

Yeesookyung

작가약력



이수경은 1963년에 태어나 현재 서울에서 거주하며 활동하고 있다. 비디오, 설치, 조각, 드로잉 등 다양한 매체를 넘나드는 다학제적 예술가로, 1990년대 한국의 급격한 현대화 속에서 개인적인 경험을 표현하기 위해 다양한 매체를 실험하는 젊은 예술가들 중 한 명으로 활동을 이어왔다.

가장 잘 알려진 작품은 "번역된 도자기 (Translated Vase)" 시리즈로, 이 프로젝트는 한국의 명장 도예가들이 버린 도자기 조각들에서 시작되었다. 작가는 깨진 도자기 파편을 에폭시로 이어 붙이고, 그 후 24 캐럿 금박으로 손수 채색하여 풍만하면서도 여린 형태의 작품을 만들어냈다. 이수경의 작업은 한국 전통과 서구 현대성의 독특한 결합을 보여준다. 각 도자기 파편 속에서 파괴와 재창조의 순환을 통해, 그녀는 한국 역사와 문화의 집합적인 정체성을 작품에 담아내며, 이를 서구 관객을 위해 재해석한다.

이수경의 작품은 크리스틴 마셀(Christine Macel)이 기획한 제 57회 International Art Exhibition - 베니스 비엔날레 (Viva Arte Viva, 2017년)에도 전시되었다.

주요 개인전으로는 "Translated Vase," 마시모데카를로 피에스 유니크, 파리 (2023); "Temple Portatif," Cernuschi Museum, 파리, 프랑스 (2023); 북서울미술관, 서울, 한국 (2021); "Moonlight Crown," 아트선재센터, 서울, 한국 (2021);

"I am not the only one but many," 마시모데카를로, 런던, 영국 (2020); "Whisper Only to You," Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, 나폴리, 이탈리아 (2019); "Whisper Only to You," MADRE· Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, 나폴리, 이탈리아 (2019); "Fragments of Form, with Carla Accardi," 마시모데카를로 홍콩 (2019); "Yeesookyung: Contemporary Korean Sculpture," Asia Society Texas Center, 휴스턴, 미국 (2015); "When I Become You," 대구미술관, 대구, 한국 (2015) 등이 있다.

주요 그룹전은 다음과 같다: "The Shape of Time: Korean Art After 1989," 필라델피아미술관, 필라델피아, 미국 (2023); "Collection for All," 서울시립미술관, 서울, 한국 (2020); "Being Human: an exhibition of modern sculpture," 브리스톨미술관, 브리스톨, 영국 (2019); "Ghost," 대구미술관, 대구, 한국 (2017); "Born in Flames: Korean Ceramics from the National Museum of Korea," 에르미타주미술관, 상트페테르부르크, 러시아 (2016); "CERAMIX: Art and Ceramics from Rodin to Schütte," Cité de la Céramique, 세브르, 프랑스 (2016); "Dual Natures in Ceramics," SFO Museum, 샌프란시스코, 미국 (2014).

Biography

Yeesookyung



Yeesookyung was born in 1963, and currently lives and works in Seoul, Korea. Working across video, installation, sculpture, drawing, the interdisciplinary artist emerged on the art scene in the 1990s, as part of a wave of young Korean artists experimenting with a wide range of mediums to express personal experiences in a rapidly modernizing Korea.

Best known for her acclaimed *Translated Vase* series, the project began with the remnants of disposed vases by a master Korean potter. The artist took the fragments of broken ceramic shards, seaming them together with epoxy and later hand-painting them with 24-carat gold leaf, resulting in simultaneously voluptuous yet fragile forms. Yeesookyung's amalgamation of Korean historical canon with elements of Western modernity is entirely idiosyncratic. Through this cycle of destruction and re-creation within each crevice of every porcelain fragment, Yeesookyung embeds the collective identity of Korean history and culture, re-interpreting the final piece for a wider western audience.

Yeesookyung's works are included in the 57th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, VIVA ARTE VIVA, curated by Christine Macel.

Solo exhibitions include: *Translated Vase*, MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Paris, UK (2023); Temple Portatif, Musée

Cernuschi, Paris, F (2023); Gana Art Nineone, Seoul, ROK (2021); Buk-Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, ROK (2021); *Moonlight Crown*, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, ROK; *I am not the only one but many*, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK (2020); *Whisper Only to You*, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, I (2019); *Whisper Only to You*, MADRE: Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples, I (2019); *Fragments of Form*, with Carla Accardi, Massimo de Carlo, Hong Kong, HK (2019); Yeesookyung: Contemporary Korean Sculpture, Asia Society Texas Center, Houston, TX, US (2015); *When I Become You*, Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, KOR (2015).

Yeesookyung's work has been included in group exhibitions such as: *The Shape of Time: Korean Art After 1989*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, USA (2023); *Collectiong for All*, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, ROK (2020); *Being Human: an exhibition of modern sculpture*, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Bristol, UK (2019); *Ghost*, Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, KOR (2017); *Born in Flames: Korean Ceramics from the National Museum of Korea*, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, RUS (2016); *CERAMIX: Art and Ceramics from Rodin to Schütte*, Cité de la Céramique, Sèvres, FR (2016); *Dual Natures in Ceramics*, SFO Museum, San Francisco, CA, US (2014).

Available Artworks

Yeesokyoung

YEESOOKYUNG

Translated Vase 2023 TVCIW 1, 2023, Ex. Unique

Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24k gold leaf

161 × 74 × 76 cm / 63 3/8 × 29 1/8 × 30 inches





Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase TVCIW 1*, 2023, (detail)

YEESOOKYUNG

oh, Rose! shines the halo of a rainbow, 2023, Ex. Unique

Acrylic on canvas

162 × 130 cm / 63 2/3 × 51 1/5 inches





Yeesookyung, *oh, Rose! shines the halo of a rainbow*, 2023, (detail)

MASSIMODECARLO

YEESOOKYUNG

Translated Vase 2022 TVW 19, 2022, Ex. Unique

Ceramic shards, epoxy, 25k gold leaf

130.5 × 62 × 67 cm / 51 3/8 × 24 1/2 × 26 3/8 inches





Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase* 2022 TVW 19, 2022, (additional image)

YEESOOKYUNG

Translated Vase 2021 TVG 8, 2021, Ex. Unique
Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24k gold leaf
61 × 41 × 41 cm / 24 1/8 × 16 1/8 × 16 1/8 inches





Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase 2021 TVG 8, 2021* (additional image)

YEESOOKYUNG

Translated Vase 2020 TVG 10, 2020, Ex. unique
Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24K gold leaf
32 × 27 × 26 cm / 12 1/2 × 10 3/5 × 10 1/5 inches





Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase 2020 TVG 10*, 2020 (detail)

YEESOOKYUNG

Translated Vase 2020 TVG 17, 2020, Ex. unique

Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24K gold leaf

28 × 27 × 27 cm / 11 × 10 3/5 × 10 3/5 inches





Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase 2020* (VG 17, 2020 (detail))

YEESOOKYUNG

Translated Vase 2020 TVG 22, 2020, Ex. unique

Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24K gold leaf

23 × 21 × 24 cm / 9 × 8 1/5 × 9 2/5 inches





Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase 2020 TVG 22*, 2020 (detail)

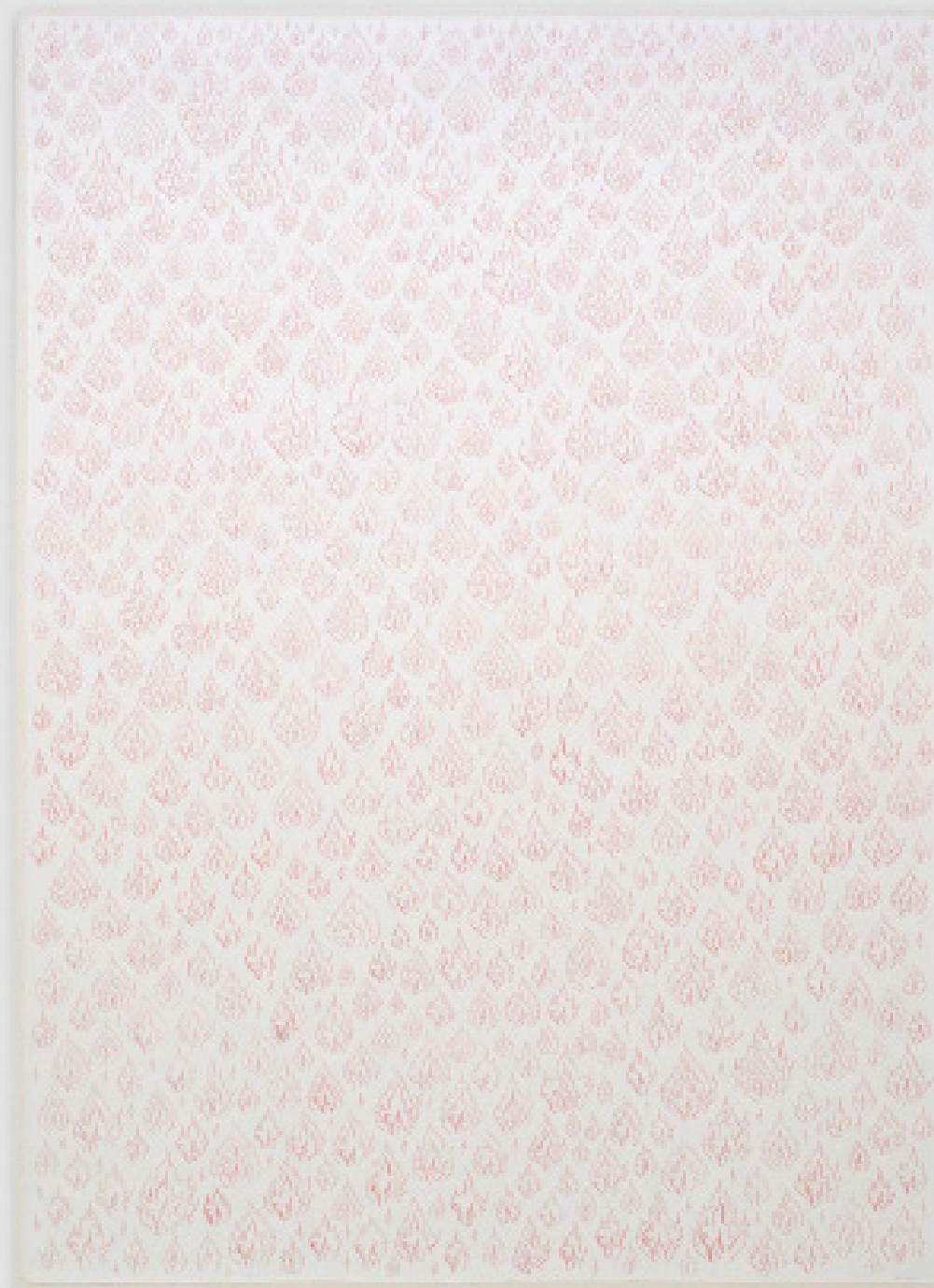
MASSIMODECARLO

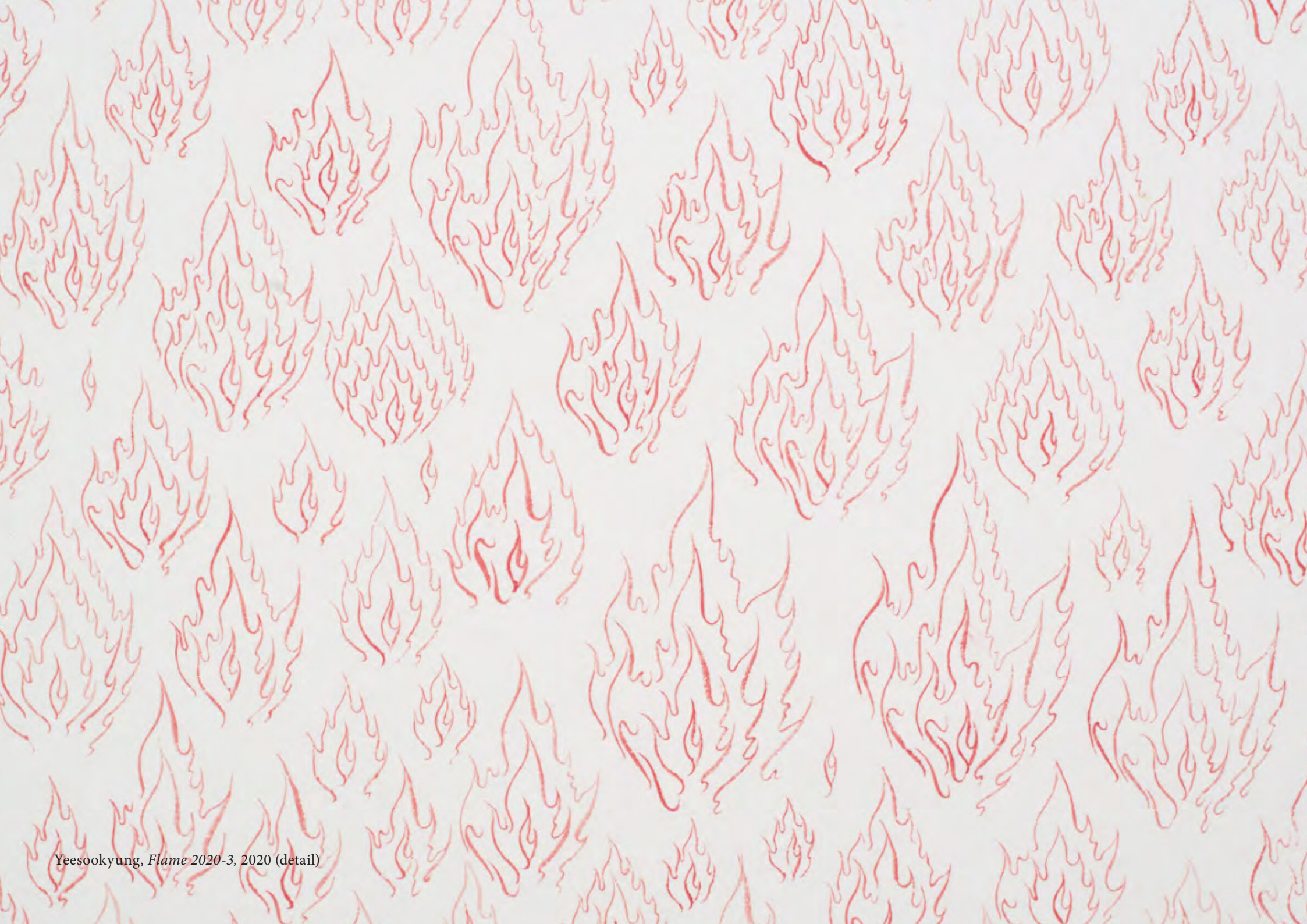
YEESOOKYUNG

Flame 2020-3, 2020, Ex. unique

Cinnabar on Korean paper

151 × 101 × 3.8 cm / 60 × 39 7/10 × 1 1/2 inches





Yeesookyung, *Flame* 2020-3, 2020 (detail)

