collaborators, then when new minds and talents join a project, it is not my sole responsibility to establish its ethos. I hope that the experiences of my collaborators can be applied beyond their work with Project 7½, to widen the scope of such projects and their social value over more extended time frames.

At first, I had envisaged that Project 7½ needed to work outside the institutional frameworks of art and culture to achieve its aims; however, my experiences of developing the *Tale of Two Cities* and *Elephant in the Room* exhibitions for art centres and museums in Korea and Indonesia have led me to understand it is possible to change the views of the non-art public about their relationship to art and its institutions. This is exemplified by a group of Nepalese migrant

workers who submitted the film they made as part of *The Tale of Two Cities* project in Gimhae to a film festival in Nepal, and in the delight of the deaf community, Rumahtuli Jatiwangi, at exhibiting their collaborative artwork *Gosari* (2018) (made with mixrice) at the National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta. Moreover, the curators of the various venues where the exhibitions took place were pleased to see that they were attracting new social groups through the exhibitions. The Jakarta History Museum's curators acknowledge that *Elephant in the Room* has affected their thinking, and that this exhibition has caused them to consider ways of developing new representations of Jakarta's modern history.

Postscript:

As an extension of this curatorial research, I am now applying my findings to a social foundation and social enterprise project in Indonesia. In pursuing this aim, I seek to help participating artists from Indonesia, Korea, and elsewhere, to gain a significant measure of economic independence and greater autonomy, whilst assisting vulnerable sectors of Indonesian society to gain economically viable skills and cultural recognition. In applying my research to this end, I hope to assist the creativity of artists to positively benefit a local community in an appropriately significant way.

Sulki and Min, From the *Gray Letter* series (2016)

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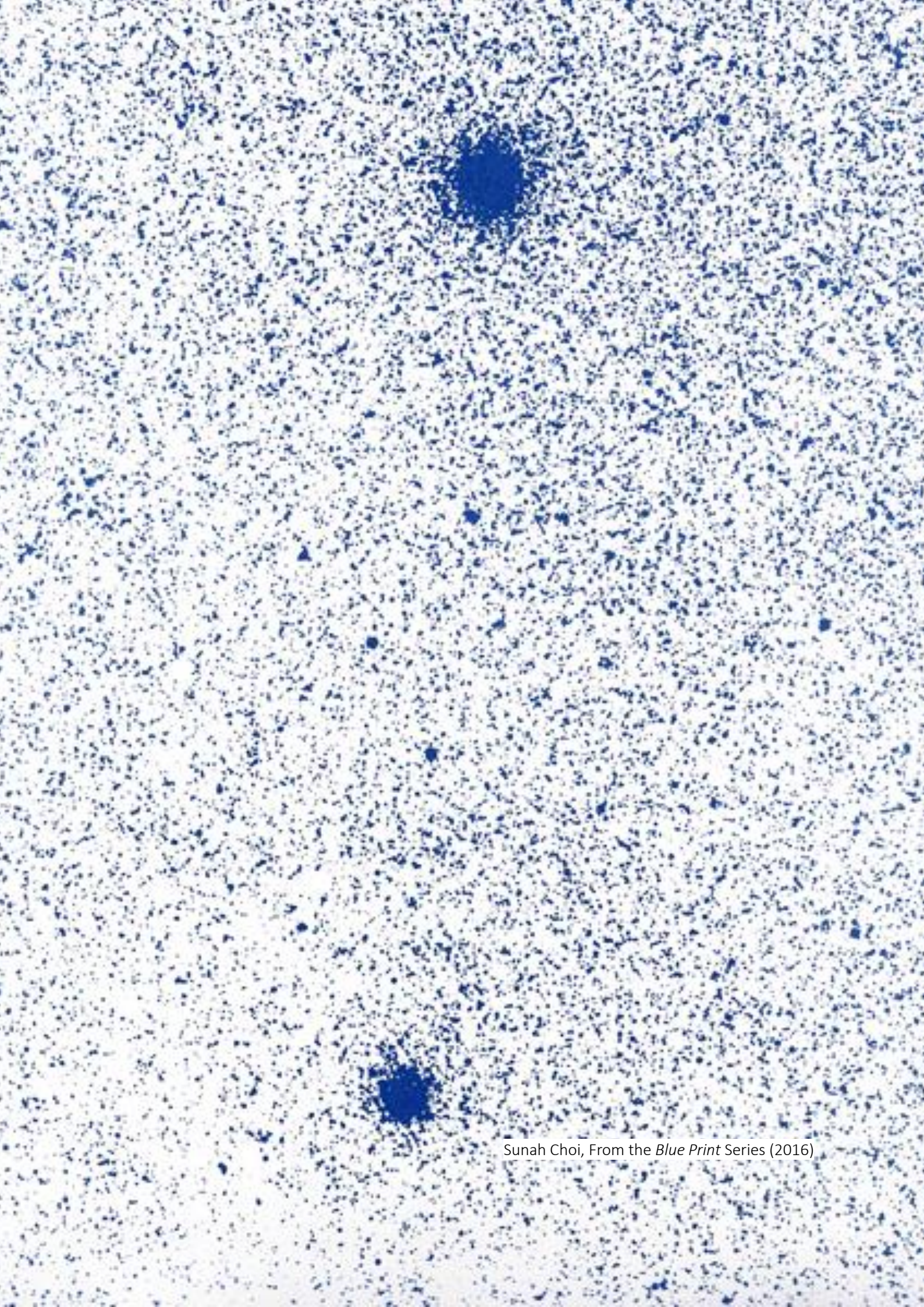
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Sunah Choi, From the *Blue Print* Series (2016)

PORTFOLIO OF WORK FOR PHD BY PUBLICATION

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Project 7½ (2014 – 2016): Seoul, Korea

Between 2014 and 2016, the exhibitions and events of Project 7½ took place at several sites across Seoul, and each year the theme of the project changed according to the character of the place. The project started in 2014 working with the theme *Art and the Unconscious*. The next phases of the project took place in Yeongdeungpo in 2015 and Jongno in 2016; both these areas of Seoul are strongly associated with aspects of Korea's industrialization and still retain this character. In 2015, the theme was *Relationships with Others*, and *Cryptographic Imagination* in 2016. Collectively the project involved artists, designers, choreographers, dancers, actors, musicians, critics, and film directors. In many instances, the forms of an exhibition and event were integrated, with artworks becoming elements within an interactive theatrical production.

Art and the Unconscious (2014): Various locations in Seoul

I invited the choreography critic Kim Nam Soo to deliver a lecture programme offering an interpretation of the work of Korean-American artist Nam June Paik through an exploration of Korean Shamanism along with Freud's and Lacan's theories of the unconscious and the various perspectives that arise from these insights. Kim's series of eight lectures, titled *Anthropological Exploration of Art and Unconscious*, were held at different venues in Seoul over a period of eight months (Fig. 4).



Figure 1. Participants of the lecture and audiences of the performance. Photograph: Heewon Kim



Figure 2. *Impromptu Choreography for Fashion Shows* (2014), before the lecture. Photograph: Heewon Kim

Alongside the first lecture, I staged a performance titled *Impromptu Choreography for Fashion Shows*. This also took place at the Itaewon store of the Japanese designer brand, Comme des Garçons (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6).

Cast

Director: Sunyoung Oh

Choreographers and performers: Myeong Gyu Song and Jae Eun Lee

Costumes: Youngjin Kim

Music: Ombre

Neither the lecturer nor the audience was aware that the lecture program accompanied the performance, as my intention was to unexpectedly shift their perspectives. Initially, those who participated in the lecture inside the shop window and the passers-by outside the shop window were separate groups. After the lecture ended, the two choreographer-performers shifted the attention of attendees at the lecture to the street outside, and pedestrians in the city streetscape also became implicated as-if performers on a stage. In these ways, different groups of spectators found themselves the subject of the attention of another.



Figure 3. *Impromptu Choreography for Fashion Shows* (2014), before the lecture. Photograph: Heewon Kim



Figure 4. Lecture by Kim Nam Soo. Photograph: Yoonzee Kang



Figure 5. *Impromptu Choreography for Fashion Shows* (2014), after the lecture. Photograph: Heewon Kim

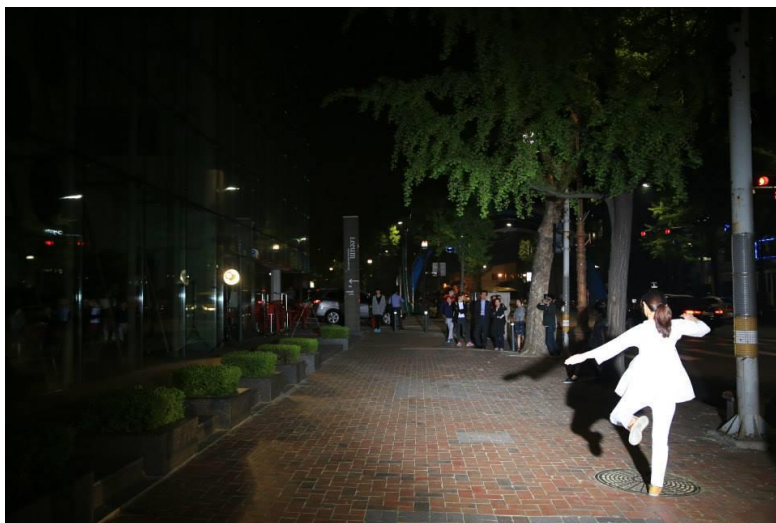


Figure 6. *Impromptu Choreography for Fashion Shows* (2014). Photograph: Heewon Kim

Human after Garment (November 11 – December 30, 2014, Roundabout, Seoul) (Fig. 7). This project arose from my conversations with a young Korean fashion designer, Taewook Kim. People often came to him because they found the universal sizing of mass-produced clothing did not fit the size or shape of their bodies. In fact, most people’s bodies are asymmetrical in some way and to clearly illustrate this, he proposed to exhibit a garment made especially for the painter Jaeho Kim, who has cerebral palsy. People could try on to directly experience the sensation of a jacket made for a differently shaped person.



Figure 7. Taewook Kim, *Human after Garment* (2014), shop window project, Seoul

Relationships with Others (2015): Yeongdeungpo, Seoul

The year's productions took place in the iron district of Seoul, 54 Mullae-dong 3-ga. The first project, *Functional Dissonance* (13 March 2015), involved a group of audience-participants who were led into the alley by a tour guide and who unexpectedly found themselves in the *Mise-en-Scène* of a movie and being directed by a script. *Functional Dissonance* (2015) consisted of 5 individual projects presented within one performative scenario.



Figure 8. *Functional Dissonance* (2015)

1. *Functional Dissonance*, 2015

· ***Film Script Serving Functional Dissonance*** [performative scenario]

Cast

Concept: Sunyoung Oh

Film Director: Sook Hyun Kim (actress performed an experimental film director and writer of the script)

Tour Guide: Lee Gyeyoung (actress performed a tour guide)

The audience, depending on the degree of their participation, became either supporting actors or extras (Figs. 8, 9). Within the cinematographic experience, the audience was encouraged to visualise the different elements that make a film: the predetermined movement of the camera lens, a confusing montage of edits, striking sound recordings, the inside and outside of the frame that defines the perspective of the viewer, the *mise-en-scène* created within the field of vision, and the weaving of different stories. For example, as the Director of the fictional movie, Sook Hyun Kim explained to them:

“Here's the frame. However, the spaces that are not included in the frame, even the backspace of the camera, are called the off-screen space of the movie. It's invisible to moviegoers, and now we imagine a substantial frame. Imagine that the surface of off-screen space extends beyond space, below the mantle in the Earth, and this is the internal space of the screen. (...) In the frame, we are a formal element along the way. It's a systematized relationship. We're building a Mise-en-Scène out there with our eyes. [The Director points to the road, making a square frame with her hands.] The definition of Mise-en-Scène is the staging of events. We will face the case together. The frame size of 3:4 is now expanded.”⁷⁴

The script of the tour guide also included slang traditionally used by the ironworkers of the area, this made parts of the Guide's dialogue incomprehensible to the participants: They became bewildered not only by the language the Tour Guide used but by the scene they faced and the difference between the art they expected to encounter and the reality of the streetscape.



Figure 9. *Functional Dissonance* (2015). An unplanned situation occurred. The situation, where a local worker objected to the perceived critical gaze of the audience, became a catalyst to the future direction of the project. [Further information, see the main Commentary pp. 52-53]

⁷⁴ Sook Hyun Kim. *Film Script Serving Functional Dissonance*. Performative Scenario (2015).