YEESOOKYUNG

Translated Vase 2019 TVW 3, 2019

Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24k gold leaf

96 × 68 × 67 cm / 37 5/6 × 26 3/4 × 26 3/8 inches





Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase 2019 TVW 3*, 2019 (detail)

Selected Installation Views

Yeesookyung

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CANADA



MASSIMODECARLO



PIÈCE UNIQUE



2020 - *Non Sculpture: Light or Flexible*, Yongji Park, Gyeongsangnam-do, ROK





2019 - *I am not the only one but many*, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK



2019 - *I am not the only one but many*, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK



2019 - *I am not the only one but many*, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK



2019 - *Fragments of Form*, MASSIMODECARLO, Hong Kong, C



2019 - *Fragments of Form*, MASSIMODECARLO, Hong Kong, C



2019 - *Fragments of Form*, MASSIMODECARLO, Hong Kong, C



1744. Il Caselli... scrisse al Monteleone che nel prossimo lunedì Gaetano Schepers
avrebbe incominciato a lavorare con la sua nuova composizione,
ed egli sperava che non si usasse più quella di Livio suo padre,
ella quale molti pezzi venivano imperfetti e facilmente si crepavano nella fornace.

Cartolina di Monteleone. Gli archivi di Monteleone della Real Fabbrica di Napoli, 1878



2019 - *Whisper Only to You*, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, IT



2017 - The 57th International Art Exhibition - Viva Arte Viva - La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, IT

Selected Solo Shows

Yeesookyung

2023

- 2023 - *Translated Vase*, MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Paris, France
 2023 - *Yeesookyung: Temple Portatif*, Musée Cernuschi, Paris, France
 2023 - *In Dialogue with Uli Sigg*, Yeesookyung Studio, Goyang-si, Korea
 2023 - *Une Rose*, Gana Art Nineone, Seoul, Korea
 2023 - *Yeesookyung: Une Rose*, Gana Art Nineone, Seoul, Korea

2022

- 2022 - *Yeesookyung: Nine Dragons in Wonderland*, The Page Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 2022 - *Intimate Sisters*, Duson Gallery, Seoul, Korea

2021

- 2021 - *Moonlight Crown*, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea
 2021 - *Little ASJC: Yeesookyung: Moonlight Crown - Intimate Sisters*, Kunsthall Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark
 2021 - *Flame Seed*, Gana Art Nineone, Seoul, Korea
 2021 - *The Story of a Girl Named Long Journey*, Buk-Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea

2020

- 2020 - *I am not the only one but many*, Massimo De Carlo, London, UK
 2020 - *Oh Rose!*, Space Willing N Dealing, Seoul, Korea

2019

- 2019 - *Whisper Only to You*, Museo Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, Italy
 2019 - *Whisper Only to You*, MADRE · Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples, Italy
 2019 - *Fragments of Form*, w/ Carla Accardi, Massimo de Carlo, Hong Kong, HK

2017

- 2017 - *Yeesookyung: Translated Vase*, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, USA

2015

- 2015 - *Yeesookyung: Contemporary Korean Sculpture*, Asia Society Texas Center, Houston, TX, USA
 2015 - *Saint Breeders*, Atelier Hermès, Seoul, Korea
 2015 - *When I Become You*, Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, Korea
 2015 - *When I Become You*, Yeesookyung in Taipei, Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, Taiwan

2014

- 2014 - *The Meaning of Time*, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, MA, USA
 2014 - *Take Me Home Country Roads*, Space Willing N Dealing, Seoul, Korea

2013

- 2013 - *Flame*, Ota Fine Arts, Singapore

2012

- 2012 - *Yeesookyung*, Sindoh Art Gallery, Seoul, Korea

2011

- 2011 - *Yeesookyung*, Almine Rech Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
 2011 - *Constellation Gemini*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Korea

2010

- 2010 - *Jung Marie's Jeongga*, Yeesookyung's Devotion, Arko Art Center, Seoul, Korea
 2010 - *Broken Whole*, Michael Schultz Gallery, Seoul, Korea

2009

- 2009 - *Yeesookyung*, Thomas Cohn Gallery, São Paulo, Brazil
 2009 - *Yeesookyung*, Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, Japan
 2009 - *Yee Sookyung im Schloß Oranienbaum*, Museum Schloß Oranienbaum, Dessau, Denmark

2008

- 2008 - *Broken Whole*, Michael Schultz Gallery, Berlin, Germany

Selected Solo Shows

Yeesookyung

2007

2007 - *Earth Wind & Fire*, Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul, KOR

2006

2006 - *Flame*, One and J. Gallery, Seoul, KOR

2005

2005 - *Breeding Drawing*, Gallery SSamzie, Seoul, KOR

2004

2004 - *Island Adventure*, Alternative Space Pool, Seoul, KOR

2002

2002 - *Off-shoot Flower/ Painting/ Pottery*, SSamzieSpace, Seoul, KOR

1997

1997 - *Domestic Tailor Shop*, Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul, KOR

1996

1996 - *Lee Sookyung*, Artemesia Gallery, Chicago, IL, US

1992

1992 - *Getting Married to Myself*, K Gallery, Tokyo, J

Selected Group Shows

Yeesookyung

2025

2025 - *Monstrous Beauty: A Feminist Revision of Chinoiserie*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

2024

2024 - *Common Ground: Indian Ceramics Triennale 2024*, Arthshila Delhi, New Delhi, India

2024 - *UNBOXING PROJECT 3: Maquette*, New Spring Project, Seoul, Korea

2024 - *The Spinning Earth*, Namwon City's Kim Byungjong Art Museum, Namwon, Korea

2023

2023 - *K=XY: Transcending Time and Space*, KF XR Gallery, Seoul, Korea

2023 - *Natura*, Seoul Auction, Seoul, Korea

2023 - *TRADE&TRANSFORMATION*, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK, USA

2023 - *The Shape of Time: Korean Art After 1989*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, USA

2023 - *Time States: Contradiction and Accordance*, Seoul National University Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea

2023 - *Hysteria: Contemporary Realism Painting*, Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea

2023 - *penetrate*, CL Art, Seoul, Korea

2022

2022 - *Paik Nam June Effect*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Korea

2022 - *Contourless*, artnow VIP Lounge, West Bund Art & Design, West Bund Art Center, Shanghai, China

2022 - *Fantastical Worlds*, The David Roche Foundation House Museum, North Adelaide, Australia

2022 - *Setouchi Triennale 2022*, Seto Inland Sea, Japan

2022 - *Conversing in Clay: Ceramics from the LACMA Collection*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, LA, USA

2022 - *The Usefulness of the Useless*, Osan Museum of Art, Osan, Korea

2022 - *Porcelain: Material and Storytelling*, Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, USA

2022 - *Four Poems: Korean Abstraction*, Helen J Gallery, LA, USA

2022 - *Wabi Sabi*, Sun Valley Museum of Art, Ketchum, USA

2021

2021 - *The Art of Communicating, from Goryeo to the Present*, Horim Museum Sinsa, Seoul, Korea

2021 - *BVLGARI Colors*, Hangaram Design Museum, Seoul, Korea

2021 - *Art Macao: Macao International Art Biennale 2021*, Macau, China

2021 - *Dynamic & Alive Korean Art*, National Museum of Contemporary Art at Deoksugung Palace, Seoul, Korea

2021 - *The Real DMZ Project*, NIROX Sculpture Park, Krugersdorp, South Africa

2021 - *In Bloom*, HITE Collection, Seoul, Korea

2021 - *L'Invitation au voyage*, Esther Schipper, Berlin, Germany

2021 - *Border Crossings: North and South Korean Art from the Sigg 2021 Collection*, Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern, Switzerland

2021 - *Encounters Between Korean Art and Literature in the Modern Age*

2021 - National Museum of Contemporary Art at Deoksugung Palace, Seoul, Korea

2021 - *Jamunbak Museum Project Part 2*, Gana Art Center, Seoul, Korea

2020

2020 - *The Moment of Gieok*, Seoul Calligraphy Art Museum, Seoul, Korea

2020 - *2020 Changwon Sculpture Biennale: Non-Sculpture - Light or flexible*, Changwon, Korea

2020 - *Artists Respond*, Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA

2020 - *To the Moon with Snoopy*, Wooyang Museum of Contemporary Art, Gyeongju, Korea

2020 - *Wandering in Art*, Jeju Museum of Contemporary Art, Jeju, Korea

2020 - *Collectioning for All*, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea

2019

2019 - *Being Human: an exhibition of modern sculpture*, Bristol Museum

Selected Group Shows

Yeesookyung

2015

2015 - *Reshaping Tradition: Contemporary Ceramics from East Asia*, USC Pacific Asian Museum, Pasadena, CA, US
 2015 - *CERAMIX: Art and Ceramics from Rodin to Schütte*, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, NL
 2015 - *Paradox of Place: Contemporary Korean Art*, Seattle Asian Art Museum, Seattle, WA, CA, US
 2015 - *[ana] please keep your eyes closed for a moment*, Maraya Art Center, Sharjah, UAE
 2015 - *Art and the Measure of Liberty*, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, New York, NY, US
 2015 - *Contemporary Art, Infiltrated into a Museum*, Gyeonggi Provincial Museum, Youngin-si, KOR
 2015 - *Accidental Encounter*, Buk Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, KOR
 2015 - *Rivers-The Way of Living in Transition*, PIER-2 Art Center, Kaosiung, TWN
 2015 - *HaengChon Art Project*, Daeheung Buddhist Museum, Baekryunsa, Gangjin, KOR
 2015 - *Blessed Land*, Yang Pyeong Art Center, Yang Pyeong, KOR
 2015 - *Memories of artistic soul*, Cheonan Arts Center Museum, Cheonan, KOR
 2015 - *My Blue China*, Fondation d'entreprise Bernardaud Limoges, FR
 2015 - *Water and Land - Niigata Art Festival*, Closed school in Niigata, Niigata, J
 2015 - *Art from Elsewhere*, Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston, UK; Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Middlesbrough, UK; Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Birmingham, UK
 2015 - *Blessed Land*, Yang Pyeong Art Center, Yang Pyeong, KOR
 2015 - *Memories of artistic soul*, Cheonan Arts Center Museum, Cheonan, KOR
 2015 - *My Blue China*, Fondation d'entreprise Bernardaud Limoges, FR

2014

2014 - *Beyond and Between*, Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, KOR
 2014 - *Art from Elsewhere*, Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, UK; Busan

Biennale: Inhabiting the World, Busan Museum of Art, Busan, KOR
 2014 - Jakarta Contemporary Ceramics Biennale, National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, IND
 2014 - *Time of Resonance*, Jeju Museum of Art, Jejudo, KOR
 2014 - *From Core to Korea*, Fine Art Gallery Art Link, Seoul, KOR
 2014 - *Encounters 2014*, Art Basel Hong Kong, HK
 2014 - *Dual Natures in Ceramics*, SFO Museum, San Francisco, CA, US
 2014 - *K-P.O.P. Korean Contemporary Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, TWN
 2014 - *Warmth*, Culture Station 284, Seoul, KOR
 2014 - *Objectified: Sculpture Today*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK

2013

2013 - *Apakabar Indonesia*, Lotte Shopping Avenue Gallery, Jakarta, IND
 2013 - *Women Healing the World*, Osan City Museum, Osan, KOR
 2013 - *Korea-NRW*, Osthaus Museum Hagen, Hagen, DE
 2013 - *La Route Bleue*, Fondation Boghossian, Bruxelles, BE
 2013 - *THE MOON JAR and Contemporary British Ceramics*, Korean Cultural Centre, London, UK
 2013 - *The Collectors Show: Weight of History*, Singapore Art Museum, SG

2012

2012 - *Deoksugung Project*, National Museum of Contemporary Art at Deoksugung Palace, Seoul, KOR
 2012 - *Constellation Gemini*, Korea Artist Prize, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, KOR
 2012 - *Berliner Festspiele*, Seitenbühne Berlin, Berlin, DE
 2012 - *The Diverse Spectrum: 600 Years of Korean Ceramics*, Museum of Art, Sao Paulo, BR
 2012 - *Korean Eye*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
 2012 - *All Our Relations: The 18th Biennale of Sydney*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, AUS
 2012 - *Arsenale: First International Biennale of Contemporary Art in Ukraine*