· ***Uniforms Serving Functional Dissonance*** [Experimental Fashion Show]

Cast

Concept: Sunyoung Oh

Bespoke clothing: Park Hyesu

In one part of the alley, the *Functional Dissonance* audience encountered a group of six ironworkers from the Eojin factory wearing bespoke workwear designed by fashion designer Park Hyesu.⁷⁵ When a designer measures people's bodies their asymmetry is often revealed. While working people do not usually wear bespoke clothing, I questioned if custom-made clothes might not be suited to the body shapes of manual workers. (For example, the worker's arms may be longer or thicker because they are more developed by physical labour.) This intervention, titled *Uniforms Serving Functional Dissonance*, explored the sensations that come from wearing made-to-order garments, ones perfectly fitted to the body; the workers spoke about what it felt like to be wearing such garments and told the audience about their everyday working lives (Figs. 10, 11, 12, 13).



⁷⁵ This element of *Functional Dissonance* was originally conceived to be an extension of the *Human for Garment* exhibition. However, due to other commitments Taewook Kim was unable to realise the idea and instead I asked Park Hyesu, a PhD researcher in Fashion, to make the customized workwear for the labourers in Mullae-dong.





Figures 10, 11, 12, 13. *Uniforms Serving Functional Dissonance* (2015)

· **Performance Serving Functional Dissonance** [Experimental Music Performance]

Cast

Concept: Sunyoung Oh

Cellist: Nam Yumi, Percussionist: Cho Insuk

For the *Functional Dissonance* musical performance, the musicians improvised a composition based on their perceptions of the ambient sounds of Mullae-dong (Figs. 14, 15).



Figures 14, 15. *Performance Serving Functional Dissonance* (2015)

· ***Deconstructed Defensive Measure*** [Exhibition]

For this *Functional Dissonance* project, I asked artist Son Jongjun to take apart a work titled *Defensive Measure* that he created for a previous project. We titled this re-production *Deconstructed Defensive Measure*. The title of the original work *Defensive Measure* (2014) referred to the name for the military actions that would be undertaken by the U.S. Marines, based in Okinawa, in case of an emergency situation on the Korean peninsula. The concept was that he would symbolically ‘disarm’ this work in the context of *Functional Dissonance* to represent the possibility of a peaceful co-existence with others. He explained his *Defensive Measure* work as follows:

“... stereotypes and individualism can represent modern society; aggression has become a way of expression to protect oneself; people show aggression towards another to secure their own safety; others develop defensive measures to protect their interests; however, they hurt themselves by expressing these defensive measures more than needed”.

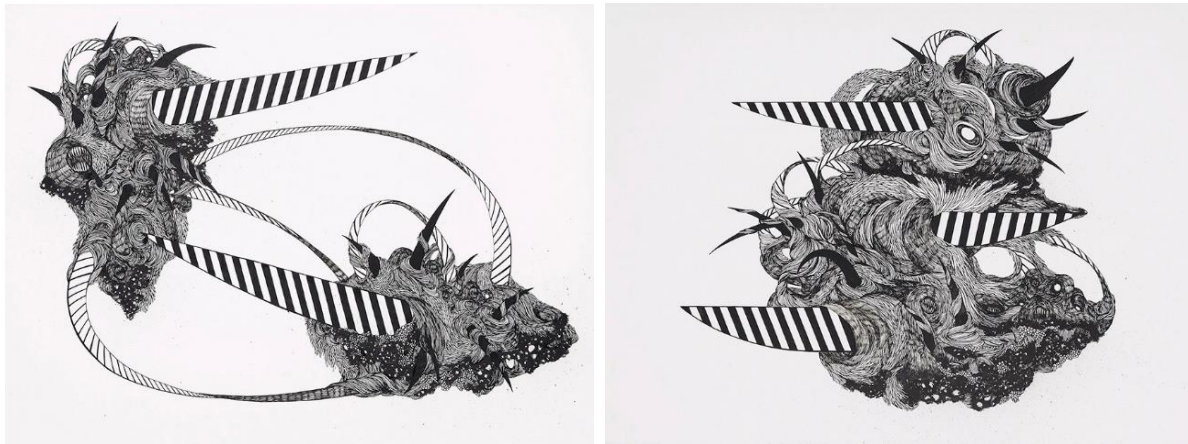
He said he wanted to talk about the critical path of contemporary society in which humanity is replaced by material value. The dismantled individual elements were laid out across the gallery floor (Fig. 16).



Figure 16. Floor: Son Jongjun, *Deconstructed Defensive Measure* (2015).
Wall: Ryu Jieun, *Collision of Reveries* (2015).

· *Collision of Reveries* [Exhibition]

A series of *Collision of Reveries* ink drawings on paper by Ryu Jieun, represented the artist's repressed desires and described the complicated tangles of her inner self (Figs. 17, 18).



Figures 17, 18. Jieun Ryu, *Collision of Reveries*, each 76.5 x 56.5 cm, ink on paper, 2015

The hour-long alley tour of *Functional Dissonance* ended in the basement space where the artworks *Deconstructed Defensive Measure* and *Collision of Reveries* were installed. This space offered a refuge from the alley, and at the same time, it was a place where the artist and audience removed the personal shields, they erected to protect themselves. The various elements of the *Functional Dissonance* project challenged conventional audience expectations of where and how they would encounter art.

The following conversation took place between two local residents and a visiting artist in the alley in March 2015:

Mr. Choi (company owner): Why are artists crawling into Mullae-dong?

An artist (visitor): Because the rent is cheap.

Mr. Park (resident and worker in the alley): Usually, the second and third floors of the Mullae-dong steel mills are vacant, but because artists are coming in, the landlords keep on raising the rent. So, it becomes tough for people like us to keep up with the rent.

I include this exchange to offer a sense of how local businesses and people held a generally negative perception of artists working in the area. This was the situation I faced as a curator working in Mullae-dong and one that I sought to improve.

2. *Pollination* - Seoyoung Bae [Residency, mural project, and exhibition, April - August, 2015]

After the *Functional Dissonance* project, I was looking for an artist who was willing to examine the relationship between art and local people and express their observations and understandings of the Mullae-dong iron district from their own perspectives, but with some insight into and sensitivity to the area. I invited emerging artist, Seoyoung Bae, to take up a four-month artists' residency using the Project 7½ space as her studio so that she could observe the everyday life of the district and gain inspiration from the area for her work. The artist and I explored various ways to directly engage with the local community of Mullae-dong. Outcomes included a new signboard for the Daeryuk Steel Company and street murals (Fig. 19).

This was the artist's perspective:

"This spring, I ran into the curator of Project 7½, Sunyoung Oh, and she asked me to join in as a participating artist for a part of the project. Under the fundamental theme of 'senses', the project comprised a series of exhibitions in the Mullae-dong iron district this year. It kicked off with *Functional Dissonance*, which explored the relational gap between the locals and incomers to the area. It was only natural that the first exhibition reflects symbiosis or coexistence as the following discussion point. I was delighted to be a part of this project. However, I had some hesitation in setting to work in view of the fact that I was a complete outsider who had not yet had a chance to gain an understanding of this regional culture. Meanwhile, the solution came from the curator, who suggested that I start working on a signboard and a mural painting for Daeryuk Steel Company located in the iron district. So, my small busy life in Mullae-dong began, and it led to new social interactions. I got to know several locals, including the owner of Daeryuk Steel Company and his close colleague Mr Manho. On top of that, more and more people approached me, such as the steel mill owner who asked me to paint roses on his building and Mr Dongjin, who likes to carry around a bottle of makgeolli all the time. These new interactions allowed me to get a glimpse of life in the iron district. Here, a symbiotic relationship was better than negative coexistence. No one was eager for utopia.

The locals of Mullae-dong may not consider their relationship with artists as being symbiotic. Artists may only prompt rapid urbanization while being settlers who receive support from the locals. I do not think it would have any validity if a settler brought the natives out of their solid and well-established culture to propose a new cultural framework. Like the blossom on an old tree, I hope that the grafting of artists onto the iron district will lead to organic creation".

“My work in Mullaedong developed quite differently in comparison to the way I previously worked. Interaction with the environment surrounding me was important, especially sharp contrasting views of streets of the area. Despite the streetscape being totally unfamiliar to me, in some sense, I had four pleasant month-long residencies including exhibition period in the place. A few of the ironworkers I encountered during my work on a mural painting on the street in front of the atelier became interested in what I was doing and talked to me with curiosity. A series of short conversations with them brought a stable friendly relationship. They sometimes came down to the basement, the atelier, to banter with me, saying jokingly “How on earth could this be art?”. At the same time, they were very appreciative of my artistic efforts to represent their lives in this harsh environment. The workers chatted to me in a friendly way and returned my waves of greeting with delightful welcoming smiles, even when hard at work. As time went by, I could feel some fellowship between myself and my ironworker-neighbours on the street. Yet again, ‘relations’ of life and matter of labour cause resonance in my mind while getting used to my daily life in the rugged and crazily roaring street.

It was pretty interesting but strange to find comments about Mullaedong in internet space during my work there. Many essays and comments had titles such as ‘beautiful encounter of wage earners and arts’. However, most of the ironworkers in Mullaedong are not ‘wage earners’ but more like self-employed businessmen who run their own ironworking factories. Distorted information floating in cyberspace often prevents people from having a clear vision of the whole entity, Mullaedong, in this case, and the current dissonance may be a reflection of this understanding. Mass media has a strong influence on public awareness of certain objects and events. In fact, arts in Mullaedong are media that provide a platform for people to commune with each other. However, there is some awkward impression of using the word ‘arts’ with ‘wage earner’ in the sense of flattening individuals as stereotypes. In this case, ‘arts’ may easily be misread in our perception as ‘a superior’ to ‘wage earner’”.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Seoyoung Bae's notes (August, 2015) published on the website Project 7½. Available at: www.sevenahalf.com.



Figure 19. Seoyoung Bae, *Pollination* (2015), Mullae-dong, Seoul. While making murals, the artist was able to talk to people on the street. The mural was created with the assistance of local people. She made a further series of artworks for the exhibition that followed.

3. *Who in the World am I?* - Sunyoung Oh (Director) [Event]

The original experimental film production, *Functional Dissonance* (2015), led to another performance: *Who in the World am I?* (6pm, 31 October 2015). Over the course of almost a year, the individual projects of individual participating artists accumulated, and I brought them all together in one outcome. An invited audience gathered at 1, Dorim-ro 128-gil, Yeongdeungpo-gu, Seoul, for an outdoor event that featured an experimental film, a play, a performance, and an exhibition (Fig. 20).



Figure 20. Signboard of theatre 7½ in Mullae-dong alley, Seoul

· *Here, I am...*, 2015

Sunyoung Oh (Director); Sung Gook Ryu, Sunyoung Oh (Script); Sung Gook Ryu, Malgeum Kang, Hyun Soo Lee with Okuda Masashi, Yunjin Choi (Performers) [Play]

Artist HASC's work *ReNCODE* functioned to spotlight the play and performance.

Jiyeon Lee's *Enter Nowhere: Down the Rabbit Hole* (2015) served as the backdrop to Sook Hyun Kim's film *Who in the World am I?* (2015).