Selected group shows

Yeesookyung

2012 - *Mystetskyi Arsenal*, Kyiv, UKR
 2012 - *Walk in Asia*, Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, J
 2012 - *Women In-Between: Asian Women Artists 1984-2012*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, J
 2012 - *Buam Project*, Whanki Museum, Seoul, KOR
 2012 - *Art project 2012: communion*, Nuclear Summit Seoul, 2012 Media Center, Seoul, KOR
 2012 - *Ceramics Commune*, Artsonje Center, Seoul, KOR
 2012 - *Art project 2012: communion*, Nuclear Summit Seoul, 2012 Media Center, Seoul, KOR
 2012 - *Ceramics Commune*, Artsonje Center, Seoul, KOR

2011

2011- *Poetry in Clay: Korean Buncheong Ceramics from Leeum*, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, KOR; Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, CA, US
 2011- *Elephant Parade*, Singapore 2011, SG
 2011- *Epic of Units*, Gallery Hyundai, Seoul, KOR
 2011- *Countdown*, Culture Station Seoul 284, Seoul, KOR
 2011- *Tell Me Tell Me: Australian and Korean contemporary art 1976-2011*, National Art School Gallery, Sydney, AUS; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, KOR
 2011- *Chopping Play_Korean Contemporary Art Now*, Ion Art Gallery, SG
 2011- *New address*, New works, Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, J

2010

2010 - *My dear object*, Avenue L Gallery, Seoul, KOR
 2010 - *Korean Gene*, Korea Craft & Design Foundation Gallery, Seoul, KOR
 2010 - *oblique strategies*, Kukje Gallery, Seoul, KOR
 2010 - *Busan Biennale*, Now Asian Artist, Busan Cultural Center, KOR
 2010 - *Sculptures*, Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, J
 2010 - *Close encounter*, Jeju Museum of Art, Jejudo, KOR
 2010 - *Triennale of KOGEI in Kanazawa*, Culture Hall, Kanazawa City, J
 2010 - *The touch of history*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, DE
 2010 - *The 30th Anniversary of the Young Korean Artists*, National

Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, KOR

2009

2009 - *Vancouver Sculpture Biennale*, Cardero Park, Vancouver, CA
 2009 - *Platform*, Kimusa, Seoul, KOR
 2009 - *Cheongju International Craft Biennale*, The Old Cheongju Tobacco Processing Plant, Cheongju, KOR
 2009 - *Temptation Body*, Galleria Alessandro Bagnai, Firenze, I
 2009 - *Double Fantasy*, Marugame Genichiro Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, Marugame City, J
 2009 - *Logic of Sensibility*, Interlalia, Seoul, KOR
 2009 - *Ceramics-Climax*, Gyeonggido Museum of Modern art, Ansan-City, KOR
 2009 - *Translated Koryo Celadon*, Haegang Ceramics Museum, Ichon, KOR
 2009 - *Fragile-Fields of Empathy*, Museum of Modern Art of Saint Etienne, Saint Etienne, FR
 2009 - *Lost and Found*, Rokeby Gallery, London, UK
 2009 - *Encounter: Dublin, Lisbon, Hong Kong and Seoul*, The Korea Foundation, Seoul, KOR
 2009 - *Meditation Biennale Poznan 2008*, Poznan, PL

2008

2008 - *Hirschweeinundzwanzig*, Kunstverin Coburg e. v., Coburg, DE
 2008 - *Metamorphoses: Korean Trajectories*, Espace Louis Vuitton, Paris, FR
 2008 - *Micro-narratives*, Saint-Etienne Museum, FR
 2008 - *Fantasy studio-A foundation*, Liverpool biennale, Liverpool, UK
 2008- *-B side*, Do Art Seoul, Seoul, KOR
 2008 - *To have or to be*, Farmleigh Gallery, Dublin, IE / Palacio Galveias, Lisboa, PT

2007

2007 - *Possible Impossible*, Art Park Gallery, Seoul, KOR
 2007 - *Anyang Public Art Project*, Hakun Park, Anyang, KOR
 2007- *Shanghai E-arts Festival*, Doll House, Shanghai, CN
 2007 - *The 48th October Salon: Micro Narratives*, Belgrade, SRB

Selected Group Shows

Yeesookyung

2007 - *Icheon Ceramic Biennale*, Icheon, KOR
 2007 - *Unfolding Korean Stories*, Alcalá 31, Madrid, ES

2006

2006 - *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial*, Abandoned house, Echigo-Tsumari, J
 2006 - Gwangju Biennale 2006: Fever Variations, Biennale Hall, Gwangju, KOR
 2006 - Art in Life: Public Furniture, Busan Biennale 2006, Haeundae Beach, Busan, KOR

2005

2005 - V4 Video, Vostell Gallery, Berlin, DE
 2005 - The Exhibition on the Tales of 15 Villages, Gwangju, KOR
 2005 - Against Translation, Total Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, KOR
 2005 - Seoul Until Now, Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall, Copenhagen, DK

2004

2004 - Episode, Chungju City Art Center, Chungju, KOR
 2004 - A Praise for Still Life, Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul, KOR
 2004 - MixMax, Artsonje Center, Seoul, KOR

2003

2003- Attese-Ceramics in Contemporary Art 2003, Albisola Museum of Ceramics, Albisola, I
 2003- D.I.Y. Beyond Instruction, Total Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, KOR

2002

2002 - Real-Interface, Space Ima, Seoul, KOR

2001

2001- Attese-Ceramics in Contemporary Art 2001, Albisola Museum of Ceramics, Albisola, I
 2001 - Art Museum in Image, Gwangju Art Center, Gwangju/ Busan

Art Center, Busan, KOR

2000

2000 - Das Lied von der Erde-Song of the Land, Museum Fridericianum Kassel, Kassel, DE
 2000 - Exit: International Film & Video Festival, Chisenhale Gallery, London, UK
 2000 - Con-Temporary-Super Expo 2000, Tokyo Big Sight, Tokyo, J
 2000 - Media City Seoul 2000, Subway Gallery, Seoul, KOR
 2000 - art@design.org, Seoul Arts Center Hangaram Design Museum, Seoul, KOR
 2000 - Leaving the Island: Busan International Art Festival, Busan Museum of Art, Busan, KOR
 2000 - Another Space, Insa Art Space, Seoul, KOR
 2000 - Art Museum in Image, Korea Center of Art and Culture, Seoul, KOR

Selected Collections

Yeesookyung

HONG KONG

M+ Museum, Hong Kong

JAPAN

City of Echigo-Tsumari

Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka

YU-UN Obayashi Collection, Tokyo

Setouchi Triennale Executive Committee, Seto Inland Sea

KOREA

Acrovista, Seoul

The Ambassador Seoul

Amorepacific Museum of Art, Seoul

Byucksan Corporation, Seoul

Cha Bio Complex, Seongnam

Daegu Museum of Art Collection, Daegu

DMZ Peace & Culture Square, Pyeongchang

Gana Foundation for Art and Culture, Seoul

Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Ansan

Hite Collection, Seoul

Jeju Museum of Contemporary Art, Jeju

Jeonnam Museum of Art, Gwangyang-si

Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul

Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul

LOTTE Foundation for Arts, Seoul

Mongin Art Center, Seoul

National Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon

POSCO Museum, Pohang

Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul

Suwon Museum of Art, Suwon

Times Square, Seoul

SPAIN

ARCO Collection, IFEMA, Madrid

SWITZERLAND

Uli Sigg Collection

UKRAINE

Mystetskyi Arsenal, Kyiv

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Salama Bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, Abu Dhabi

UNITED KINGDOM

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Bristol

The British Museum, London

Saatchi Gallery Collection, London

USA

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Princeton University, New Jersey

Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York

Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Chicago

Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Lawrence

The Tia Collection, Santa Fe

ITALY

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

CANADA

Jesse & Julia Rasch Foundation, Toronto

SOUTH AFRICA

NIROX Sculpture Park, Krugersdorp, South Africa

Selected Collections

Yeesookyung

NETHERLANDS

The Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics, Leeuwarden

AUSTRALIA

Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

Selected Press Clippings

Yeesookyung

HYPERALLERGIC

Chinoiserie Through a Feminist Lens

Met Museum curator Iris Moon dismantles misconceptions of vanity and frivolity within the porcelain craft in the upcoming exhibition *Monstrous Beauty*.

Rhea Nayyar March 7, 2025

Largely derided as the pinnacle of feminine vanity and frivolity, the imported porcelain fever of early 18th-century Europe laid the framework for Chinoiserie, a Western imitation and interpretation of Chinese culture and aesthetics in manufactured wares. An upcoming exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art examines the obsessively collectible status symbol of upper-echelon homes, identifying how perceptions of the art form took aim at European women's financial autonomy and contributed to the exoticizing objectification of Asian women and cultures.

Curated by Iris Moon, who oversees the ceramics and glass collection in the museum's Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, *Monstrous Beauty: A Feminist Revision of Chinoiserie* assembles some 200 objects from The Met's collections and on loan internationally in a critical examination of gender autonomy and racial stereotyping. In an interview with *Hyperallergic*, Moon mentioned that her main entry point into the department's collection was through Chinoiserie as an Asian American woman. She sought to unveil the histories embedded within the style and its legacy through the *Monstrous Beauty* show, opening on March 26.



Doccia Porcelain Manufactory (Italian, 1737–1896), two sweetmeat dishes (c. 1750–60) (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

“The other starting point for this exhibition was an object that we acquired, a reverse painted mirror of a woman in a Manchu dress from around 1760,” Moon explained. The generic commercial trade object had stood out because the image of the woman appeared to stare directly at her. “She’s supposed to be a decoration on the surface of the mirror, not someone that you have to confront, and I found that incredibly intriguing.”



The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquisition that sparked Curator Iris Moon's development of *Monstrous Beauty: A Feminist Revision of Chinoiserie* (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Moon established the timeline and acquisition trends of imported porcelain to *Hyperallergic*, noting that while the earliest presence of the material in Europe dates back to the Medieval period, it was primarily available to princely collectors as a rare and prized object or set.

“The association with women and frivolousness really comes in the 18th century with the consumer revolution,” she elaborated. “It’s exactly at this moment, when women gain power as consumers, that public discourse freaks out about women’s newfound power and the fact that no one could control their taste.”

“Suddenly, porcelain goes from this rare, precious commodity object to this explosion of uncontrolled desire,” Moon continued, “and that sexualized language is being imposed on these women right at the moment when they develop a taste for these objects.”



Cup and saucer (c. 18th century) (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art; photo by Peter Zeray)

Moon stated that one of the primary societal criticisms of purchasing porcelain was that you couldn't just have one set — “you’ve gotta catch ’em all, they were like Pokémon.” Female collectors were compulsively filling rows of shelves throughout entire rooms with their acquisitions. Noting that decorative art was often dismissed from both an aesthetic and political point of view compared to what was considered high art, Moon said that porcelain was more accessible as it flew under the radar.

When it comes to porcelain's role as an object of inheritance, the curator explained that historically, “rights to the land and property inheritance all goes to the male line, whereas women inherited the movable goods.” She cited Amalia van Solms-Braunfels, Princess of Orange, who left her taste-making and influential collection of decorative art and jewels to her four daughters — each of whom devoted a room in her home to display and build upon her mother's legacy.

But what in particular drew women to this art form? Was it the fragile, milky white material and the delicate decorations? Was it the act of hosting and showboating the wares and associated fine teas to guests?

“We tend to not consider the decoration that important because you see the same figures across all these objects — the pavilions and pagodas, trees, and women in silk dresses,” Moon said. “But if this is your only access to a world beyond yourself, porcelain really becomes a tool for fueling the imagination and fantasy and projections.”

And in that, Chinoiserie took the presented aesthetics of Chinese porcelain and other decorative goods and ran with it, leading to fetishized renderings of the “Orient” as told through the imagination of European producers relying on their interpretations of previously imported and authentic commercial goods.

“Chinoiserie flattened and serialized fixed images of a culture that Europe knew nothing about, and it was designed to suit the European taste,” Moon explained. “The imagined narrative of what they think China is became a structure that doesn't necessarily go away; it comes back when it's needed. The idea that these inanimate purchased objects first determine your relations with a person or a country is the complexity of Chinoiserie.”

Rounding out the conversation to be had about stereotypes and autonomy with historical works, Moon's exhibition will incorporate contemporary Asian women artists including Candice Lin, Lee Bul, Yeessookyung, and Patty Chang, as a sort of “tonic” to cut through the ornate seduction of Chinoiserie and call in the present and future of the material and the people it has come to represent.

“Different storylines can hopefully open people to new perceptions and new ways of thinking about not only history, but about the way we live today,” Moon said of *Monstrous Beauty's* feminist lens.

“I hope that when viewers come, they'll look first and think second.”



Left: Lee Bul, "Monster: Black" (2011; reconstruction of 1998 work) (© Lee Bul; photo by Jeon Byung-cheol, courtesy BB&M, Seoul)
 Right: Yeessookyung, "Translated vase_2017 TVBGJW1_Nine Dragons in Wonderland" (2017) (© Archivio Storico della Biennale di Venezia ASAC, photo by Andrea Avezzi)

ROBERT C. MORGAN

ABSENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE: READING THE WORK OF YEESOOKYUNG

Yeesookyung is a conceptually-based artist who works out of Seoul, Korea. She holds a preeminent reputation among patrons and scholars in her own country with a steadily growing reputation in many distinguished European, Japanese, and American collections. Considered by many as a significant new presence in bringing the legacy of Korean traditional forms into focus, she deploys unique strategies of appropriation in conjunction with a variety of mediums to produce works that reveal a carefully premeditated irony. For example, her critically acclaimed ceramic works, titled *Translated Vase*, are founded on a conceptual practice in which she assembles complex structures using shards of broken vessels that have been discarded. These vessels, though recently constructed by artisans working in various ceramic villages throughout Korea, are based on original designs formerly used in porcelain vases made during the Goryeo

[918–1392, fig. 2] and Joseon (1392–1897, fig. 3) dynasties. To ensure quality of the reproductions, artisans are asked to destroy those vases that reveal any signs of inferiority.

The origin of Yee's work in ceramics began in 2001 with a work titled *Translated Vase Albisola*. This developed soon after the artist encountered a verse by the Korean poet, Kim Song-ok, "Ode to a Porcelain Vase."¹ This led Yee to



Fig. 1. Yeesookyung's studio, 2013



create twelve white porcelain vases painted in blue, typical of the Joseon influence on European ceramics in the eighteenth century. To achieve this, the artist employed an Italian ceramicist, Anna Maria, to translate her impressions of the “Ode” into the design and production of the vases. The result was a series of twelve Italian versions of a Joseon vase, majestically produced according to the artist’s instructions, but highly ambiguous, if not meaningless, in content. What stands forth, however, is the fact that the stylistic exchanges that once occurred between East and West along the Silk Road are now laminated together as an integral part of the conceptual design within the accompanying production process. *Translated Vase Albisola* began with a series of translated impressions

Fig. 2. Artist/maker unknown, Korean, *Vase [Maebyeong]*, Goryeo Dynasty [918–1392], 12th century, porcellaneous stoneware with incised decoration under celadon glaze, 16 x 9 1/2 inches. Collection Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA. Purchased with the Fiske Kimball Fund and the Marie Kimball Fund, 1974.



and finished as a series of twelve crossbred utilitarian objects detached from their cultural origins.² In addition, they might function as well-crafted examples of exquisite décor suspended in time and place, ambiguous, if not negligible, on the level of connoisseurship. One may further discover a link to understanding the fascination associated with Chinoiserie as found in the Palace of Oranienbaum in Dessau (1683, fig. 4), which was the site of one of Yeosookyung’s most intriguing installations, verging on the precipice between kitsch, craft, deconstruction, and fine art.³

Together with her symmetrical scroll paintings, influenced by the ancient Taoist cave paintings from the Goguryeo kingdom in the North, dating back to the

Fig. 3. Artist/maker unknown, Korean, *Bottle with Chrysanthemums and Orchids*, Joseon Dynasty [1392–1910], late 18th to early 19th century, porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration; gold lacquer repair on body, 12 x 7 inches. Collection Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA. Gift of Dr. Andrew Byoung Soo Kim and Mrs. Wan Kyun Rha Kim in honor of James and Agnes Kim, 2006.



first century A.D., and Buddhist flame paintings from the later Goryeo period, *Translated Vase* seems to make a seamless conceptual fit.⁴ In both series, the artist forges an anti-aesthetic in her paradoxical reconciliation with the present. For example, the symmetrical scroll paintings embody references to Bodhisattva figures and attendants juxtaposed with indigenous Mudang shamans, the latter going back centuries before any kingdom or dynasty occupied the Korean peninsula.⁵ Her timely approach to sculptural assemblage and painterly montage (or vice versa) suggests not only a deconstructive process at work, but an inexorable patience as she implicates a slow release of energy (*qi*) that informs such paintings, once given to forms generated through the skills of anonymous Korean masters from past centuries. Her work is less a manner of engendering a style than producing a host of oppositional fragments. This allows the work to come to terms with the visual language embedded within these indigenous forms as she foregrounds them in a lyrically and provocative relationship to the present.

A clear reading of these forms may have been lost in recent times, given the difficult history of Korea following the Japanese occupation (1910–1945), and, in recent years, the intrusion of mediated global trends. However, the power of Yeesoookyung's works continues to astonish national and international viewers.⁶ In her recent works, one finds a consistent, albeit subtle, reference to the *qi* through her perception, craft, agility, and a nearly inscrutable precision and concentration on detail. Her attention to particulars reveals an acute sense of tension and balance in her *Translated Vases* consistent with her broader use of symmetry and rupture that deconstructs the past. Whether Buddhist or Neo-Confucian icons and figurations, the space is filled with evocative ganglia and provocative interstitial happenings. Given the variation of medium, material, scale,

Fig. 4. Installation view, Yeesoookyung, Schloßmuseum Oranienburg, Dessau, Germany, 2009

and surface, Yeessookyung offers a series of complex investigations, especially in welding the cracks and fissures of shattered porcelain (and celadon) using epoxy and gold [*geum*].⁷

In her decontextualized Buddhist paintings (fig. 5), Yeessookyung redefines pictorial abutments of shape, figurations, and dismantled symbolic referents from histories of past kingdoms and dynasties. Her application of floral designs and filigree resonate with the multifarious infusions of global and transcultural traces. Evocations glutted with a subterranean infestation of beauty mark every conduit, every linear motif, all magically woven into a palpably refined, sensuously endowed crescendo of ecstasy. Her elegantly cultivated semiotic discourse represents a sequence of caricatures, a collision of cultural signifiers in the artist's search to rediscover the authenticity and ironies embedded in the past. In so doing, Yeessookyung has indirectly, yet forcefully reopened a discourse into the meaning of Korean identity today.

Educated in the College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University, one of the best, and clearly most formidable institutions of higher learning in the Republic of Korea, Yeessookyung received her BFA in 1987 and her MFA in 1989. During this period, French poststructural theory, along with major writings of the Frankfurt School and cultural feminism, were slowly making their way into Korean translation. Although the writings of Duchamp and the Conceptualists of the 1960s were already known, the translations lagged behind. Yet Korean art similarly shifted away from purely formal ideas in the visual arts toward an extended range of content focused on language.⁸ The rubric of "postmodernism" became a standard term for anything that defied Modernism and did not reduce artistic practice to a particular medium.

Fig. 5. *Flame Variation 1-2* (detail), 2012





I mention this only to suggest that while these ideas were burgeoning and clearly in vogue at the time Yeosookyung was at Seoul National, her recent work represents the the full extent of their power and potential impact in relation to her evolving methods of deconstruction. After exposure to two important residencies in New York in the 1990s, her conceptual practice came into focus. It soon followed that instead of pursuing a resistance to Modernism independent of her cultural heritage, Yeosookyung embraced Western theory less as a truth than a method.⁹ In this way, she began to investigate the traditional parameters of language and form in Korean culture. This was achieved by way of appropriating traditional objects, specifically ceramics, as a kind of conservative disguise, a concealed

Fig. 6. Discarded ceramic shards

radicality on the verge of regeneration, a transgression, in some sense, that leads to transformation.

The broken shards of white porcelain and celadon offered a fertile field of investigation. Several villages throughout the Republic of Korea have teams of master artisans on staff to produce replicas according to the original specifications, used predominantly in the mid Joseon dynasty. The largest is in Icheon, southeast of Seoul, which has become a major outlet, in fact, a veritable corporation. Others include Yeosu, Gwangju, Danyang, Hadong, Mungyeong, Gangjin, and Buan. Given the requirements for perfection, only a small percentage of the ceramic works produced actually reach the final cut. The rest are destroyed, thrown into ceramic graveyards (fig. 6), as it were. Yeosookyung became interested in the rejects and how to transform these shards into works of art. She devised a system based on a ceramic core by which to gradually adhere the fragments with epoxy. The shards are constructed in relation to one another until they achieve an *embodied form*. I emphasize this term given the artist's emphasis on the volume or space once contained by the vessels as reforming themselves into another body, a Buddha, for instance, or a form manifesting the Sanskrit concept of *sunyata*, or "pregnancy of the void."¹⁰ Less detached as a purely deconstructive process, the more recent *Translated Vase* constructions of the past six years further suggest the notion of moving from or through space as contained in a vessel, a reversal of an embodied space as in *dhyana*, towards a paradoxical form of transcendence that retains its materiality.¹¹

The concept of symmetry abounds in Yeosookyung's work of the past three years, ranging from the exalted faux-mysticism in her paintings, such as *Flame Variation* (2012, pp. 49, 53, 57), to the *Polaris* installation from the same year,



featuring a mirror-like ensemble of cast resin figures showing young girls with animals, a theme also present in the paintings. In addition to the Taoist and Buddhist-inspired hanging scroll paintings and her recent figurative sculpture, there is yet another recent variation on conceptual symmetry found in her re-staging of traditional dance works, previously destined for the eyes of elite literati during dynastic times. The women who generally performed in these dances were known as *kisaeng* who were highly educated professional entertainers and occasionally prostitutes.¹² Donned in traditional Korean *hanbok* or long floating gowns, their slow graceful movements are sustained throughout the dance. The video document of one of these performances, titled *Twin Dance* (pp. 44–47)

Fig. 7. *Chen Chog Heruka and Spirits of the Bardo*, Tibet, Mongolia or China, 18th–19th century, colors and gold on cloth with cloth mounting, Nyingma Religious Order. Collection Newark Museum, Newark, NJ, The Heeramanek Collection. Purchase 1969, The Members' Fund 69.34.

involves two women who pose and move as if they were exact reflections of one another.

Based on my observation, this slowness of effect is embodied in the consciousness of the female performers. Part of this is technical due to the fact that each woman must maintain an exact opposite reflection of the other. This would be relatively inconceivable if the tempo were to accelerate. But the contemplative aspect of the dance relative requires a consistency with the sounds of traditional instruments, such as the *Gayageum*. These ancient percussive sounds also resemble Sanskrit Buddhist chants, performed by monks in Korea. The sounds are slow and deliberate, assured and steady. Their effect is essential as they parallel the movements of the dancers. The dance begins with the same pace that it finishes, just as the Buddhist chant begins and ends on the exact tempo. The symmetry in the *Twin Dance* is omnipresent, and therefore, increases one's depth of contemplation in the process of watching and listening to this highly complex, yet indefatigably complete performance. Time stands still.

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I Am Being Born as “You.”

Yunkyoung Kim, Independent Curator

Yeesookyung’s works take one’s heart away and grab the attention. Many viewers’ heart and eyes are appealed to and mesmerized by her works: the <Translated Vases> series (2002~) where fragments of porcelains discarded by craftsmasters are collected and glued together in a traditional pottery repair fashion; and the <Flame> series (2006~) where drawings of images borrowed from a Buddhist painting or a talisman, expressed in simplified lines of cinnabar unfold in a complicated manner. In Yeesookyung’s works, fragments of white porcelains or celadon porcelains are connected in delicate lines of gilding, and proliferate infinitely, or refined, elegant and sometimes voluptuous lines are repeated in full with a red tint of cinnabar. The ecstasy generated by them is represented in front of viewers. The materials and methods chosen by the artist transcend “art and crafts” against the heterogeneous time and space where the “East and West” and “past and present” cross over and are weaved against one another. They even cross over in extending to the traditional music or dance recently, breaking down the multi-layered distinctions recklessly and absorbing them, ridiculing them and seriously delving into them, which has served as an attractive means to settle Yeesookyung’s works in the context of the contemporary art. As such, analysis of, approaches to and evaluation of Yeesookyung’s works that exude an irresistible force—beyond its charm—in visual and conceptual aspects took place in these aspects, and their depth are further intensified.

And yet, a repeated look and reading of her works makes one think that this is not enough. Her new attempts for this exhibition seem a sought-after sophisticated departure from the even multi-layered and multi-faceted approach that has been used till now. <When I Become You> (2015), being the title of her installation work that comprises the prologue of the exhibition as well as the title of the exhibition, casts such doubts over Yeesookyung’s attitudes. Moreover, what about the narration and paintings based on the experience of regression to a former life? Her recent works tend to be detached again from the existing contexts established through the series of <Translated Vases> and <Flame> which are now felt familiar, and how can they be interpreted differently? Or, can these recent works be penetrated into a solid aspect of the existing context of her works? Why not uncover the memories of having confronted her works by turning back the clock?

Yeesookyung established herself as an artist with her solo exhibition of <Getting Married to Myself> held in 1992. Since then she has conducted a wide range of experiments of contemporary art, such as issues of society and system, representation and significance, narratives jumping over the boundary of fiction and non-fiction, as well as feministic approaches in her works <Green Shoe Tribes> (1998), <Straightforward Project> (1999), <Artist Uniform> (2000), and <Painting for Out-of-Body-Travel> (2002). Korea’s art arena in the 1990s witnessed the emergence of a new species that presented personal experiences in art works through the contemporary culture and kitsch senses, less relying on weighty mythologies or macro-discourse. Yeesookyung’s contemporary sense was expressed in diverse ways thanks to her skillful communications with and wide choice of artistic codes. Her working style as such has generated a linkage with her recent works in terms of materials and methods as it has been carried on up to the early 2000s. The early version of the <Translated Vases> series that are ongoing today made its debut at <Attese: Biennale of Ceramics in Contemporary Art> held in Albisola, Italy. Yeesookyung took part in the biennale twice in 2001 and 2003, introducing installations and videos by linking the issue of translation and false narratives resulting from the given medium of ceramics—an unfamiliar one which she happened to encounter.¹

Then, moving onto the mid-2000s, Yeessookyung's works seem to leap into a new phase. Her 2006 solo exhibition titled <Flame> and <The 6th Gwangju Biennale: Fever Variations> offered opportunities to reaffirm such changes in her work, and she also mentioned that the de facto starting year of her work was 2006. Artworks she showed through these two exhibitions, in fact, reveal a starkly different facet from her previous works. Her iconic work of <Translated Vases> and drawings on fire were exhibited in these events, which have been shown in series and repertoires in their own ways. In the meantime, she started a long-term project titled <The Very Best Statue>ⁱⁱ (2006~), and introduced <Portable Temple>ⁱⁱⁱ (2008).