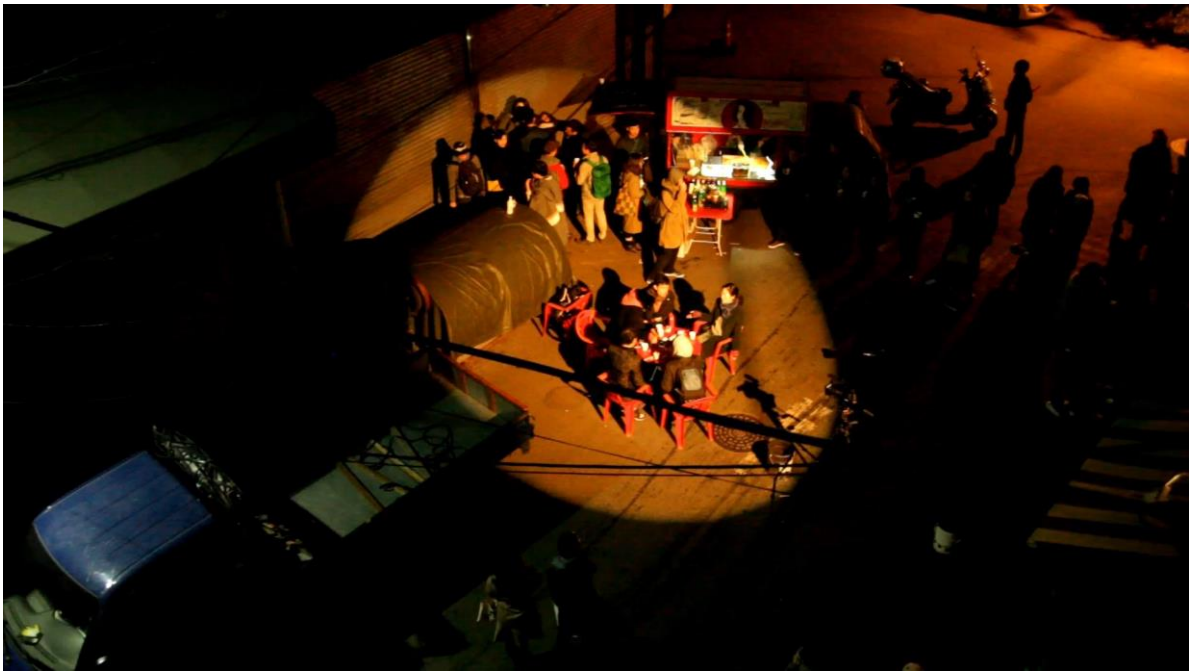
Seoyoung Bae's mural, *Pollination* (2015), served as the backdrop to the performance of choreographer Hong Seok Jang's work *Is That It* (2015).

While working on *Functional Dissonance*, I had identified a theatrical element in the iron alley that I wanted to explore further.⁷⁷ *Who in the World am I?* took inspiration from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* to explore existential questions and it connected at certain points with the work of other artists involved with the project.⁷⁸ The invited guests were requested to adopt a different attitude to view the different kinds of artworks, like role-playing in a game. The Wonderland within the rabbit hole in the film broadly reflected the journey in Lewis Carroll's story. However, rather than an adult reading the words of a storybook, the journey was more like that of a child watching a fairy tale. The characters of this Wonderland expressed themselves through body language. They were 'adults' who assigned themselves to categories that they could no longer escape from; they imposed objectivity on others; they appeared discontented, isolated and in a state of absurdity (Figs. 21, 22, 23, 24). In this production, Alice, once a mere fictional character of film, video, performance, and animation, met real people from the real world. Given the fragmented elements of the event (e.g., time, space, narrative, image, physical performance, symbols) making sense of their relationships to a whole narrative was up to each viewer.



⁷⁷ The whole alley nearby 54 Mulla-dong 3-ga was considered to be a stage when I started this project with *Functional Dissonance*.

⁷⁸ Jiyeon Lee and Seoyoung Bae (visual art), HASC (multimedia art), Sung Gook Ryu, Malgeum Kang, and Hyun Soo Lee (Play actor and actress) and Hong Seok Jang (choreographer).



Figures 21, 22, 23. *Here, I am...* (2015) from *Who in the World am I?* (2015)



Figure 24. *Is That It* (2015) from *Who in the World am I?* (2015)



Figure 25. Last scene of *Who in the World am I?* (2015) in Mullaedong, Seoul



Figure 26. Audiences of the event



Figure 27. Yunjin Choi, actor and neighbour of Project 7½ in a scene of the play *Here, I am...* (2015)

7½	홍상현 HONG, Sang-Hyun	7½	이록현 Lee Lock
	·		·
	경계에서 가장 빛나는 The Most Brilliant on the Border		침전물 Sediment
	·		·
	2015년		2015년
	11월 18일-25일		11월 28일
	영등포구 도림로128가길 1		영등포구 도림
	지하 1층		지하
	·		·
	오프닝		오프닝
	11월 18일 수요일		11월 28일
	오후 7시		오후 7시
	후원		후원
	서울특별시, 서울문화재단		서울특별시, 서울문화재단

7½	이록현 Lee Lochyun	7½	하상철 HASC
	·		·
	침전물 상자 Sediment Box		넌 NaN
	·		·
	2015년		2015년
	11월 28일-12월 5일		12월 12일
	영등포구 도림로128가길 1		영등포구 도림
	지하 1층		지하
	·		·
	오프닝		오프닝
	11월 28일 토요일		12월 12일
	오후 7시		오후 5시
	후원		후원
	서울특별시, 서울문화재단		서울특별시, 서울문화재단

7½	하상철 HASC	7½	
	·		·
	넌 NaN		
	·		·
	2015년		
	12월 12일-19일		
	영등포구 도림로128가길 1		
	지하 1층		
	·		·
	오프닝		
	12월 12일 토요일		
	오후 5시		
	후원		후원
	서울특별시, 서울문화재단		서울특별시, 서울문화재단

Figure 28. Posters for the last three exhibitions designed by Sulki and Min (2015)

In 2015 the Seoul Metropolitan Government provided a budget through the Seoul Museum of Art to provide funded opportunities for artists in Mulla-dong suffering from MERS. The initiative was designed to support artists in a difficult situation, but it actually only served to emphasize divisions in society and among the artists who took part and those who did not. In response to the situation, I created the final three *Relationships with Others* exhibitions in Mulla-dong with three artists who were not part of the government-funded project. Each of the three artists presented a critique of the ‘reality’ of Mulla-dong from their own personal perspective.

4. Hong Sanghyun, *The Most Brilliant on the Border* (November 18-25, 2015)

Hong Sanghyun captured the ironworks of Mullae-dong at sunset during August and September 2015. By leaving the shutter of his camera open he picked up the boundary between day and night, at sunset; this was the moment when the metal fragments of Mullae-dong alley also received the light. It led him to reconsider the 'gelatine silver print' that he had learned about when he first encountered the medium of photography and he sought to reproduce images of metal with metal. He had only thought of simple objects, such as a spoon, or a coin corresponding to the idea of metal when he first encountered photography a decade ago, but now he could feel the 'direct' experience of metal as a tangible substance (Figs. 29, 30).



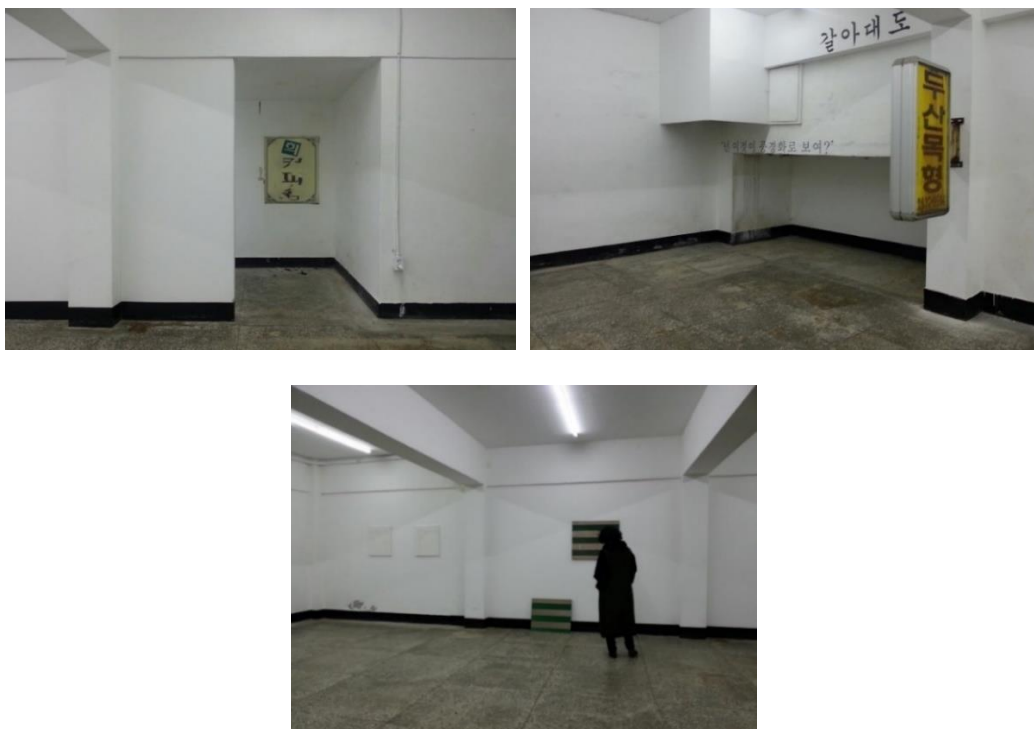


Figures 29, 30. Hong Sanghyun, *The Most Brilliant on the Border* (2015)

5. Lee Roc Hyun, *Sediment Box* (November 28 - December 5, 2015)

Lee Roc Hyun collected and recycled abandoned signboards to produce her artworks. The Seoul Metropolitan Government's funding for artists whose livelihood was affected by MERS encouraged the replacement of the signboards of local businesses by ones created by artists. However, from her perspective, as a resident of Mullae-dong, this was a waste of time and money, as the old signboards were not an eyesore. She likened her use of the signage to the geological process of the accumulated depositions of sedimentary rocks. She explained:

“(...) the title 'Sediment Box' (...) originated from the sight of the new signboards going up and the old ones being taken down in my neighbourhood; I rushed to think of why the works from different times are tied together. When the signboards were changed, I may have expected something to be dramatically different. But I got to know for sure that such signboards cannot do anything about the accumulated time. The time of the place, the time of the human (...) Of course, it isn't easy to read the time from everything visible. While people reminisce on the traces of the time, it is more difficult to deal with the busy and painful minds that are not satisfied with the time being seen. Sometimes, when I visit the place where traces are gathered, they are stuffed with a band around them. I want to leave a few things and pass on the story”.
(From the artist's project notes.) (Figs. 31, 32, 33)



Figures 31, 32, 33. Lee Roc Hyun, *Sediment Box*, installation views, 2015

6. Ha Sangcheol (aka. HASC), **NaN** (December 12-19, 2015)

Ha Sangcheol made the space of Project 7½ in Mullae-dong function as a complete artwork, and not merely as an 'exhibition gallery'. The ceiling of the space has a small hole, which connects to the entrance floor of a business called 'Clover Metals.' It looks like a device used to spy on the ground floor from an underground tunnel. The iron plate covering this hole seems intact during the business hours of 'Clover Metals', and when the store is closed, the bottom plate cannot be opened because the security shutter presses down on it. Only half of the uncovered plates are visible from the outside. Ha Sangcheol's work made full use of the physical characteristics of the space, harnessing the electrical current of the underground space to strike the iron plates installed in the ceiling with beams of light. The Morse code signal 'SOS', generated by the installation, was transmitted not only to visitors to the underground space but also to people walking on the street. In this way, space was converted into an object that sent out repeated signals. The SOS message was created through alternating states of darkness and light, silence and sound. The audience was left to wonder who might be the intended recipient of the message? The exhibition title 'nan' is a combination of English letters 'SOS ('sos' to be exact)' typed on Korean keyboards; this combination of Korean letters pronounced as "nan" does not have a meaning in the Korean language (Fig. 34).