The breakpoint between her works in this period and her previous works is the stand-out of religious or shamanic aspects. Cinnabar was used as a material for fire drawings, which is known to have been used to draw amulets, used as a medicinal ingredient known to be effective for easing and calming one's mind, and also for communicating with god if taken in at all times. Statues were made resembling saints or gods worshipped in diverse cultures. A six-folded screen with images of the Buddha and Bodhisattva was made as a personal portable temple. Such artworks as these were exhibited in her solo exhibition <Paradise Hormone> held in 2008, in particular, so her different approach perceived from her post-2006 works was seemingly made clear through the exhibition.

Despite the external changes that are noticeable, several points that are discovered here and there continue to remind one of the methodological linkages between these works and early works. This is because a close look at the works filled up with a holy ambience would reveal the hidden scatters of quizzical factors. Statues resembling saints and gods imbue a questionable awkwardness. In <The Very Best Statue> of 2008, this awkwardness is expressed in the form of weirdness. The statue—seemingly a far cry from a religious one—covered in blue from the head to toes emerges in the image of a ghost or a monster that might appear in a sci-fi film. The statue explicitly reveals the intent and the production process for the artwork, which one neglected, and could not be perceived by being overshadowed by a holy ambience. In other words, it is conveyed that this statue is not proposed as a symbol of holiness as an icon for worship but produced as a single artwork to produce the best statue best befitting the notion of “a statue.” Yeessookyung has always conducted surveys for local residents whenever she took part in art events held in particular regions, and produced statues based on the results. Images of a saint or a god which have been considered to be inviolable are divided by body part and exhibited as such, and residents select the parts they like as if to make an avatar on-line. The parts with the highest preference are selected and assembled in the work, which might be furthest from holiness, in fact. Likewise, if one perceives unfamiliarity emitted from the ambience of familiarity in <Portable Temple> suggested as a space for personal meditation surrounded by Buddhist paintings, it is because the artwork was designed as an outcome of twisting the existing notions and systems, not as a space for holiness. Buddha and Bodhisattva turning their back against coldheartedly without their stereotyped look at the mankind with generosity at all times consistently!

Her attitude of disrupting the existing notions and institutions that clearly represent the religious and psychological through the holiness or some similar energy does not seem significantly different from that of her pre-2006 works. The methodological precedent of <The Very Best Statue> can be found in the process of producing <Artist Uniform> where uniforms of jobs where uniforms are necessary are divided by part, and each part is selected based on survey outcome to come up with the most suitable uniform for the artist. Her interest in different types of religions in various cultures is shown in

<Painting for Out-of-Body-Travel> conceived based on a fictional narrative mixed with the meditation at a new religious cult as well as in the interviews with believers of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses and Baha'i for her work during her stay in France in 2003. Her intention to shake, twist, disintegrate and mix the existing institutions and authority that force on reckless worshipping and adaptation as in a religion or education is clearly embedded behind such methods and attempts. Examples of her intent to distort a solid world are a “discourse” on public sculptures and monuments in an artistic context surrounding the statues, and the “artistic standard” determining the destiny of the broken ceramic fragments.

Yeessookyung's works have been carried on in dissection and propagation in full swing in the late 2000s, which used to be often misinterpreted as if to lack in consistency for the reason of attempting for diversity instead of sticking to a particular style. While ceramic fragments and drawings repeatedly propagate in reiterations as it has been at the beginning, her collaboration with experts of traditional music and dance have expanded, serving as an axis of a variation which her artistic world seeks for. The symmetrical drawings with the usage of her two hands—she made this attempt sometimes in her works—in <Daily Drawing> whose motif is a “circle” drawn as if to write a diary every day since 2004 have been altered in the series of <Flame Variation> (2012), or even altered and propagated as <Polaris> (2012), a set of three-dimensional works. In the meanwhile, another area of her interest seems to be installations collaborated with singer Jung Marie and dancer Lee Jung Hwa, through which traditional *sori* (sounds in Korean) and dances of Korea are combined, hinting at the expansion of her domain.

Anyhow, it seems clear that a turning point came into being in her work at a time when ceramic fragments and drawings in cinnabar emerged. She mentioned that her pre-2006 works, seemingly fresh, are split to the extent of failing to be dubbed as works of a single artist. She pinpointed, however, that in her later works, the splits from and gaps with her have converged. On the works during this period, topics of discourse included not only newly emerging motifs and materials but also the holiness, the psychological and religious, or the divinity as a result therein, or as a cause for such outcome. True, her early attempts resembling “noise”—a type of splitting that forms the basis of her works—have crisscrossed to generate a structure, and as the structure was converged into the refined surface of her works, it served as a source to induce abundant and diverse stories: it is a topic never missed out in the discourse on her works.

And now, Yeessookyung unravels another story. A noticeable change is revealed through her newly attempted paintings. Moreover, the experience of regression into a former life, which she has been interested in for long, forms as a narrative for her works, and has entered into Yeessookyung's world. Although I know how she has jumped around various media at ease, the medium of paintings she has introduced this time was a surprise. And, the narrative for the paintings is the experience of regression into a former life at that! Would this be an attempt to stay away from the contexts established by her works? A clear and ringing voice fills up the exhibition room where canvases—big and small—are hung on the walls, and roses are blossoming: “I am walking in a forest filled up with red roses...” As I listen to the story of a woman with a beautiful voice, my eyes follow the former life of the artist that foggily unfolds as she walks into a rosy forest.

The former life experience consists of many scenes. The main character takes on different lives in different places and time in a story that unfolds against the background mostly filled up with roses.

She experiences many lives: the head of a tribe, a maid, a Buddhist monk, and a daughter of a father falsely charged with treason, an audacious warrior, a roe deer and a bear, and even water bubbles, building up the moments of birth and death, joy and agony, regressing into the next life and the former life again. She specifically records the scenes confronted upon entering the subconscious deeper and deeper through hypnosis, and represents them again as paintings. Yeesoookyung's works revealed as such look different from her previous works, but they still hold the charm of mesmerizing viewer's eyes and heart. The "story" of the artist who has experienced the mystique world of a former life, and "paintings" where the scenes she confronted unfold: a former life is something that anyone has wondered about at least once, and it is unraveled through the story and paintings as means to mesmerize one's ears and eyes from the birth, then anyone would be mesmerized by their inevitable charm. It is a former life and that of a former life, that of the former life of a former life and so on.

The combination of a former life and paintings is puzzling, but putting the clues revealed through her works together would show a sentiment that has been continuously felt in her works since 2006, that is, the agony and pain, and the positive ambience surrounding it. The characters in many scenes of a former life Yeesoookyung says she confronted suffer from agony and pain in common. The agony and pain sometimes put them to death again, even burning their eagerness for revenge to be born again from the death. Nevertheless, the main characters accept their destiny, embracing life and death with a positive energy. This narrative structure was reminiscent of the <Flame> series introduced in around 2008. The big picture plane drawn in cinnabar was filled with dancing and burning flames as in her previous work of fire drawings. On top of this, Yeesoookyung created some other patterns different from her previous works—clouds, plants, dragons or monsters, and faces of a girl in variations.

She said that this was the outcome of a process of sensitively perceiving and recording the vibration and waves of her body and heart toward the outside world surrounding her. She added that she wanted to generate a positive energy by putting these "undigested images" on the picture plane. This is not different from empathizing on agony and pain that exist outside, and her perspective is extended to the work of recombining broken ceramic fragments or disintegrated parts of statues, and revealing the back images of Buddha and Bodhisattva. In other words, this is interpreted as an attempt to reveal sympathy to those that have not been spotlighted, and to reveal the agony and pain hidden behind or resulting from the extreme beauty and the ultimate holiness. This is done by choosing the back images that have not been seen before as well as broken or disassembled fragments, instead of the beautiful and holy white or blue porcelains or statues that have existed seamlessly as the icons of "beauty" or "worship." Her recent work titled <The Dark Side of the Moon> (2014) is a work in the shape of a big moon as a patchwork of ceramic fragments of the black glaze ceramic instead of white or blue porcelains. It can be interpreted that the black glaze ceramic from the area of Hoeryeong—a region in the north of Korea—that is not as spotlighted as white porcelains, thus lost in inheritance, reminds one of a forgotten history and the historic wound thereof.

This mentioning is considered particularly significant because Yeesoookyung started to perceive the "body" by unraveling the undigested images. For her who fast adapted herself to the contemporary art in the 1990s through its discourse and methodologies, art has been understood as a "notion/concept" and has been applied and expressed as such. In the point when she perceived that she herself is a being with a body, and agony and pain come due to the existence of the body, and the agony and pain are overcome only through the very body, her mulling over on the functions of the body as an artist, or what the body of an artist can do probably kicked off. That she kneeled down as in meditation and

did fire drawings with a brush in hands, and that she started to attach ceramic fragments based on the craftwork can be easily understood, given her perception as such. Even before bringing in the traditional music and dance, she learned herself *Jeongga* (aristocratic chamber songs) and *Salpuri* (Korean traditional spirit-cleansing dance) for long, focusing on the body vibration and movements, which can be related to the process of getting to know of her body. This is, again, connected to a work of painting, the art of brushstrokes. As she has been mulling over the way to approach paintings—oil paintings—that have carried on the weight of the traditions of the Western art history, she found the way to recover and reveal her body and her own breaths as one of the paths to do it.

Then, it must not have been easy to recover herself, her body and breaths by getting rid of the remnants of long education that has wrapped her body: she has been educated on art that has flown in from the West. As such, the experience of regression into a former life must have been an inevitable choice. As she confesses, wouldn't the repeated regression into the former life of a former life through hypnosis free one from the consciousness to relieve of all the weight imposed? Wouldn't there be total freedom, shedding off the weight resulting from life, education, religion and all the institutions surrounding one? Also, wouldn't there be the revelation of each layer that has been gradually accumulated in the process? As the past, albeit seemingly distant, cannot disappear, fragments of the past that have become vague in one's consciousness and yet never vanish repeatedly gather and scatter over a long passage of time, and one's facets would be based on these fragments of the past. Wouldn't one recover the body and breaths at some point upon following one's facets as such? So, it is not so important if these scenes she experienced and recorded are Yeesoookyung's former life or not.

Many years ago, I had a chance to curate her solo exhibition. We used to talk over the exhibition on many occasions, and each time we met, she suggested new ideas, stories and works for the exhibition. At first, new ideas and proposals strained and burdened me as the exhibition was nearing, but as we met more and more, I was deeply into all the stories and works she talked about. Before long, at last, all the stories that sounded new and different each time came to be recognized as the same stories with different aspects that are introduced here and there. I came to realize that one work led onto another, which was some work of her past career, and Yeesoookyung's stories themselves were an artwork per se, and were her life, which were reborn as another work, another story, being born as another life. However, albeit vaguely, I now know that all these cannot be the same. As the saying "many blind men touching an elephant" goes, I was touching the elephant blinded by the charms of each and every work of her.

ⁱ In her work created in 2001, the title of <Translated Vase> first appeared where she gave a poem of <*Baek Ja Bu* (translated as "praise for white porcelains")> (1947) of Sang-ok Kim translated in Italian to an Italian ceramist, and asked him to create a white porcelain based on the image he envisioned. The discomfort she feels towards the white porcelains as an "idea" or a "symbol," and the "discourse" encompassing these two—all types of authority recklessly embraced in a broader sense—not the white porcelains per se is revealed through her method: making a direct translation of a Korean poem, a metaphor for white porcelains, and inducing an Italian ceramist who has never seen a white porcelain to create a visual creation based on the poem. <Parental Plates> of 2003 is a ceramic work cloned by an Italian ceramist using plates of residents in Albisola passed down from their parents, so

imbuing personal stories within. It exhibits her interest in art and craft, the originality and reproduction, and narratives on the personal memory.

ⁱⁱ The project was conducted in Echigo-Tsumari, Japan in 2006; in Anyang, Korea in 2007; Liverpool, U.K. in 2008; and Kiev, Ukraine in 2012. The project is an amalgamation of statues that were derived from diverse cultures of the world. Yeesoookyung conducted surveys with residents living in these cities to produce the “best” statue. Images of Confucius, Lao-tzu, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad and Ganesh are shown by part and section: head, eyes, nose, mouth and chin, facial shape, right and left upper bodies, lower body, and color of the statues. Residents select the part they think most suitable, and the statues were produced based on their feedback and preference. The project is ongoing with a goal to complete twelve statues in twelve regions.

ⁱⁱⁱ <Portable Temple> represents a meditative space that is portable consisting of a six-folded screen where such delicate drawings of Amitabha, Buddha of Medicine, Maitreya, Guardian Deity of Children and Goddess of Mercy are drawn in the traditional stone color technique. Buddhist paintings drawn here are based on those of Goryeo period, but the back images of Buddha and Bodhisattva, which have never been seen are represented based on imagination. This work has been re-produced in the version where Manjusri and Samantabhadra are drawn.