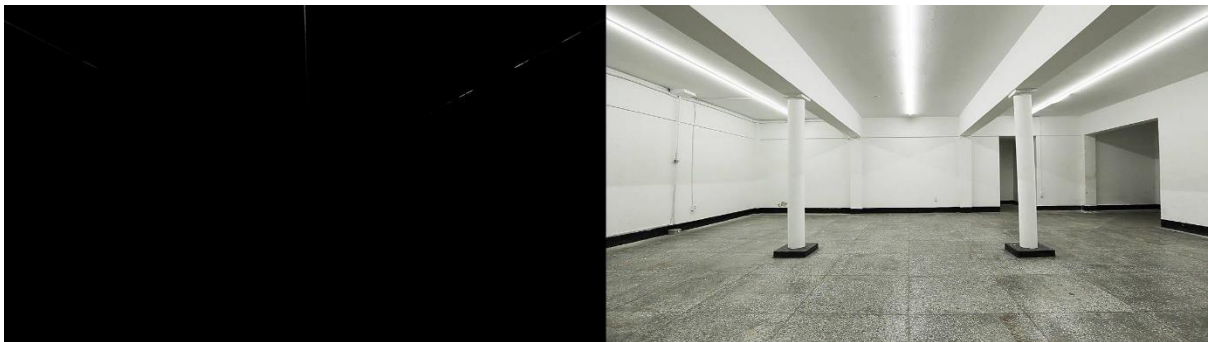


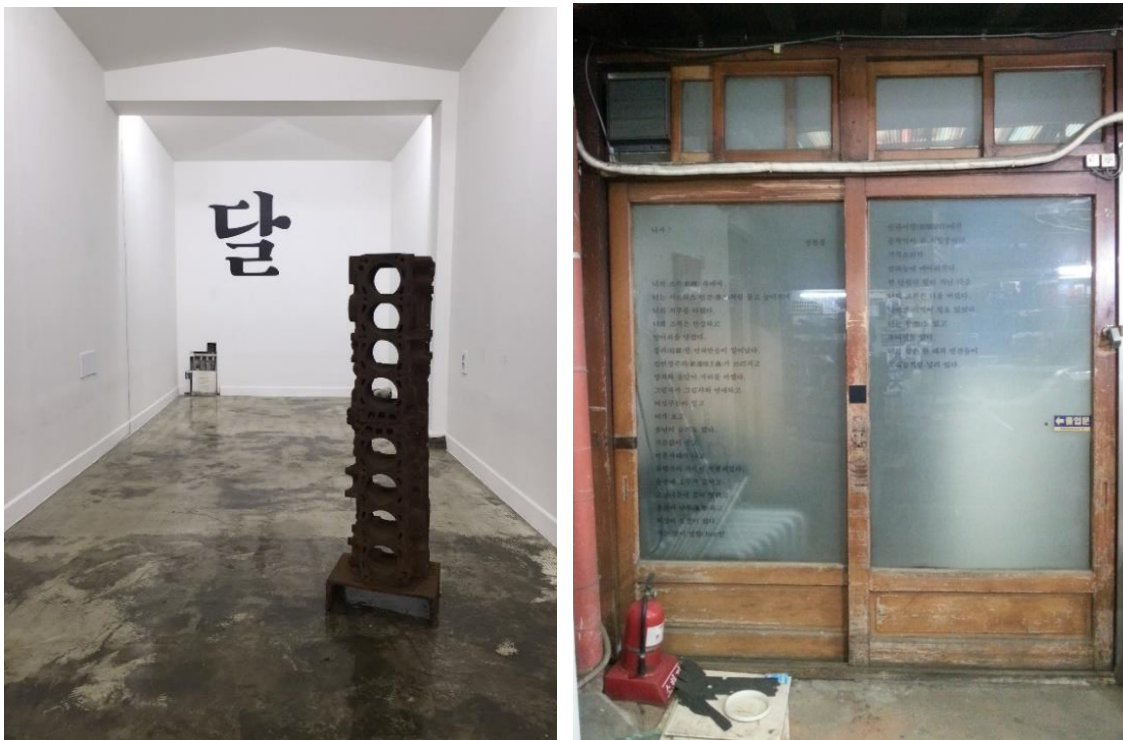
Figure 34. Ha Sangcheol, *NaN*, installation view, 2015



Figures 36, 37. *Cryptographic Imagination* 'Seoyoung Bae, Hyunji Lee' (2016)

2. Chan Kyung Sung + Kiwan Sung, May 2016 [Exhibition]

The exhibition included works made using the metal objects that the late poet Chan Kyung Sung (1930-2013) found on the streets, along with 103 one-syllable word poems from his collection *Sun*, and 18 poems from his *Screw* series (Figs. 38, 39, 40). Both art audiences and members of the local community could discover the late poet's work tucked away in various corners of the neighbourhood, leading them to question which of the objects and scripts could be deemed 'art' and which were not (Figs. 41, 42). The late poet's son, Kiwan Sung, also a poet and musician, selected the 103 poems from *Sun* at random and converted them into artificially digitized voices which played on speakers in and around the exhibition space under the title *Poems without Footnotes* (2016). The digital voices combined consonants and vowels from the late poet and his son's voice recordings so that the voice of the father joined the voice of the son in a random reading of the 103 poems. Chan Kyung Sung was a poet who resuscitated discarded or dead words, and the exhibition provided an opportunity to look back upon his life-long accomplishment as a poet.⁷⁹ I also attached his *Screw* poems to plasterboard walls—abandoned building materials found on the side of the road and which I erected in the alley, and I displayed his collection of one-syllable word poems on shop windows and signboards around the streets in Jongno (Figs. 39-43).



Figures 38, 39. Installation view of *Cryptographic Imagination* 'Chan Kyung Sung + Kiwan Sung' (2016)

⁷⁹ Jongup Lim. (2016). Access available from www.sevannahalf.com.



Figure 40. Installation view of *Screw 7* of *Screw Series* written by Chan Kyung Sung
Cryptographic Imagination 'Chan Kyung Sung + Kiwan Sung' (2016), Jongno, Seoul



Figure 41. Installation view of one-syllable word poems
Cryptographic Imagination 'Chan Kyung Sung + Kiwan Sung' (2016)



Figures 42, 43. Installation view of one-syllable word poems
Cryptographic Imagination 'Chan Kyung Sung + Kiwan Sung' (2016)

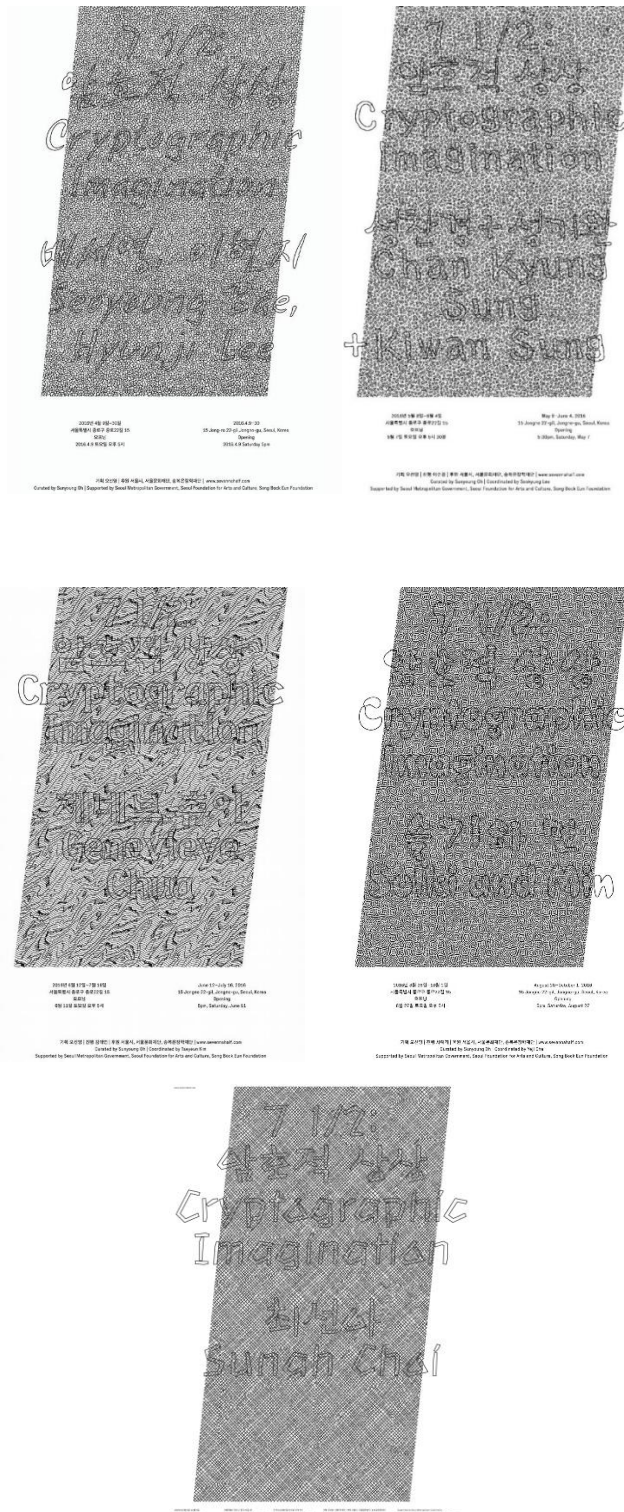


Figure 44. Posters of *Cryptographic Imagination* designed by Sulki and Min (2016)⁸⁰

⁸⁰ <https://www.sulki-min.com/wp/cryptographic-imagination-5/>

3. Genevieve Chua, June – July 2016 [Exhibition]

The Singaporean artist, Genevieve Chua, showed a collection of abstract conceptual artworks titled Vestigials and Halves. The works comprised stickers of typographic symbols and modular paintings (Fig. 45). Following the exhibition, some of the vinyl sheet stickers were attached to the wall of the alley between its shop signs, blurring the boundaries between the everyday marks and symbols of the streetscape and the artworks (Figs. 46-49).

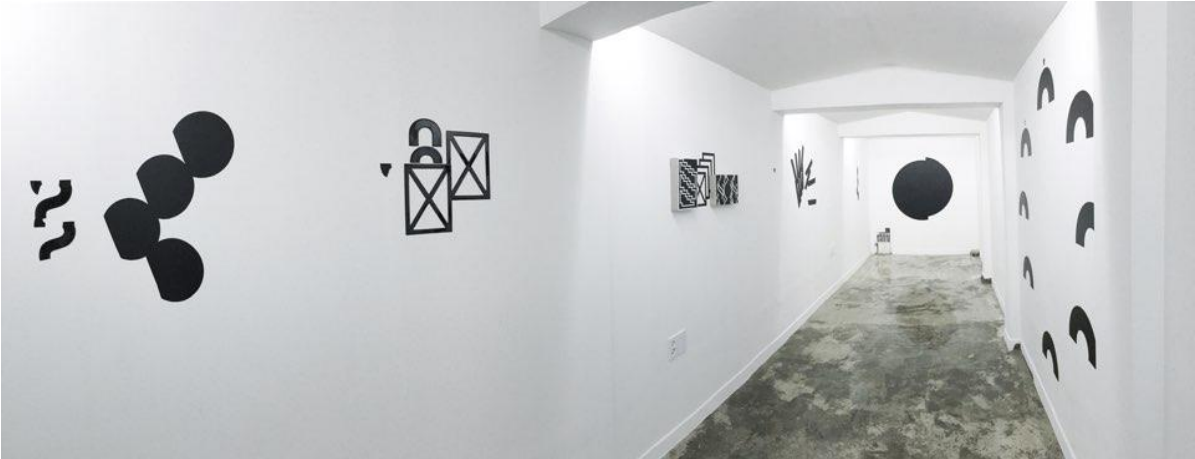


Figure 45. *Cryptographic Imagination* ‘Genevieve Chua’ (2016), Jongno, Seoul







Figures 46, 47, 48, 49. *Cryptographic Imagination 'Genevieve Chua'* (2016), after the exhibition



Figure 50. Trace of *Cryptographic Imagination 1, 2, 3* (2016), Jongno, Seoul

4. Sulki and Min, August – October 2016 [Exhibition]

Graphic designers Sulki and Min's site-specific work included images of pie charts, security patterns, and badges made using plastic and paper. The overall theme of the exhibition was visual exposure and concealment, and they sought to undermine the communicative potential of the various graphic symbols by eliminating the conventional clues needed to interpret them (Figs. 51-55).



Concept Drawing 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 9, 2016, digital printing on fabric, 210×180cm each
Gray Letters, 2016, offset printing on paper, eight sheets, 29.7×21cm each
These Won't Melt, 2016, paper, plastic and metal, six pieces, dia. 2.2cm, 2.5cm, 3.3cm, 4.4cm, 5.8cm and 7.5cm
List of Exhibits: 7 ½, 2016, 2016, pigmented polyurethane coating and screen printing on wood, 40×30cm

Figures 51, 52, 53, 54. *Cryptographic Imagination* 'Sulki and Min' (2016)



Figure 55. Sulki and Min, *Notification Muzak*, 2016

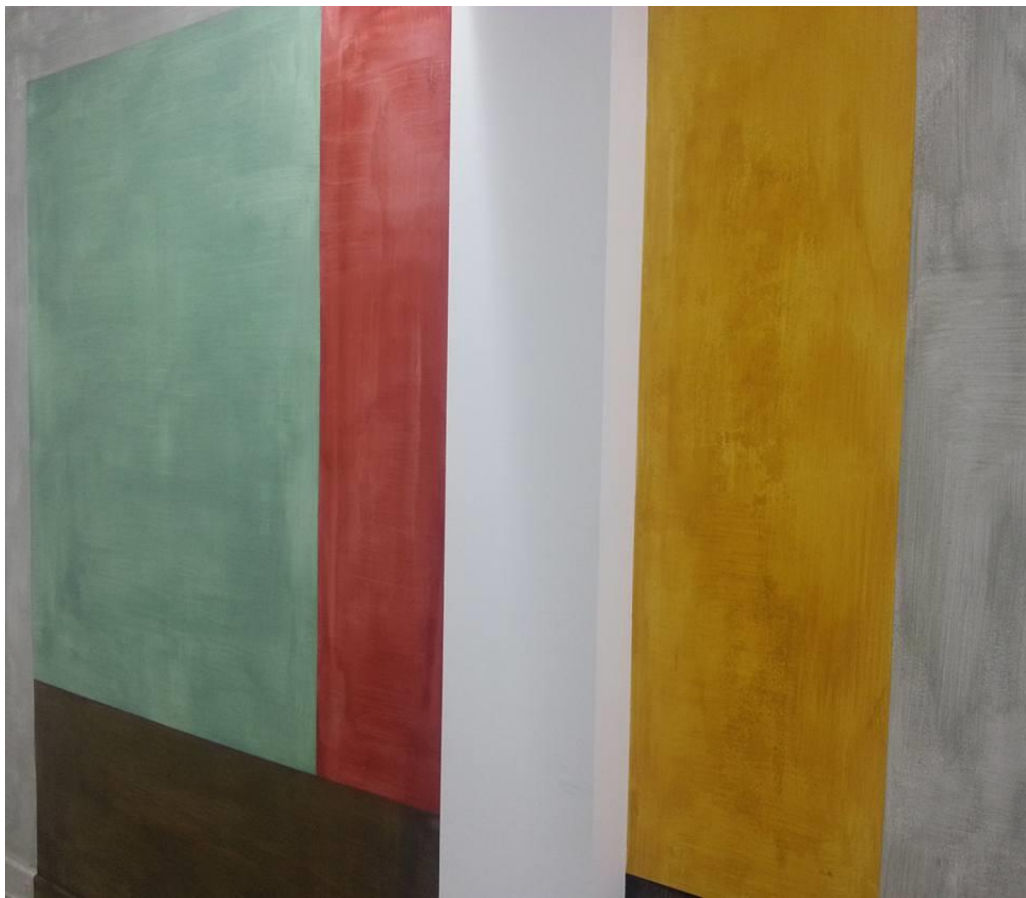
5. Sunah Choi, October - November 2016 [Exhibition]

The exhibition had three elements: 13 postcard-sized watercolour paintings which she posted to Seoul from Berlin (Fig. 56); murals (Figs. 57, 58, 59); photographs based on the principle of the Photogram (Figs. 59, 60). The colour combinations of the watercolour paintings serve as a code without any explanation. The possible loss or damage caused during the postal delivery was an essential element of the work. The abstract photographs *Blue Print* (2016) were made using the *Cyanotype* technique, with shadows created by placing objects directly on light sensitive paper and exposing them to light. Whereas photography is often understood as capturing reality, Choi pursued the potential of this camera-free photographic technique as a way of creating unique images. The technical constraints of the medium made her focus on the subject matter and through her attention to the negative spaces between ordinary things, she invented a fresh abstract design and pattern in reinterpretations of army camouflage patterns (Figs. 60, 61).

Choi's site-specific mural *Wall Painting* (2016) related to both the scale of the site of the exhibition and its originality of its structure: An old warehouse was painted white for use as a project space, and the concrete floor was exposed by ripping up floorboards. During this process of renovation, the foundation stone of an old 'Hanok' (a Korean traditional house) was found. Her mural work served as a conduit for connecting the present with the traces of the older structure. By these means she created a layering of space and time, bringing together ideas of the past and present, in a fusion of traditional and contemporary art forms. At the same time, the images highlighted the microscopic and macroscopic world, angles and scales, ideas of time and memory.



Figure 56. *Postcards* (2016), *Cryptographic Imagination 'Sunah Choi'* (2016), Jongno, Seoul





Figures 57, 58, 59. *Mural* (2016), *Cryptographic Imagination 'Sunah Choi'* (2016), Jongno, Seoul



Figure 60. *Blue Print* (2016), *Cryptographic Imagination 'Sunah Choi'* (2016), Jongno, Seoul

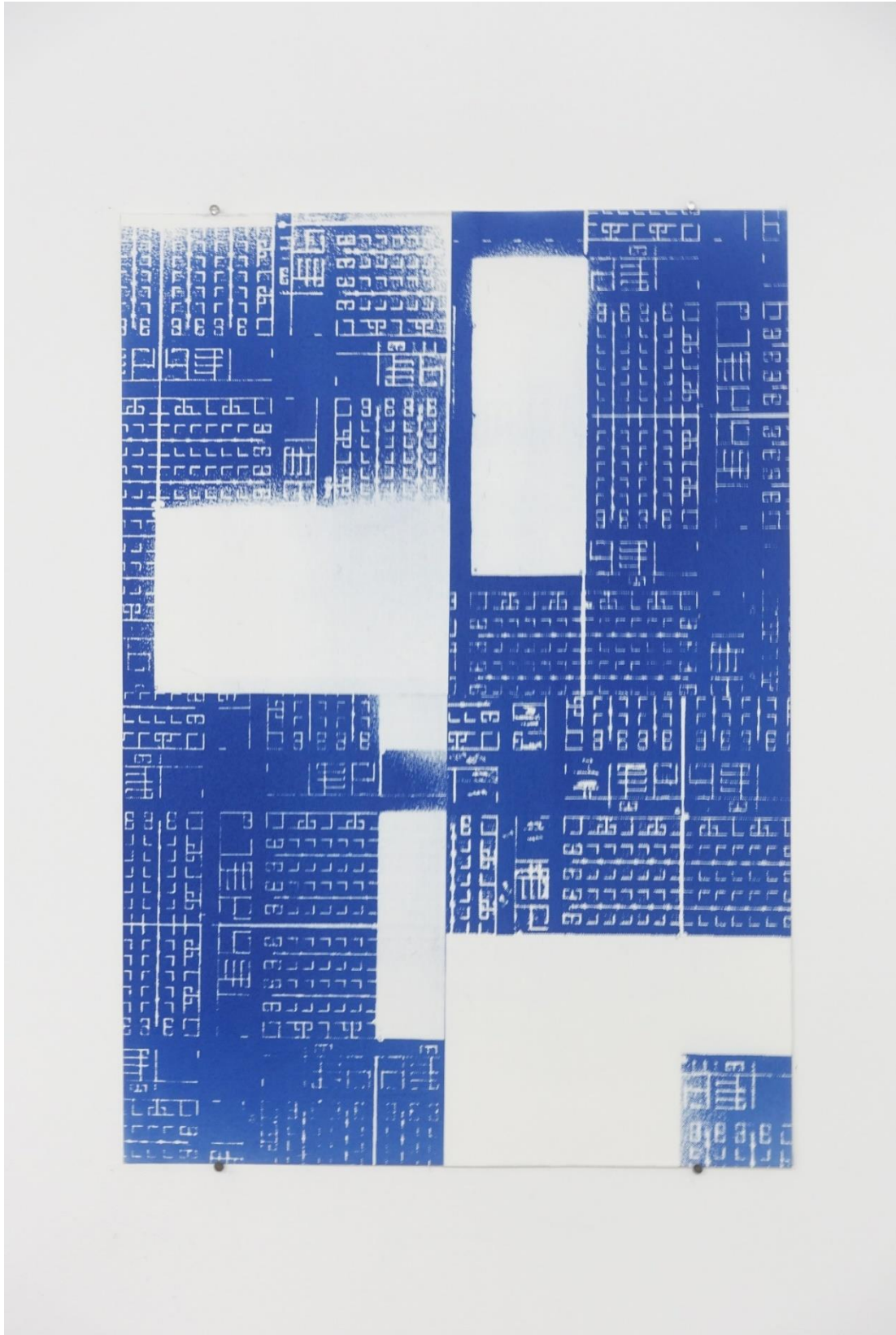
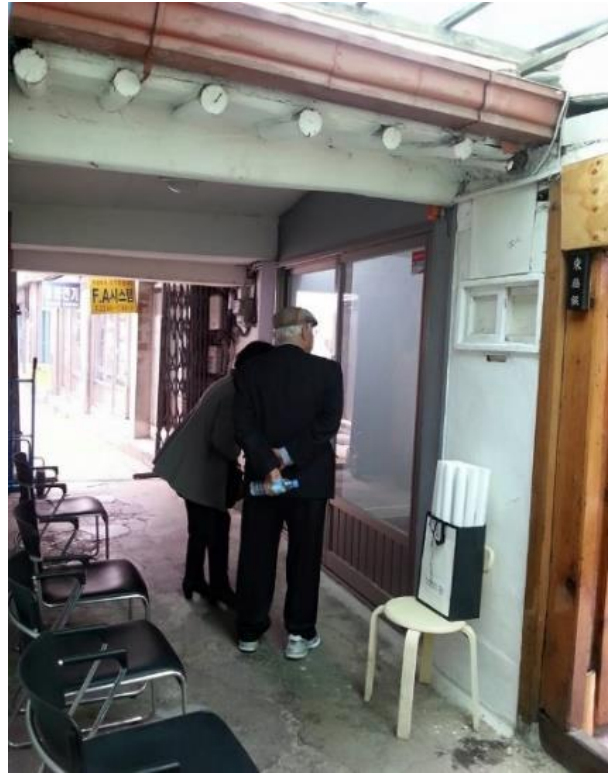
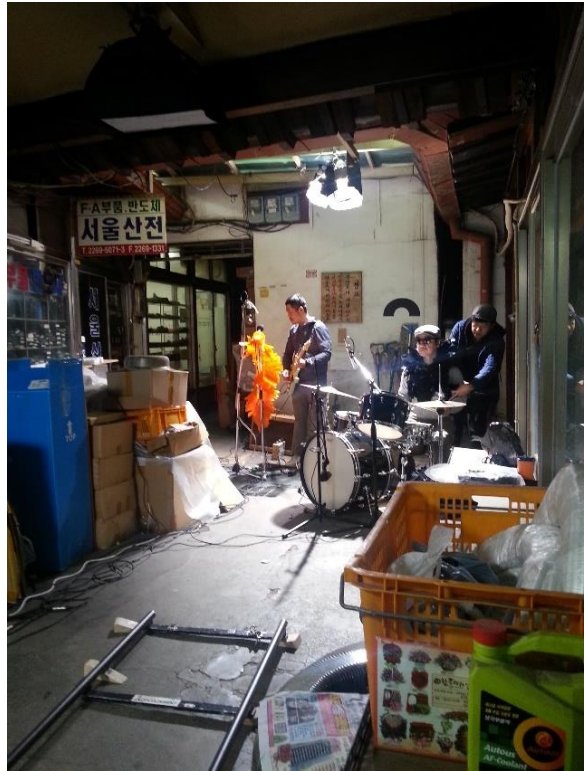


Figure 61. *Blue Print #32* (2016), *Cryptographic Imagination* 'Sunah Choi' (2016)



Figures 62-64. Visitors to the *Cryptographic Imagination* exhibitions in Jongno, Seoul, 2016



Figures 65, 66, 67. Bae Youngwhan produced his work *Please, Give Me Some Water* at the venue of Project 71/2 in Jongno, 2016 and this work was shown at the exhibition *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2017), Seoul. Local people participated in the artist's video work.

Project 7½ (2017-2019): Seoul, Gimhae, Jakarta

A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (2017 – 2018): Seoul, Gimhae, and Jakarta

A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2017)

A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (Yunseul Art Museum, Gimhae, 2018)

A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, 2018)

In 2016 I undertook a research visit to Indonesia. My aim primary was to gain an understanding of how Indonesian artist collectives were organized but I also started to research the modern history of both Korea and Indonesia and its relationship to contemporary art and social issues. On returning to Korea, I curated *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2017) at the Arko Art Center in Seoul (Fig. 68). This was selected as the best exhibition of the year 2017 by the Korea Arts Council. The exhibition was an extension of Project 7½'s site-specific projects in Itaewon, Mullaedong and Jangsa-dong, Seoul (2014-201), and served as a bridgehead for connecting projects in Gimhae and Jakarta in 2018 (Figs. 69, 70).