Ode to a Shape Shifter

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Transformations abound in Yeeseokyoung's art. Her work seeks to understand the underlying significance of breakage and mending, a process of trauma and healing wrought large on the mindscape of Korean collective consciousness. With the end of imperial rule in 1905, colonial subjugation under the Empire of Japan by 1910, national division following the Korean War in 1953, and the unrelenting industrialization of the late 20th century that has thoroughly reordered centuries-old patterns of everyday life, rupture and discontinuity have been a pervasive force in shaping memory and experience in twentieth-century Korea. Following traces and threads of this Korean past permeating her daily encounters in Seoul, Yeeseokyoung's artistic process is constantly unlocking new understandings about the legacy of Korea's past and redeeming historical practice as something potent and invigorating for Korea today.

Three important themes in Yeeseokyoung's work emerge in this essay: ritual, spiritual hybridity, and translation. While far from a comprehensive charting of her development as an artist or her artwork, these three inter-related concepts are utilized to illuminate a practice that fundamentally strives to understand culture both as a manifestation of particular local idioms and drives towards a deeper condition of culture as it operates on a global context.

Through her exploration of numen—the power (perhaps magical) of objects—and states of consciousness, her artwork further dislodges and questions the tyranny of modernist constructs implicit in the western-based art world. By deploying poetic, emotional, dreamlike, and magical states that surpass regular experiences, her work speculates on the subjective interplay of spiritual realms, positioning the body as galvanizing focal point in this process. The potential of other realms of consciousness as reservoirs for inspiration and as critical vantage for contemporary society intertwines, engenders and dissipates like an enveloping cloud through Yeeseokyoung's art.

Ritual

In a room in her studio dominated by prismatic rows of colored pencils, drawing as a daily activity takes on a ritualistic, meditative dimension (Fig. 1). In her important study of ritual theory and practice, Catherine Bell defines the “ritualized body” as one invested in a “sense” of ritual and that “through the interaction of the body with structured and structuring environments” engenders ritualization.¹ With sketch and stroke, line and color the disciplined gesture of drawing settles Yeeseokyoung into her own ritual body, bringing focus to her conceptual process and

¹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory/Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 98.



Fig. 1 Yeeseokyoung's Studio



Fig. 2 Yeeseokyoung, *Painting For Out Of Body Travel*, 2000

with it both therapeutic and computational potential. In the interplay of process and product afforded by systematic drawing, Yeeseokyoung is interested in harnessing the transcendent potential of art making.

Her root interest in blurring banal visual experiences is evident in earlier works such as *Painting for an Out of Body Experience* (2000–2002). Following her instructions “to stare at the painting until you feel dizzy,” the installation stretches and distorts a landscape painting as an experiment in the powers of perception (Fig. 2). Due to the disorienting effect of the work, she recommends that viewers wear “a helmet, life jacket, and elbow protectors.”² It is not a coincidence that around this time, Yeeseokyoung began to investigate the meditative potential of the Mandala. Simply “circle” in Sanskrit, the concentric design of the Mandala works as a diagrammatic focus for deepening meditative and trance states. The utilization of the Mandala as a critical format is attained in *Motherland and Freedom Is* (2009), a multisensory installation that harnessed the residual energy of the infamous Kimusa military base sited on the grounds of a former colonial Japanese hospital (Fig.

² http://www.yeeseokyoung.com/16_paintingforoutofbodytravel.html

3).³ The practice of drawing Mandala further mutated into the ongoing series *Daily Drawing* (2005–present), in which the circular form of the Mandala remains a potent focal point (Fig. 4).

The visual language that emerges in *Daily Drawing* is eclectic and mystical. A desexualized, prepubescent female protagonist, powerful yet venerable appears as a constant force among the imagery (Fig. 5). The sources for this diverse universe come from Catholic iconography, Buddhist symbolism, Disneyesque assemblages to pop culture references like my personal favorite—a pair of red ruby slippers (“there’s no place like home!”) (Fig. 6).⁴ The strategy of using both left and right hands to draw simultaneously further opens the mind to spontaneous juxtapositions. While the lexicon emerges from Yeeseokyoung's daily stimulus, the strategy of documenting daily influences with ritualized manner, deploying a style that is flat and linear, is reminiscent of *uigwe*—Joseon period court documentary painting (Fig. 7). An essential part of Confucian court ritual during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897), the appreciation of *uigwe* has recently enjoyed resurgence in the Korean public mind.⁵ While Yeeseokyoung's daily drawing lacks the ceremonial precision of *uigwe*, they are conceptual linked by the way in which they both trace liminal movement, transitioning from realms of symbolic significance to enactment. In this way, they are both about process and embodiment.⁶



Fig. 3 Yeeseokyoung, *Drawing*, 2007

³ Located across from Gyeongbok Palace, the Defense Security Command or Kimusa is currently being renovated as part of the National Museum of Contemporary Art. To learn more about this process see Yeongeum Kim, Seungae Bang, Joonsung Yoon “Site-Specific Art as Necrophilia: Platform in Kimusa Exhibition in Seoul 2009,” in *ISEA2010 RUHR Conference Proceeding* (Ruhr: The 16th International Symposium on Electronic Art, 2010), 487.

⁴ For the suite of *Daily Drawing* utilized as part of the *While Our Trust Has Been Delayed* installation Yeeseokyoung listened to a range of musical accompaniment from the melancholic Jeongga, Buddhist recitations, Gregorian chants, Quranic recitation, Joseon period ritual music and Catholic hymns. See Kim Inseon, “Upon the Exhibition, ‘Jung Marie’s Jeongga, Yeeseokyoung’s Devotion’ in Jung Marie’s Jeongga Yeeseokyoung’s Devotion (Seoul: Arko Art Center, 2010), 19.

⁵ Evincing by urban renewal projects like the lovely Cheonggyecheon Stream that utilizes *uigwe* as decorative tiles. For a recent study and introduction to *uigwe* in English see Yi Song-mi “The Making of Royal Portraits during the Choson Dynasty: What the *Uigwe* Books Reveal” in *Bridges to Heaven: Essays on East Asian Art in Honor of Professor Wen C. Fong*, edited by Jerome Silbergeld, ... [et al.] (Princeton, N.J.: P.Y. and Kimmy W. Tang Center for East Asian Art in association with Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁶ Sara Schneekloth, “Marking Time, Figuring Space: Gesture and the Embodied Moment,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, December 2008 (7): 277–292.



Fig. 4 Yeosookyung, *Daily Drawing 100404-1*, 2010



Fig. 5 Yeosookyung, *Daily Drawing 100408*, 2010



Fig. 6 Yeosookyung, *Daily Drawing 100501*, 2010



Fig. 7 Ogyujangak *Ulgwe*

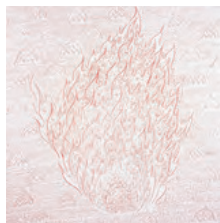


Fig. 8 Yeosookyung, *Flame*, 2006



Fig. 9 Master of Triumph of Death *<The Inferno>*, 1490-1500

If the *Daily Drawings* inventory and archive everyday stimulus, then the *Flame series* (2006-2011), depicting endless environments engulfed in fire explores less tangible realms of consciousness (Fig. 8). Drawn on huge sheets of Korean paper, the red lines of flames are rendered in cinnabar, or mercury sulfide also known as vermillion. The symbolism of the flame and the material significance of cinnabar have traditional sources. In Buddhism, the manifestation of enlightened beings such Buddha and Bodhisattva—compassionate enlightened beings—is closely associated with flame imagery. Flames represent purity, the burning away of ignorance and misconception, and simultaneously embody energy and the protective ability of Bodhisattva. Whereas in the Euro-American context fire carries with it connotation of hell, damnation and punishment as seen in a 15th century depiction of the “Inferno,” in East Asia the representation of flames conversely represent salvation, purity, and understanding (Fig. 9).

Cinnabar is closely associated with magical and protective properties in Daoism and Korean shamanic practice. As a mineral byproduct of mercury, cinnabar is highly toxic, and despite its poison properties the substance has long been associated with magic, healing and even immortality. In Chinese Daoist practice, cinnabar has been used for centuries to draw protective talisman, a similar practice is also seen among Korean shamans who utilize cinnabar for its believed apotropaic qualities. The *Flame series*, as part of Yeosookyung's ritualistic drawing



Fig. 10 Yeosookyung, *Flame*, installation scene, 2008

process, combines these symbolic and material applications. Spreading the paper out on the floor, seated on a mat, the repetitive, undulations of drawing flames takes on a meditative quality, focusing and tightening the mind. When hung on the wall together, the installation of a continuous field of linear fire, a roaring blaze contained by the cool whiteness of the paper, works like a temple mural, evoking paintings from exotic locale like Dunhuang along the fabled

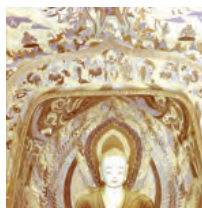


Fig. 11 Cave 249, Western Wei dynasty (ca. 1038-1227)

Silk Road in China (Fig. 10 and 11). The drawing process operates as a transformative movement, a traveling through spaces of the mind.

Spiritual Hybridity



Fig. 12 Yeosookyung, *Portable Temple*, 2008

Collaborating with an artist trained in traditional Korean Buddhist painting techniques, Yeosookyung's *Portable Temple* (2008) twists, inverts, and generates new experiences that differ from historical iterations of devotional Buddhist art (Fig. 12). The practice of making portable devotional shrines in Buddhism is long lived. The *Mokjo-samjohn-bulgam*, a carved sandalwood portable shrine in the collection of Song Kwang-sa Temple is an important early Korean example of the practice (Fig. 13). When the wooden, fitted pieces of this shrine are opened, a central carved image with two flanking deities is revealed.⁷ The frontal gaze of the image establishes an important hierarchical relationship between the space of the divine and the profane realm of the viewer, defining roles of deity and devotee.



Fig. 13 *Mokjo-samjohn-bulgam*, Circa 9th century

Rather than opening to reveal the interior image, in Yeosookyung's work the shrine encloses around the viewer who sits on a central white hexagon platform enveloped by a six-panel folding screen. And, rather than the typical frontal image, one encounters a pantheon of six deities with their backs turned. This imagined assemblage includes: the Buddha of Western Paradise (Amit'a-bul); the Healing or Medicine Buddha (Yaksa); the Future Buddha (Miruk-bul); Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom; Jijang Bosal (commonly called Jizo in Japanese), who is as-

7 See further Nakagiri Isao, “Shoko-ji Sanzon Butsuganzo,” *Bijutsu-shi*, December 1959, vol. 3, no. 2: 54-60.

sociated with salvation from hell; and Gwaneum (Guanyin in Chinese or Kannon in Japanese), the embodiment of compassion. The environment is inclusive. Not only is the space enclosed, but the vantage offers a distilled perspective on infinity, a visual strategy evocative of Casper David Fredericks iconic work from 1818 *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (Fig. 14 and 15). The reseating of the viewer within a participatory and totalizing divine environment is equitable, even ecumenical. And, the experience further questions paradigms of power implicit in the structures of traditional religious art.



Fig. 14 Yeosookyung, *Portable Temple*, detail, 2008



Fig. 15 Casper David Fredericks, *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, 1818

Yeosookyung's ongoing conceptual sculpture series *The Very Best Statue* is a community-based, participatory inquiry into religious imagery that similarly aims to dislodge conventional and prescribed spiritual experiences. For the first phase of the project Yeosookyung developed a multiple choice survey for two communities—Anyang in Gyeonggi Province, Korea and the community of Nigata province located directly north of Tokyo. Disassembling iconic imagery taken from world deities—Confucius, Laozi, St. Mary, Jesus, Buddha, the prophet Muhammad and the Hindu god Ganesh—the resulting product is a telling



Fig. 16 Yeosookyung, *The Very Best Statue*, survey sheet 1



Fig. 17 Yeesookyung, *The Very Best Statue*, installation scene, 2009

sociological synthesis of the broad-based appeal of certain religious iconography (Fig. 16). A stark white Christ-like figure and a muted Buddhistesque statue both possess an androgynous quality that melts and merges the harder edges of religious normality (Fig. 17). While Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid's highly important project *The Most Wanted and Least Wanted Paining* deployed a similar survey methodology, their inquiry into national and cultural constructions of artistic preferences differs from Yeesookyung's broad based inquiry into spiritual hybridity.⁸ For Yeesookyung the process is less about discerning boundaries and more about mergers and synthesis. Michel de Certeau reflects that "everyday life invents itself by poaching on the properties of others" and it is this persistent interest in "poaching" and admixture that flavors the thick conceptual stew of Yeesookyung's work.⁹

Yeesookyung 2010 multisensory installation *While Our Trust Has Been Delayed*, a performative collaboration with the Korean traditional singer Jung Marie, further destabilizes spiritual formats through its immersive environment of light (Fig. 18). The haunting intonation of *jeongga* at the center of the piece was funneled by an acoustical cantilever directly behind the singer that was designed to both augment the performance quality and to render a visual space of white infinity (Fig. 19). Singing the *Stabat Mater*, the sorrowful hymns associated with Mary following the crucifixion of Jesus, the merger of the melancholic cadence of traditional *jeongga* with the sorrowful hymns transforms both of these temporal and culturally distinct phenomena into a hybridized dynamism that soothes and refines "with its calmness."¹⁰ On a circular wall opposite the stage a suite of *Daily Drawing* hung on a single line was interspersed with speakers delivering recorded playback of Jung



Fig. 18 Yeesookyung, Jung Marie, *While Our Trust Has Been Delayed*, scene of performance, 2010

Marie's *jeongga* recitation, filling the space with perpetual sound (Fig. 20).