Figure 68. *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2017), Arko Art Center, Seoul

The theme of the exhibition was based on aspects of the comparative histories of the Korean and Indonesian people since 1945. The Netherlands ruled Indonesia for over three hundred years (1602-1908) and in the early 1940s, during World War II, Japan occupied and ruled Dutch Indonesia. In the case of Korea, its occupation by the Japanese was for a period of 35 years (1910-1945). The exhibition examined how the two countries have developed since their independence in August 1945, with a particular focus on the history of Seoul and Gimhae (Korea), and Jakarta and Jatiwangi (Indonesia) where associated events were held. The narratives of the exhibitions, communicated through artworks by participating artists expanded on that history, as did the booklets published to accompany the exhibition, which accompany my submission. After Seoul, the exhibition travelled to Gimhae (Korea) (Fig. 69) and Jakarta (Indonesia) (Fig. 70). As the exhibition moved from city to city, the participating artists, the artworks and other contents changed to some extent.



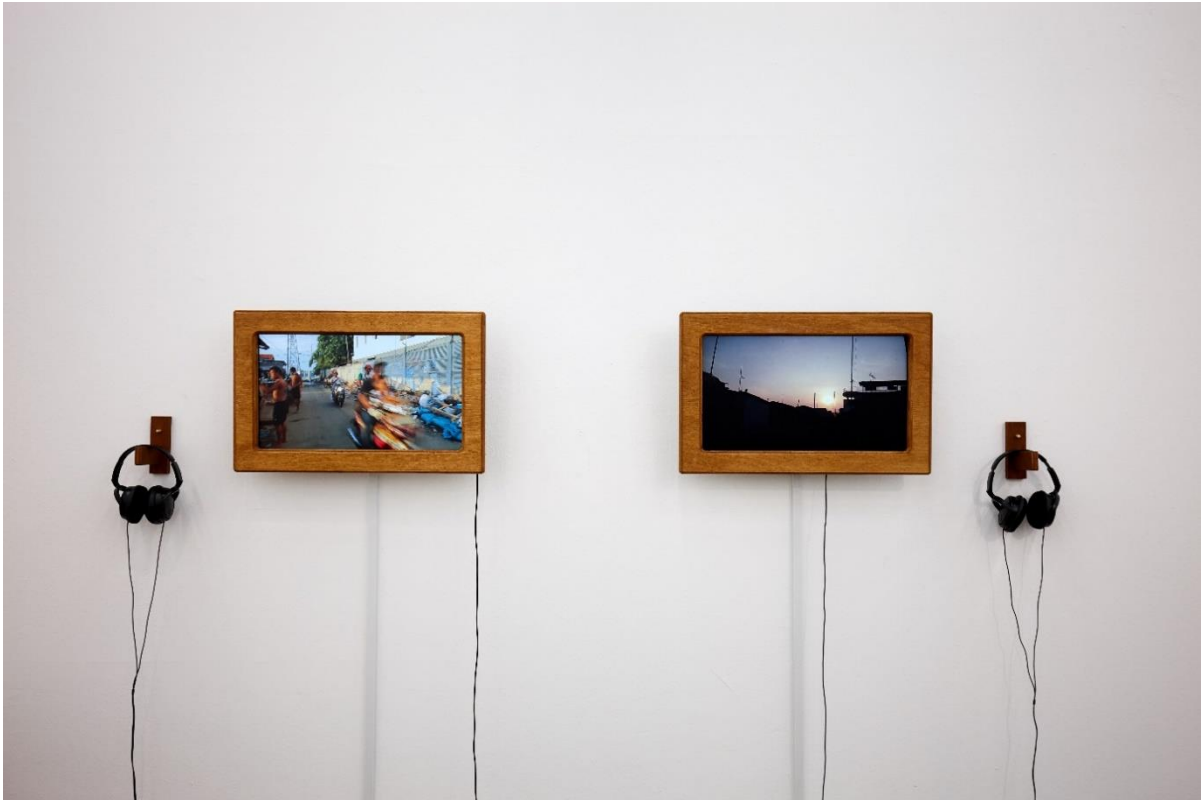
Figure 69. *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2018), Yunseul Art Museum, Gimhae



Figure 70. *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2018), National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta

Each iteration of the exhibition presented a collection of new works based on perceptions of 'social history' and 'memory' with the exhibitors including an urban research organization, architects, activists, journalists and artists from Korea and Indonesia. I aimed to capture the various perspectives and narratives of those who had experienced life in Korea and Indonesia in the 1980s and 1990s.

The artworks included various media such as video, installation, and archive materials. Indonesian activists Watchdoc produced a documentary about the controversial repossession of 17 islands on the Northern Coast of Jakarta that were taken from a fishing community by the government to create a coastal housing development (Figs. 71, 72). An archive project, *Archiving Resistance* (2017), was by Marco Kusumawijaka and Rujak Center for Urban Studies (Fig. 73). There were also Indonesian propaganda film sections collected by Forum Lenteng, dating from the 1940s and '50s, produced by Huyung, an individual who over the course of his life held three nationalities: Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian (Figs. 74, 75, 76). The different iterations of the exhibition provided an opportunity for the artists and me to gauge the public reception of the artworks and other exhibits. It offered the possibility to reflect on ways to develop or change the artworks, archive exhibits and their presentation, expand the aesthetic discourse, and improve the communicative effect of each subsequent exhibition.



Figures 71, 72. Installation view of Watchdoc's video documents, Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2017
Photograph: Nam Ki-yong



Figure 73. Installation view of Rujak Center for Urban Studies' archive materials, Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2017
Photograph: Nam Ki-yong



Figures 74, 75. Huyung, *Frieda* (1950), photo archive (1942-1945) and poster archived by Forum Lenteng

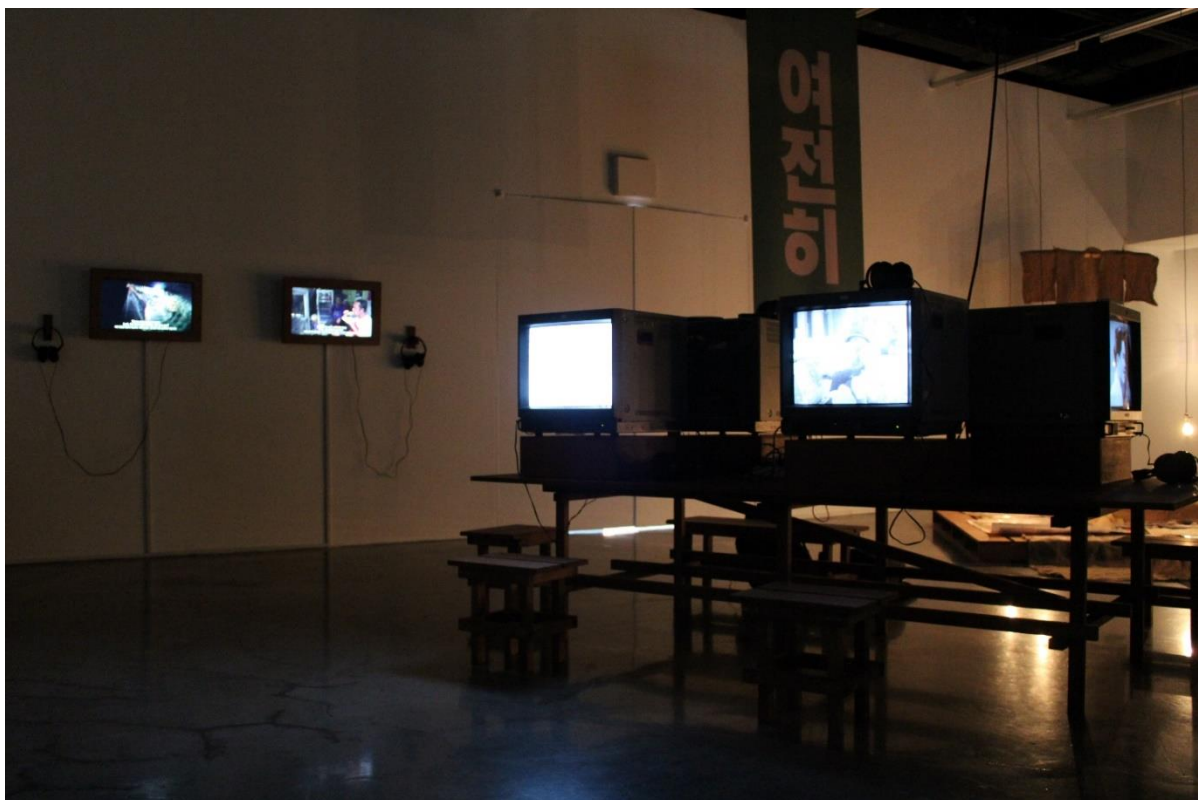


Figure 76. Installation view of Watchdoc's video documents (Left on the wall) and Forum Lenteng's film archiving (Right monitors on the table), Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2017 / Photograph: Nam Ki-yong

Among the new artworks that reflected on the modern and contemporary histories of Seoul was Bae Bae Young-whan's video installation *Please, Give Me Some Water* (2016) (Fig. 77). This was set in the Sewoon Arcade and Jangsa-dong area of Seoul that led to the industrialization of Korea (where Project 7½ was held in 2016). Kiwan Sung, one of the artists who participated in *Cryptographic Imagination* (2016), appeared and sang in the film (Figs. 65, 66, 67). A particular sentimental yearning is captured in the popular songs of the 1970s in Korea, and 'Give Me Some Water' was a track on Han Dae Soo's first album *Long Long Way* (1974) that expressed the unquenchable thirst experienced by people living under the dictatorship in one of Korea's most turbulent periods; the song was forbidden by the government for being dissident.



Figure 77. Bae Young-whan, *Please, Give Me Some Water* (2016), *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2017), Arko Art Center, Seoul. Bae produced this work in the space of Project 71/2 in 2016 and its alley in Jongno, Seoul. Musician Kiwan Sung, one of the participating artists of *Cryptograph Imagination* (2016), participated as a singer in Bae's film [See the pictures on p.134].

The alleys of watch shops in Jongno-gu, Yeji-dong, were established by merchants originally from Cheonggyecheon Stream, who moved into this area in the 1960s. Its heyday for selling jewellery and watches was during the 1970s and 1980s and the area is still famous for its watch shops. However, as trade was bound to be adversely affected by a redevelopment zone, many shops had been shutting down or relocating, leaving only the empty buildings and old signboards as reminders of the past and Bae documented the streetscapes of the area in 2017 as photographs and videos. His work *The Past Also Lasts a Long Time* (2017) reinterpreted the locality and allowed viewers to re-edit their memories of the area (Fig. 78).

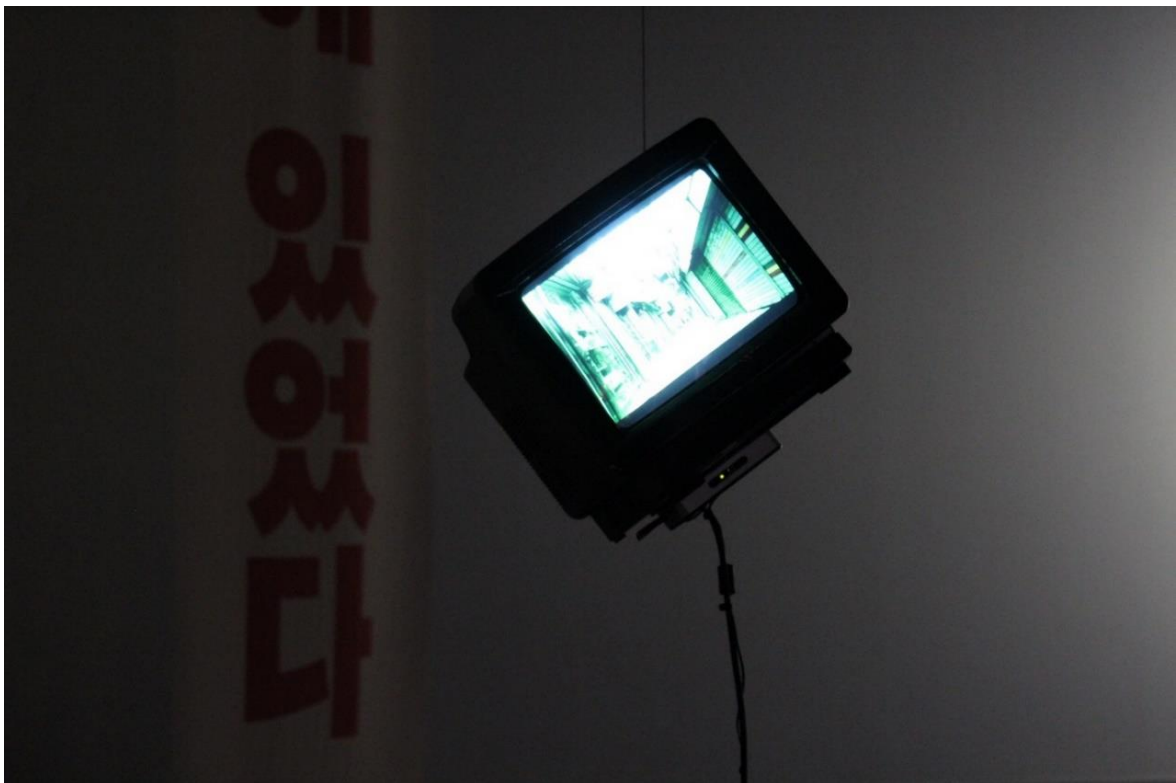


Figure 78. Bae Young-whan, *The Past Also Lasts a Long Time* (2017), Arko Art Center, Seoul
Photograph: Nam Ki-yong

Sunah Choi created an artistic interpretation of a 1:10,000 scale map of Seoul from 2003 (Fig. 79). In her work titled *Seoul 1:10,000* (2017), the 25 districts(gu) and administrative areas (dong) were selectively enlarged and printed as A4-size blueprints. Each blueprint map was spliced together on a wooden panel, ultimately creating a completely subjective map of Seoul, where the actual geographical continuity of the areas is broken and disturbed, and the vicinity is newly defined. On this new map, regional conflicts and gaps between districts, such as between Northern and Southern Seoul, were hypothetically destroyed and resolved. During the process of creating the new map, the artist omitted specific sites of Seoul where significant events of modern history took place. Nonetheless, it was possible to infer or reconstruct the original sense of the 'placeness' of these areas marked in blue or white. Paradoxically, through her omissions and concealments, the sites became more emphasized and apparent. Although one noticed the information absent from the map when looking at it closely, it became a more cohesive form when seen at a distance; this is a moment when 'information' becomes 'image'. A map is a symbol, an abstraction of the real world; it not only embodies space but also captures thoughts. A map carries information that can be a guide to understanding today's society. Unlike a digital map that can be continuously updated, a paper map cannot instantly reflect the societal change and thus gains historical value as a momentary record of the era. For the Gimhae exhibition, Sunah Choi produced a new work titled *Border(s)—Jakarta, Seoul, Gimhae* (2018). This proposed a conceptual re-mapping and the linear connection of the administrative districts in Korea and Indonesia that either had hosted or would be hosting iterations of the exhibition (Fig. 80).



Figure 79. Sunah Choi, *Seoul 1:10,000* (2017), Arko Art Center, Seoul / Photograph: Nam Ki-yong.

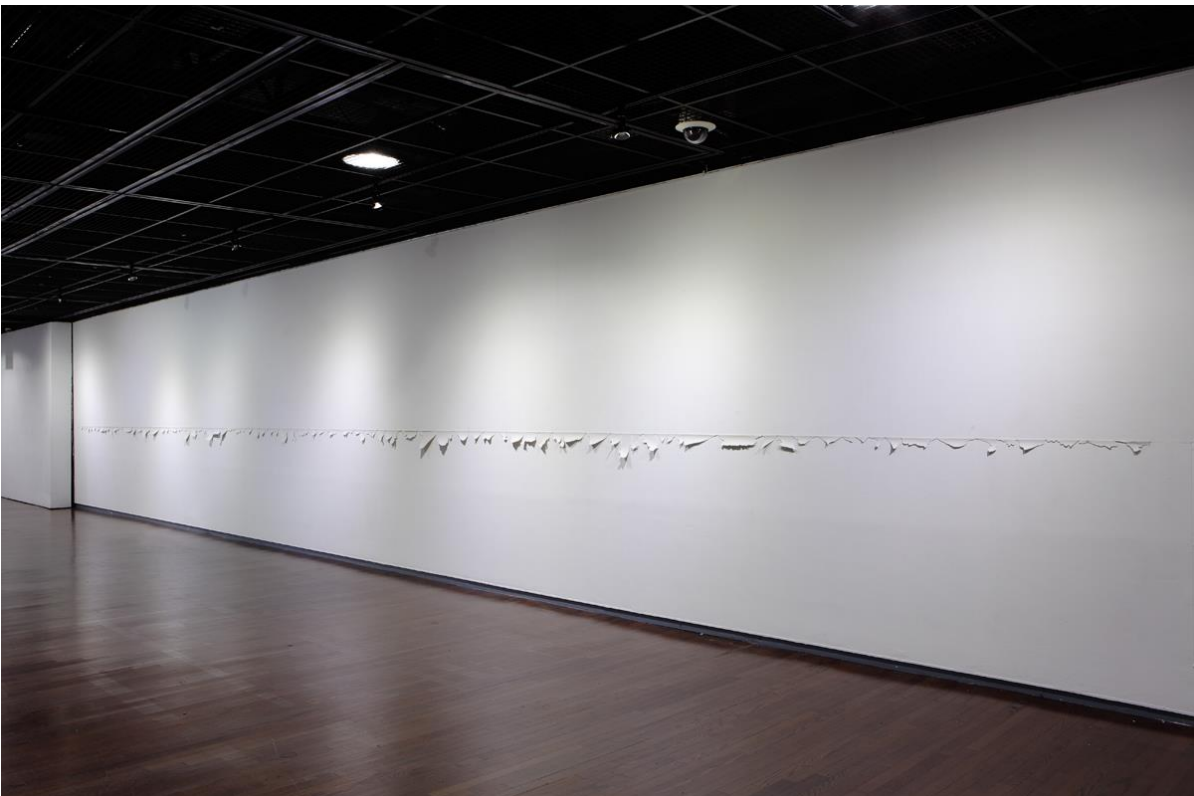


Figure 80. Sunah Choi, *Border(s)—Jakarta, Seoul, Gimhae* (2018), Yuseul Art Museum, Gimhae

The work of Indonesian artists indicated some points of contact between Korea and Indonesia. Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina's *Flower Currency* (2017) (Figs. 81, 82, 84, 85) started with *Flower Diplomacy* (2017) (Figs. 81, 83) that refers to a diplomatic event between Indonesia and North Korea in the 1960s when Sukarno named an Indonesian flower species for Kim Il-Sung. Ahmett and Salina created a new flower species whose petals were formed by the injured hands of Indonesian immigrant workers residing in Korea. This work titled *Flower Currency* (2017) was dedicated to their sacrifices for South Korea; it offered hope and notions of relationships of the past, present, and raised the idea of an uncertain future.



Figure 81. Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, *Flower Diplomacy* (2017) and *Flower Currency* (2017), *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2017), Arko Art Center, Seoul / Photograph: Nam Ki-yong



Figure 82. Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, *Flower Currency* (2017)
Produced with Indonesian migrant workers in Ansan, Korea.



Figure 83. Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, *Flower Diplomacy* (2017), archive materials, *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2017), Arko Art Center, Seoul / Photograph: Nam Ki-yong.



Figure 84. Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, *Flower Currency* (2017), produced with Indonesian migrant workers in Ansan, Korea. *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2018), Yunseul Art Museum, Gimhae



Figure 85. Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, *Flower Currency* (2017), produced it with Indonesian migrant workers in Ansan, Korea. Exhibition view of *Flower Currency*, in the exhibition of *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2018), National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta



Figure 86. Irwan Ahmett, Tita Salina and Indonesian migrant workers, *Migrating Message* (2018), *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2018), Yuseul Art Museum, Gimhae

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno's work *Seriality, the Unknown, et cetera* (2017) (Fig. 87) revealed the forgotten life story of Yang Chil-seong (1919-1949); Yang Chil-seong, AKA Sichisei Yanagawa and Komarudin was born in Wanju, Jeolla Province, Korea in 1919. He was commanded to guard the prisoner's camp in Bandung, Indonesia by the Japanese army authorities in 1942. After a battle in Bandung, the PPP guerrilla group took five Japanese soldiers' prisoner, one of whom was Yang Chil-seong (then called Sichisei Yanagawa). Later, during the Dutch Military Aggression (1947-1948), he joined the Indonesian National Army in Garut and became a naturalized Indonesian named Komarudin. He was buried in the National Heroes Cemetery Tenjolaya, Garut in 1975. The extraordinary life of Yang Chil-Seong seems like a work of fiction, begging the question if this could be the story of one man. Officially, the history we learn at school does not deal with lives such as that of Yang Chil-seong. Through his life story, it was possible to assume that many others may have had no choice but to live similar lives due to the times and circumstances they lived through.



Figure 87. Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, *Seriality, the Unknown, et cetera* (2017), *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2017), Arko Art Center, Seoul

Based on his first work in Seoul, Timoteus Anggawan Kusno produced a new video work, *Edelweiss* (2018) (Figs. 88, 89), for the Gimhae exhibition. 'Edelweiss', in Indonesian culture refers to the imagination of 'eternity'. Sometimes it's called "Eternal Flower". Ironically, this plant is considered at risk of extinction and now is categorized as protected species. Edelweiss is found in the mountainous regions of Java, southern Sumatra, southern Sulawesi, and Lombok (Whitten, T. & J., 1992). During WWII, edelweiss became the symbol of the anti-Nazi movement while, paradoxically, it was also the favourite flower of Hitler. Edelweiss was a poetic title for a film that captured the sensory experience of 'trauma' and the 'return of the repressed'. It referred to the Indonesian experience post-dictatorship, as well as post-war trauma.



Figures 88, 89. Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, Stills from *Edelweiss* (2018), *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2018), Yunseul Art Museum

In Sulki and Min's *Dinosaur* (2017-2018), five stages of a story—exposition, rising action, crisis, climax, and resolution—was printed on five flags, standing lights, and walls in order. Each word contained a rich meaning and provided an incomplete reading experience for the audience. The short novel, *Dinosaur* (2017-2018), was written by Sulki and Min: 'The dinosaur was still there when he was awake' in Korean and Bahasa Indonesian (Figs. 90-94).



Figures 90, 91. Sulki and Min, *Dinosaur* (2017)
A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2017)



Figure 92. Sulki and Min, *Dinosaur* (2018)
A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (Yunseul Art Museum, Gimhae, 2018)



Figures 93, 94. Sulki and Min, *Dinosaur* (2018)
A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, 2018)

For the exhibition in Jakarta, I invited the Korean artist collective mixrice and arranged for them to undertake a month's residency programme in Jatiwangi to produce artworks with villagers. The resulting work *Gosari* (2017) is about 'community' and was based on a community dance originating in Korean agrarian society and known as *Gang-Gang Suwol-le*. It is a dance that involves the *Hui* (joy), *Ro* (anger), *Ae* (sadness), *Lak* (pleasure), *Ae* (love), *Oh* (hatred), *Yuk* (greed) of the Korean people. In *Gosari*, a part of the dance called 'Gosari gungi' (picking brackens) was recreated by mixrice with the Indonesian people, adapting it to their situation and to those participating in the project. Lair Music from the Jatiwangi village created the music and the deaf community Rumah Tuli Jatiwangi participated in the workshops and performance (Figs. 95-99).







Figures 95-99. mixrice, Lair, and Rumahtuli Jatiwangi, *Gosari* (2018), *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, 2018). mixrice undertook a residency program at the Jatiwangi Art Factory for a month holding a workshop with Rumah Tuli Jatiwangi, and Lair who re-produced Korean folk music and songs.