Her approaches to religious conventions all contain strategies for utilizing pluralist spiritual practices. The effect is synergizing. The deployment of spiritual multiplicity offers a manifestation for contemporary hybridity that remains thoughtful and critical while absent of jarring polemics. Unlike the hybridity of post-colonialism, which emerges out the disjunctive temporality of two cultural encounters¹¹, or contemporary mashups that splices and sample with the intent to subvert or confront¹², Yeesookyung's approach to hybridity is about plunging the viewer into a deeper contemplative space. By quelling distraction, her work invites a state of heightened reflection.

Translation

In her series of ceramic sculptures known as *Translated Vase* Yeesookyung reconfigures broken ceramic pieces into biomorphic "mu-



Fig. 19 Yeesookyung, Jung Marie, *While Our Trust Has Been Delayed*, stage back, 2010



Fig. 20 Yeesookyung, *Daily Drawing*, installation scene, 2010

tant" sculptures (Fig. 21). Collecting discarded ceramic sherds from waste piles of Korean ceramicists producing "historical reproductions," the organic configuration of this sculptural series emerge from a painstaking jigsaw-puzzle process in which Yeesookyung instigates new connections between disparate, unrelated pieces.

From the source material of traditional ceramic reproductions to the working process of (dis)joining sherds, the conceptual framework of this ongoing endeavor embraces the mutant energy of translation—a force for both communication and confusion; definition and transformation. Lydia Liu's work on translingual exchanges in the East Asian context underscores the various regime of power implicit in translational acts, emphasizing the limitations of cultural commensurability.¹³ Thus where clarity may be the goal of translation, it often affects a stratigraphy of added complexity and sometimes even confusion. But misunderstanding can still be productive.

The first *Translated Vase* emerged in 2001 when Yeesookyung was invited to submit artwork for *Biennale di Ceramica nell'Arte Contemporanea* held in Albisola, Italy. Collaborating with a local potter, she based the work on a translation of a *sijo*-style poem *Ode to White Porcelain* (in Korean *Baekjabu*) by Korean poet and antique dealer Kim Sang-ok (1920–2004).¹⁴

The resulting twelve ceramic wares comprise *Joseon Dynasty White Porcelain Has Been Translated* (2001) (Fig. 22). The project encapsulated the rich history of cultural appropriation that fueled the development of blue-and-white porcelain in Europe



Fig. 21 Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase*, 2007

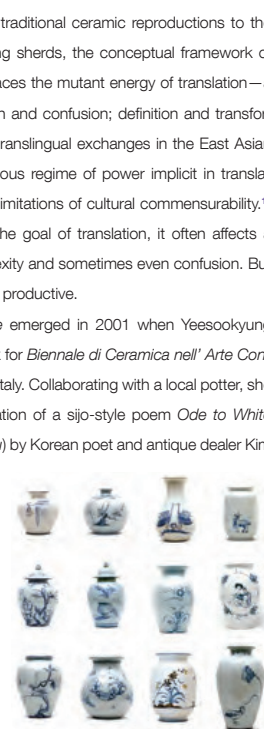


Fig. 22 Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase Albisola*, 2001

in which motifs, styles, and technology from Asia became a driving force in shaping European ceramic production.¹⁵ In his study on the "social life of things" anthropologist Arjun Appadurai observes: "commodities represent very complex social forms and distributions of knowledge."¹⁶ It is this multivalence of significance embedded in the ceramic commodity as both a utilitarian object and as a representation of historical tradition that emerges in *Translated Vase*.

By the advent of the twentieth century much of the tacit knowledge associated with traditional Korean ceramic production was gone or quickly vanishing.¹⁷ During the Japanese occupation, ceramic production was industrialized. However, archeological expedition also carried out during the colonial occupation brought to light long-forgotten celadon wares of the Goryeo dynasty as well as Joseon white-ware and *buncheong*.¹⁸ By the 1950s, research into historical ceramic techniques sparked a widespread revival of centuries-old technologies and with this ceramic renaissance came a thriving industry in historical reproductions (Fig. 23).

With strict laws regarding illicit looting and excavations of the Korean material past, the historical reproduction industry has had a vitalizing effect on Korean national identity, allowing most people the ability to possess high quality, often times hand-made examples of Korea's vibrant ceramic past. For Susan Stewart, the possession of souvenirs—and I would argue historical reproductions operate as a kind of temporal souvenir—is about context destruction. She writes:



Fig. 23 Celadon firing, 2011

8 Anne Schmedding, "Komar & Melamid: Most Wanted Paintings," *Daedalos*, Dec-Jan 1998–1999 (69–70).

9 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 1*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), introduction, xii.

10 For a detailed description of the project at Arko Center see "Upon the Exhibition, 'Jung Marie's Jeongga, Yeesookyung's Devotion' in Jung Marie's Jeongga Yeesookyung's Devotion (Seoul: Arko Art Center, 2010), 17–19.

11 Homi Bhabha writes: "Hybridity reverses the formal process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonialization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse." He goes on to observe: "Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence." In *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1994), 114.

12 Liam McGranahan, "Bastards and Booties: Production, Copyright, and the Mashup Community" *Trans* 2010 (14).

13 Lydia H. Liu, editor, *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 1999).

14 The poem was originally published in a compilation called *Ch'ŏkŏk*. A posthumous collection of poems by Kim Sang-ok was published as *Kim Sang-ok si jŏnjip*. For an example of Kim Sang-ok's poetry in English see, "Contemporary Sijo Translations" in *Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature and Culture* (4) 2011: 214–215.

15 This in turn relates to the 2004 project *Parental Plates* in which Yeesookyung worked with a local community once again in Albisola, Italy. Twelve people were invited to record their impression of important ceramics in their family collections. Copies of the selected ceramic dishes introduced in the video were reproduced locally and the participants were invited to a dinner at which Yeesookyung made and served Korean food on the reproductions.

16 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value" in *The Social Life of Things*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 41.

17 The Bunwon Royal Ceramic Kiln located in Gyeonggi had already been privatized by 1884, which engendered a steady decline in the quantity and quality of white-ware production.

18 For introduction to Japanese archeology during the colonial period see further Hyung-il Pai "Resurrecting the Ruins of Japan's Mythical Homelands: Colonial Archaeological Surveys in the Korean Peninsula and Heritage Tourism" in *The Handbook of Postcolonial Archaeology*, edited by Jane Lyndon, et. al. (Left Coast Press, 2010), 93–112.



Fig. 24 Yeessookyung, *Translated Vase*, 2009

*"The souvenir involves the displacement of attention into the past. The souvenir is not simply an object appearing out of context, an object from the past incongruously surviving in the present; rather, its function is to envelop the present within the past. Souvenirs are magical objects because of this transformation."*¹⁹

By utilizing the residue of the reproduction process, the discarded, imperfect wasters are reprocessed and transformed. Yeessookyung has remarked that her interest in ceramic sherds arouse precisely because of this "state of transformation from three dimensions to two, and from the whole to the part." She goes on to observe: "by transmuting the broken ceramic pieces into a complete artwork, I would like to reverse these transformations."²⁰

Reversals—such as making "trash" into "art"—and the playful manipulation of linguistic meaning is also central to the translation process explored in the work. While the use of gold lacquer is seemingly related to Japanese traditions of mending ceramics known as *kintsugi* 金継ぎ

for Yeessookyung her choice of gold is based on the Korean homophone of "gold" (*geum*) and "crack" (*geum*). She observes, "I wanted to add a sense of humor to my work by filling *geums* (cracks), which are considered as defects, with a valuable material, such as real *geum* (gold)." The ornate distortion of *Translated Vase* well complemented the baroque sensibilities of the Palace of Oranienbaum—a Chinoiserie extravaganza designed by Cornelis Ryckwaert in 1683 located in Dessau, Germany—where Yeessookyung installed a selection in 2009 (Fig. 24). This installation epitomizes the kind of cultural cross fertilization implicit in *Translated Vase* and explores further the disjunctions and connections between visual styles that have been for so long the exclusive domain of art historians.

Translated Vase has also altered Yeessookyung's artistic practice. Her earlier work deals largely with conceptual video and installation, however the building process involved in creating a *Translated Vase* has re-centered her within her own body. She remarks:

*"Translated Vases made me return to the practice of using my own body. I feel very healthy while working on Translated Vase since it makes me aware of every single moment. Without any thoughts on concept and technique, I just appreciate each sherd and enjoy completing the work bit by bit."*²¹

Indeed, as the work heightened her bodily sense, the forms and shapes began to take on biological tendencies. While the early work from the series evinced a bulbous awkward sensibility characterized by traditional Korean ceramics such as the iconic moon jar, as she experimented with techniques the shaping took on increased biomorphic complexity, emerging like bodies with crystalline growths, pulsating and breathing. A claw emerges, a tiger's tail swishes, the blurred brush of dragon's skin is detected from entities pulsating with life, begetting new forms, breathing with shifting, morphing energy (Fig. 25).

The transposition of the body as a site for mediating and



Fig. 25 Yeessookyung, *Translated Vase*, detail, 2009

understanding is further evinced in the performative installation *Dazzling Kyobangchoom* (2011). Commissioned as part of an exhibition to celebrate the renovation and reopening the Seoul Railroad Station—a 1920's colonial building—Yeessookyung recovered discarded chandeliers from the site (Fig. 26). In her own project of recovery, she meticulously cleaned and restored the light fixtures, which had been passed over by the building renovation team. As in her earlier performance with Jung Marie, lighting became an important framing device. Designing a dramatic setting with restored chandeliers, she worked with a team to enact a lively dance known as *kyobangchoom* (Fig. 27). Performed by Lee Jung Hwa, the performance resurrected the legacy of the *kisaeng*, official female entertainers during dynastic times. Versed in poetry, these educated entertainers (and occasional prostitutes) served the *yangban*, or literati elite class. The collision of a colonial site with its discarded lighting, a powerful woman reviving the legacy of *kisaeng* delivered in newly designed *Hanbok* or traditional female attire powerfully illuminates the complexity of history, and its messy irresolvable chaotic bearing on contemporary life.²²

Conclusion

When I first visited Yeessookyung's studio several years ago, she admitted to me: "I'm a local artist." Her undeniable emphasis on the immediacy of her environment and her extremely personal engagement with Korean culture, an engagement that thoroughly eschews the trappings of nationalism, presents a telling commentary on the conditions of contemporary art. With the term "global" on the tip of everyone's tongue these days, it is refreshing to hear Yeessookyung unabashedly claim her local heritage. However it is a falsity to suppose that local art acts as a preserving force for heterogeneity and difference, somehow battling against the purported evils of global homogenization.²³ Rather the valorization of the local galvanizes the experience of culture. In this way, the art of Yeessookyung delves deep into memory and consciousness. Like an archaeologist, she finds clues in broken and discarded cultural fragments that elucidate more comprehensive phenomena about our varied and complex relationships with the past. Or like an ethnographer, she breathes new life into a marginalized cultural practice, bringing a fresh perspective to the heaviness of tradition.



Fig. 26 The chandeliers which were discarded in the midst of the Seoul Station restoration process



Fig. 27 Yeessookyung, *Dazzling Kyobangchoom*, scene of performance, 2011

*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
— John Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn*

19 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narrative of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 151.

20 Seungeun Euna Yoo, translator. "Interview with Yeessookyung," unpublished manuscript, 2011.

21 Ibid.

22 The Korean *hanbok* designer, Yi Seo-yoon, designed five different *hanbok* for each performance.

23 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 45.



The Yeesookyungs

Kang Sumi

Aesthetician, Art Critic

“In schematized time, nothing really new can emerge—everything is always-already there, and merely deploys its inherent potential... We are dealing here with another temporality, the temporality of freedom, of a radical rupture in the chain of (natural and/or social) causality.”

—Slavoj Žižek(1949-)¹

1. Introduction

Hugging a stuffed Minnie Mouse without eyes, a woman is sitting on the toilet with her closed eyelids painted over with the eyes of Minnie Mouse. Could a photograph of this woman be called art? If so, what would be the aesthetical value that we, the viewers, should recognize? If a framed kitsch landscape painting, purchased from a decorative painting shop Samgakji area in Seoul, is split in half with a panel with horizontal strips inserted in between, would such be considered a recycled object or a challenge against stereotypical art? A little boy is walking down the street when he is eaten alive by a wolf, so his grandmother, who is well versed in fairytales, goes into the wolf's stomach and is reborn as a little girl, and then meets Prince Charming, and so on and so forth. So goes one endless, nonsensical tale. By exhibiting a piece at an art gallery that forces visitors to listen to such a continuous loop of a hodgepodge or re-creation of stories that we've all heard at one time or another, what sort of experience is the artist trying to convey? Iconographic figures of gods and saints including Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Buddha, Confucius, Lao Zi and Muhammad are dismantled into separate groups of body parts such as eyes, noses, mouths, face shapes, left and right, and upper and lower bodies, etc. Then a public survey asks people to pick their favorite part from each group, and the features with the greatest rating are put together to create a new idol—what sort of absoluteness would such a statue symbolize? Would it be a jumbled monstrosity of a certain religion or a great mind? Or, perhaps, could it be that the sculpture is the most humane, and simultaneously, the most ideal icon of reality that cannot represent any one specific creed or philosophy?

The sudden profusion of questions above has probably left you confused. Or, you might have the impression that it was all just a muddle of miscellaneous, convoluted and disparate items. And some others might think that more important than the questions themselves is what they present as their subject. I agree. Without doubt, the examples I rambled on about are immensely more important than the questions I raised after each wordy

¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, (London: Verso, 1999), p. 43

description. However, those examples are by nature impossible to sum up neatly with clear simple words, delivering precise judgments based on sophisticated art criticism, so I had no choice but to relate them with confusing terms and then conclude with questions.