Jatiwangi Art Factory participated in *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* (2018) in Gimhae and Jakarta. Majalengka, where Jatiwangi is located, and Gimhae cities resemble each other in many ways: Both cities are famous for their agricultural and industrial complexes and are locations of regional airports. Gimhae is famous for producing traditional pottery, while Majalengka is famous for producing traditional roof tiles. Started in 2005, Jatiwangi Art Factory was founded not in a large Indonesian city, such as Jakarta, Bandung or Yogyakarta, but to revitalize the village community and its economy by rural villages by a group of young people in Jatiwangi, rather than an artist group. However, they have developed into an internationally known artists' collective. JaF invites artists from other areas of Indonesia and other countries to stay in the village for several weeks. They call it a JaF artist residency program, although it is different from usual residencies. JaF functions a mediator to make connections between artists and villagers; it is a way of bringing people together in solidarity to solve the social problems of Jatiwangi, Majalengka. In the exhibition in Gimhae, I introduced how JaF use art to form solidarity with the community and artists. It also included Village Video Festival, organized by Sunday Screen and based on Bandung artists' collective (Figs. 100, 101); JaF TV, which was run by JaF with villagers and artists from other cities in Indonesia (Fig. 102); and the archive materials of Badan Kajian Pertanahan. For the exhibition in Jakarta, Jatiwangi art Factory and Badan Kajian Pertanahan produced a new work, *Land Cultural Certificate* (2017–2018) (Figs. 103, 104). In 2017 the Land Study Affair Agency (BKP) held an event to present an unofficial Land Cultural Certificate as a form of recognition and appreciation for the efforts of Hamlet Wates-Jatisura, a community whose land has been claimed by the Air Force since 1950. The community defends what should belong to them, including their land culture with inspiring cultural actions. Hence, the land becomes more valuable and dignified. The certificate was designed to resemble the Land Certificate issued by the National Land Agency (BPN) RI; what distinguishes it is the word 'Culture' between the word 'certificate' and 'land.' 85 people signed up to create the Land Culture Certificate, representing 85 families in the project. Badan Kajian Pertanahan (BKP), literally means Land Affair Study Agency (to mimic 'National Land Affairs Agency', a government institution), and is a cultural landscape research collective that conducts artistic research through art projects, residencies, and a minilab. Through this presentation, Jatiwangi art Factory raised the ownership of land issues in Indonesia within the art exhibition in Jakarta. And Villagers in Wates village talked about their situations to audiences by themselves (Figs. 105, 106).

After the final iteration of the exhibition at the National Gallery of Indonesia, an extension of the project, *Elephant in the Room* (2018-2019) took place at the Jakarta History Museum.



Figure 100. Jatiwangi Art Factory, *Village Video Festival: It's Performativity and the Living Archive*, 2018.
A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (Yunseul Art Museum, Gimhae, 2018)



Figure 101. Jatiwangi Art Factory, *Village Video Festival Video Archive Selection 2*, video installation, 2018.
A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories (Yunseul Art Museum, Gimhae, 2018)



Figure 102. Jatiwangi Art Factory, *JaF TV* (2018), Yunseul Art Museum, Gimhae



Figures 103, 104. Jatiwangi Art Factory—Badan Kajian Pertanahan, *Land Cultural Certificate* (2017-2018), National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta



Figures 105, 106. Opening scene of Jatiwangi Art Factory—Badan Kajian Pertanahan, *Land Cultural Certificate* (2017-2018), National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta.

***Elephant in the Room* (2018 – 2019): Jakarta History Museum, Jakarta**

The Jakarta History Museum has a more diverse audience than the National Museum of Indonesia, and its visitor numbers are far higher. The two iterations of *Elephant in the Room* took place at the Jakarta History Museum (Fig. 107) in 2018 and 2019 and extended the scope of *A Tale of Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* at the National Gallery of Indonesia. *Elephant in the Room*, did not seek to communicate with art audiences but primarily aimed to communicate with non-art audiences in Jakarta: In that regard, Jakarta History Museum offered an optimal opportunity to explore how ordinary citizens of Jakarta and foreign tourists responded to the messages of contemporary art in places they did not expect to find it.

In the first *Elephant in the Room* exhibition (2018), the works by participating artists shed new light on the hidden and forgotten stories in the history of Jakarta, and they were juxtaposed with artefacts from the museum's collections. The second iteration of *Elephant in the Room* (2019) was the first time a chronological table of Jakarta's history had been presented at the Jakarta History Museum.



Figure 107. Exterior view of Jakarta History Museum where *Elephant in the Room* I & II were held

Whereas *A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories* collected stories from the shared history of Korea and Indonesia on a broad historical level, *Elephant in the Room* offered a contemporary perspective through artistic practices that invited visitors to participate and to experience a paradoxical ‘difference’ created between the presentation of objective, universal facts, and subjective, selective memories. The exhibitions aimed to demonstrate that art is not only for society’s elite but can speak to everyone, and it emphasized the importance of Indonesian’s present and future rather than its past colonial history and that of the Dutch who ruled Indonesia.

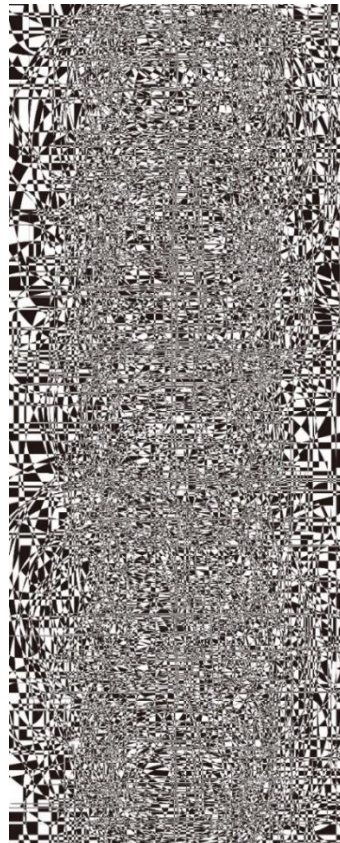


Figure 108. Sulki and Min, *Earth Now*, 10 flags, 2018

Sulki and Min’s *Earth Now* (2018) (Figs. 108, 109) consists of ten flags: these depict a cacophonous landscape of the earth’s languages. The white-noise-like image collapses the words in 145 different languages that mean ‘now’: from the Spanish ‘ahora’ to the Chinese ‘现在’, or from the Afrikaans ‘nou’ to the Zulu ‘manje’. Sulki and Min explained that,

“‘Now’—the word and the idea—is interesting as it suggests the speaker’s intimate relation to her or his time, while the meaning is often vague outside a specific context. We think it captures something about how we occupy our history, concretely and indeterminably.”



Figure 109. Sulki and Min's *Earth Now* (2018), installation view, Jakarta History Museum, Jakarta, 2018

Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina collaborated with Yos, a local artist who draws the portraits of travellers in a tourist spot in North Jakarta close to the museum. Together they devised a series of character cut-outs which visitors could inhabit by inserting their faces through the head holes (Figs. 110, 111). A team specializing in tours to Jakarta's historical sites was also asked to undertake a special tour for the exhibition; they introduced the artworks in a relevant historical context and, at the same time, raised questions to encourage the historic consciousness of Indonesian visitors.



Figures 110, 111. Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina collaboration with Yos, a street artist in North Jakarta, *Beribu Budak*, Panel with acrylic paint (2018–ongoing), Jakarta History Museum, Jakarta, 2018



Figure 112. Docent education program for the exhibition *Elephant in the Room* (2018), Jakarta History Museum, Jakarta



Figures 113, 114, 115, 116. Audiences of *Elephant in the Room* (2018), Jakarta History Museum, Jakarta

Ahmett and Salina's *Beribu Budak* (2018-ongoing) (Figs. 110-118) was based on their research in Japan in 2018, which focused on the historical relationship between Batavia and Dejima through the paintings of Kawahara Keiga (1786-1860) and the diaries of the Opperhoofden (Chiefs of the VOC factory at Dejima). They attempted to trace the existence of people from the Indonesian Archipelago, who were shipped by the VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie/Dutch East India Company) as slaves to an artificial island in Nagasaki Bay, southern Japan, known as Dejima (Figs. 117, 118). It was the only place in Japan open to Western trade during the isolation period of more than two centuries (1633-1853). At that time, Batavia was the headquarters of the VOC and played an essential role in supporting the expansion of the Dutch in strategic areas throughout the Asian region. Walls surrounded Batavia and its population of 27,000, of which 16,000 were slaves (recorded census in 1673). The VOC built such walls to protect them from any outside attacks, wild animals, and an intrinsic fear of Javanese people. Such a fear of the Javanese originated from their adherence to Islam, although it was different to the Islamic faith of the Middle East due to its hybrid mix with local beliefs. However, the VOC operated cautiously before making any Javanese people slaves. The slaves that were sent to Dejima were mainly from the island of Bali and the eastern islands. Their roles were to prepare food, tend to livestock, provide entertainment and to care for their masters' children. Kawahara Keiga's paintings and the Opperhoofden diaries, suggest that the slaves' existence was marginalised (although their numbers were huge) to the extent that they were often depicted in the paintings as mere exotic ornaments. Their reconstruction of these slaves as life-size standees for the *Elephant in the Room* exhibition aimed to cause visitors to reflect on modern Indonesia—as a nation that still sends labourers abroad, and where Indonesian migrant workers still find themselves marginalised.

Song Sang Hee produced *Geegers, You and I* (2018) (Figs. 119-123), working with Indonesian artists' collective Sunday Screen for this exhibition in Indonesia. The script for this work was adapted from *Space Fantasia* (vol. 3, chapter 16: Colony), written and illustrated by Yukinobu Hoshino. All the postcards that appear in the work were produced between 1907 and 1941. There are 22 postcards in total, including 15 from Indonesia, 5 from Korea, 1 from Japan, and 1 from the United States. The Indonesian postcards are marked in the Dutch language (Briefkaart it Nederlandsch-Indië) on the reverse. It can be assumed that the Indonesian postcards were made for European consumption by Dutch colonialists in Indonesia. The Korean postcards were produced by the Japanese during the Japanese colonial era. Foreigners who stayed in Korea during the Korean Empire era/Japanese colonial era, were mainly Japanese, and used such postcards to communicate with their families who remained in their home countries. The artist aimed to visit the places shown in the historical postcards and to take photographs from the same perspectives, although there are 90-100 years between the past and present images. For instance, some of the schools that appear in the contemporary images were once POW camps where Koreans would have been taken captive and drafted by force to Japan during the Second World War. The juxtapositions of contemporary images with historical postcards of people amplify the sense that those in the latter 'were there at that time.' The information about the prison camps and prisons of Java Island in Indonesia during the Second World War was taken from the 'Indische Kamparchieven' website. The soundtrack music is 'Mysteries of The Macabre' by György Ligeti. Peter Masseurs and Asko Ensemble played the trumpet performance. The opening music is 'The Sound of Earth', recorded on the Voyager Golden Record produced by Nasa.





Figures 119-123. Song Sang Hee, *Geegers, You and I* (2018), Jakarta History Museum, Jakarta, 2018

For *Elephant in the Room* (2018-2019), all participants researched Indonesia's historical and social background. Most of the artists undertook fieldwork and their resulting artworks covered a range of relevant and intriguing historical topics. And docents would offer explanations of the work in conversation with interested public members, usually in response to their questions.

In preparation for the second iteration of *Elephant in the Room* (2019), I worked with two Indonesian historians, Bondan Kanumoyoso and Andi Achdian on a chronicle of Jakarta's modern history since 1945 (Figs. 126, 127), with our research conducted in the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (Figs. 124, 125, 126). I selected the archive photographs that illustrated aspects of life in the 1950s. The images of the children in the pictures indicate that Indonesian girls did not wear hijabs at that time. In contrast, currently, in several regions of Indonesia, even preschool girls wear hijabs.

I proposed this exhibition as the Jakarta History Museum still did not have information or collections about the history of ordinary people in Jakarta. The outcome was the first Indonesian-centric modern history exhibition held in the Museum, one that did not focus on colonial histories. The temporary exhibition of the chronicle of Jakarta's modern history was juxtaposed with items from the museum's permanent collection; it was an exhibition that allowed us to acknowledge some of the events that have influenced the 'present' of Indonesian people connected to the colonial period. The exhibition aimed to demonstrate that art no longer just addresses the wealthy middle-class but, rather, it is a medium that can speak to all people. Through this exhibition, I hoped that I and my collaborators could identify something essential that is missing or habitually overlooked. I was confident that this exhibition could function as a medium where art delivered stories that individuals otherwise could not or did not speak about. I hoped that the exhibition could empower people and become a turning point by helping them find practical and tangible ways of addressing current-day issues by gaining a better understanding of the past.



Figures 124, 125. Photographs of street scenes taken in Jakarta in the 1950s from the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (Photographer unknown), Jakarta History Museum, Jakarta, 2019



Figure 126. Chronicle of Jakarta History post 1945, and photograph of a street scene taken in Jakarta in 1950, Jakarta History Museum, Jakarta, 2019



Figure 127. Chronicle of Jakarta History post 1945, Jakarta History Museum

Sulki and Min, From the *Gray Letter* series (2016)