The examples constitute Yeosookyung's art. That is, they are part of Yee's oeuvre, as exhibited from the early 1990s to this day in the early 2010s, and it is my task in this article to illuminate Yee's art from the perspective of an art critic. Thus, my very first question has now been answered. That is, the snapshot of the woman with painted-on eyes in the style of a cartoon mouse, and all the other pieces above are already indeed 'art.' And yet, there is a lack of consensus as to what aesthetic qualities such images have held for us, how to appreciate the pieces or whether they can be read into critically. Moreover, when art is pursued and created in the manner of the abovementioned examples by Yee, we lack 'definitive answers' to the particular sources and mechanisms of originality, or to what we, as viewers, can enjoy and in what fashion. In all likelihood, this article will fail to offset such a deficiency or uncertainty of aestheticism and criticism. But it can at least unfold the various questions that Yee's art induces us to ask, and address a host of issues that can 'provide answers' to those questions, focusing on specific works by the artist. Given that she built her oeuvre for a considerable period of twenty years or so, during which she presented multifarious art practice using a myriad of materials, the spectrum of such questions and issues is also as wide and colorful.

2. *Minnie Mouse*, Going Beyond 'Preferring Not To'²

Beginning in the early 1990s, Yeosookyung has communicated in a visual language that 'defied the mainstream' art of the time, presenting works that are physical manifestations of this language through various media. That is, rather than allowing her work to be incorporated into existing frames of art, this artist has been manifesting an experimental and unfamiliar aesthetic with a novel form, expression methodology, technique and utilization of medium that corresponds with each particular piece. Therefore, if we were to evaluate Yee's art as being 'experimental,' the implication of it would that things which have not yet secured a position in terms of art history, or have yet to become conventional, can still be considered 'art.'

Such an experimental piece, however, can invoke feelings of unfamiliarity and discomfort in the common viewer aside from the connoisseurs of contemporary art who are always prepared to recognize anything as art. Or it may cause confusion or even elude the mind altogether without ever being recognized as a work of art because it is unlike any definition of art, aesthetic consciousness or artistic experience that has been registered in the viewer's cognitive or sensorial memories. In reality, this conservative tendency in the general public's capacity to appreciate art suppresses the creativity of many artists whether it be on a psychological or systematic level. For instance, the artist may fear that his/her art will be

shunned by people who prefer conventional art, or he/she may set internal rules so that the work is not excluded from exhibitions or projects held by galleries that are most concerned about public response and monetary profit. This is why a great many artists continue to produce art that is far from anti-aesthetic or avant-garde, but is a bit cliché and somewhat stereotypical. Interestingly, however, the history of contemporary art was able to arrive at its current state through the practice of anti-aesthetics and the avant-garde. You don't have to be an expert to know how, through the 'ready-mades' of Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), art was able to expand its territory to include not only the product of an artist's manual labor, but also a proposal of an aesthetic concept. Later, along with the 'silkscreen paintings' by Andy Warhol (1928-1987), contemporary art was able to pioneer the domain of 'Pop Art,' which blatantly complied with popular culture. In other words, there exists a history of art as in Duchamp's notion of art as "a game between all people of all periods."³ In that context, experts of contemporary art have always welcomed experimental attempts in art, and in fact, it would not be an exaggeration to state that artists learn undiscovered artistic languages in such process. I myself, the writer of this article, am no exception. I came to understand the significance of the various forms and properties of art of which I am currently aware and approve, and have an open attitude towards accepting anything to increase that diversity with pleasure, in part from the works of artists that posed challenges to existing art. And of these, Yeosookyung's art has left me with a particularly strong impression.

While I was looking at Yee's photograph *Colorblind test to Blind Minnie Mouse* (1998) in early 1999, I realized that contemporary art could be something like an event, such as a presentation of an image that emerges for a fleeting moment in time. The photograph captures a young woman with eyes painted on her closed eyelids that resemble the plastic eyeballs of Minnie Mouse, who is the partner to one of the greatest icons of American popular culture, Mickey Mouse. It comes across as an insignificant mark made by somebody goofing around like a child with whatever happened to be at hand at the moment. An image made on the spur of the moment, like the photos we all take now and then, without much thought, just to have fun. However, I discovered in that photograph the potential for Korean contemporary art to become 'something infinitesimally small, exceptionally frivolous and very brief.' At the same time, I concluded that such smallness, frivolity and transience are sensuous properties that go beyond art as we used to know it, and have expanded its potential, adding another dimension to its diversity, and breaking time into smaller units to enrich the experience of art. This was because from the photograph of the Mini Mouse woman, I felt that I had a delicate sensorial experience of a very thin film coating or coming off the human face and an image over it. And such experienced aroused in me a very pleasant and joyful, yet unfamiliar, artistic awareness. And that is how I came to expect that the fleeting awareness, or the things that are unfamiliar to numbing existing thoughts and senses, will become the new characteristic of contemporary Korean art. The image of Minnie Mouse vanishes from Yee's face the moment the makeup is removed. No matter how current photography is in contemporary art, the snapshot by Yee is extremely modest in comparison to the spectacular

² For the subsequent headings, I have stated a title of a work by Yeosookyung, followed by the core concept or argument of my criticism of it.

³ "Art is a game between all people of all periods": Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Simon Pleasance & Fronza (trans.), *Relational Aesthetics*, (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), p. 19

high definition images which we normally call art photography. However, such transience, simplicity, and above all, the everyday context illustrated by the artist's photographs and her strange acts of disguising offers a breath of fresh air to those who are overexposed to fine art's abstract imagery and incoherent meanings. This means that to a viewer whose training of the senses within existing art has been limited to seriousness, absolutism and a disregard for time, Yee's photograph stimulates by trimming the corners of the senses to facilitate a more detailed and lively sense of beauty.

The idea that art work can disappear leaving just its trace in the physical time rather than represent impermanence has been given a sensorial form of expression, becoming today's happenings, performances, and site-specific art, etc. In addition, the trend among young artists whose work we can easily come across is that the artist is someone who entertains through art rather than being an unaffected agent of creation, and also that the artist's playground is not an ideal world of beauty, but a world that becomes filled with everyday objects and affairs. Here, I am not trying to say that this one photograph taken by Yee in 1998 was what enabled that kind of art. Such an argument—in consideration of how Western art diversified since the 1960s, and also given the few experimental attempts made in Korean art including the area of performance art from the 1970s to 1980s—is too likely to be erroneous. Being in a position which demands that I define the special characteristics and mechanisms in Yee's art, my intention is to emphasize the fact that her work ran counter to the mainstream of Korean art in the late 1990s. Yee's methodology was, in a way, to proceed by “preferring not to” go in the direction of that stream, moving away from abstract paintings, away from being tied down by dogmatic messages like those of the Minjung art movement in the 1980s, and away from conforming to the pretentious grandeur and purity of modernist art. Such methodology signifies a euphemistic and passive resistance. However, this resistance ceases to be passive if such method becomes fused with the property of art of ‘doing something’, that is, the property of taking existing materials and producing things with specific form. For instance, one could say that in the 1853 novel *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by Herman Melville (1819-1891), the namesake hero employs a resistance mode of ‘not doing,’ while Yee's art follows a creation mode of ‘doing something as if not doing anything.’ If one continues to employ such a mode, the art then acquires a covert nature as well as a bold individuality.

3. *Story of MunKil (long Journey)*, Imagination of a Folding Fan

Considering the whole of Yeesookyung's work, it becomes evident that Yee's artistic attitude and experimental acts of creation maintain a consistent flow throughout the entirety of her work while the individual world of each work is discontinuous. That is why I consider ‘discontinuity’ and ‘contiguity,’ experimentation and rendered actualization to be the core of Yee's art. Discontinuity is directly opposed to contiguity. And in regards to the degree of ‘experimentation’ and ‘actualization of the experiment’ (in that the former is a tendency to try something new, while the latter is the power to go beyond that initial trial and turn it into a reality), the two have different characteristics. So, if I were to say that the art of one person

simultaneously contained these conflicting or different properties, it might be a contradiction in itself, or sound like a leap of logic. But one can find similar internal factors also in the works by other ‘contemporary’ artists, and not only in Yee's art, who have built or are building their own independent world of art. This is because, simply speaking, contemporary art has to engage in an endless pursuit of novelty and also because newness is not accrued in a single take but has to be accumulated continuously. The degree of experimentation in contemporary art is registered not through a feast of empty words, but only through the reification of novelty by readily perceivable physical works.

In that context, Yee has reified newness with every piece, and she continues to do so to this day. How is this possible? What is the source of that power? I shall say that it is Yee's imagination, and through it, she was able to produce a novel work each time. Strictly speaking, however, what I refer to here as ‘Yee's imagination’ is the capability to change the order governing the contents of established objects, stories, shapes, senses and cognition; to partition new facets from within existing bodies already lumped into conventional forms; and transfer the space and time that has been given into another dimension of disparate images. That is how Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), using the comparison of a folding fan, defined the faculty of imagination as “the gift of interpolating into the infinitely small, of intervening, for every intensity, an expensiveness to contain its new, compressed fullness”⁴. In other words, such an imagination recreates space as it folds itself shut and spreads open again, and stages a situation by concealing or revealing an event, through a mechanism similar to that of a fan.

Story of MunKil (long Journey) (1999), one of Yee's lesser known works in the form of ‘text plus narration,’ clearly shows a version of that imagination. This is the work I described in the introduction as ‘a hodgepodge or re-creation of stories,’ and through it we can see Yee's imagination burrow into the inner details of the smallest of episodes from fairytales with which we are all too familiar. And our observations do not end there, as we also get to perceive—in the universality of the old fairytales that end with ‘happily ever after’—Yee's imagination as well as her ability to execute this by extracting a thread from various topics including irony, violence, uncertainty and pleasure, and weaving it into a new textual web like a spider. But this is not her only web of tales. In *Breeding Drawing* (2005) and the ongoing *Daily Drawing* (2005-), we get to feel the multifarious but stubborn contiguity that results from Yee's imagination, and the parade of images performed by such imagination.

Breeding Drawing is a series of twelve drawings of female figures on traditional Korean paper with cinnabar: an ore used in Korean and other Asian cultures that is ground into ink to draw paper talismans and Buddhist icons. Here, twelve is not only the number of the separate pieces of art, but also the result of the ‘breeding’ commanded by the title of the series. In brief, the theme of this series is the mechanism of a certain drawing propagating itself. In order to demonstrate the dynamics of that self-propagation, Yee flipped her first drawing and retraced the image, creating the next drawing, then repeated this process eleven

⁴ Benjamin, Walter, “Einbahnstraße”, *Gesammelte Schriften* Bd. IV/1, Unter Mitwirkung von Theodor W. Adorno und Gershom Scholem hrsg. von Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser, (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981), p. 117

more times; she then also made laterally symmetrical images of every one of those twelve images. As a result, what started out as an image of a girl performing a strange acrobatic feat as though she were in a Chinese circus, propagates itself into an image of two figures with mirror-image faces, and then into four figures in the next drawing, then six and so on until eventually, the faces fill the screen, forming a symmetrical formation of the letter “V,” thereby completing the *Breeding Drawing*.

Yee received psychotherapy for an unstated reason around 2004. Through that process, the artist became aware of ‘Mandala art therapy,’ for which she had to fill one circle per day with drawings to alleviate her psychological problems. She then applied that therapeutic method in her real life and work, which is how her *Daily Drawing* began. There were only two preconditions: that she complete ‘one drawing every day,’ and that the drawings are in a ‘circle.’ These may seem rather trivial, but anyone who has actually tried it will know how burdensome it is to meet such preconditions. And yet, Yee has been meeting them without fail, drawing on a 30cm-by-30cm piece of paper with colored pencils for about seven years now. Of the thousands of drawings produced, she selected 176 of them, and introduced them for the first time at her 2011 solo exhibition at Arko Art Center in Seoul, as part of an ‘installation art in the form of a drawing plus sound’ (the sound being ‘*Stabat Mater*,’ a Catholic hymn to the Virgin Mary). Visitors to the exhibition experienced the artist’s wide-range of expressive abilities, as well as an imagination of imagery whose elusiveness made it seem all the more infinite. At the same time, through this coupling of a very simple and small rule with the variables of human imagination and serial acts of creation, viewers were also able to discover a vivid example of the construction of a dream world that was unpredictable and irreducible like the emergences in nature.

Story of MunKil (long Journey), created in 1999, rambles on — in the fashion of Queen Scheherazade who spun an endless yarn of stories for ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ — about oft-heard but seldom read stories. *Breeding Drawing*, created in 2005, propagates itself symmetrically like plants in nature, and especially those that are dicotyledonous. *Daily Drawing* explodes of different images within identical circles like daily physiological phenomena that follow a causal system of time in which each twenty-four-hour-day proceeds from ‘breakfast, then lunch to dinner’ yet no two days are ever identical. Through these works, we appreciate Yee’s art that is both discontinuous and contiguous, as well as the sort of imagination that has built these dream worlds of images. Actually, we will probably soon become overwhelmed by its scope, strength, stubbornness and protean nature.

4. *Painting For Out of Body Travel*, Structure of Yee’s Artistic Transition of Executing Subjectivity

In the early years of her career in the 1990s, Yeesoookyung mainly created art works from the perspective of cultural criticism. For instance, in the context of criticizing the purity, originality, and self-referentiality of modern art, she deliberately produced installation pieces that were effective applications of postmodern methodologies such as kitsch, readymade, appropriation and pastiche. Furthermore, she created works whose primary elements were

appropriations or alterations of mass media images and mass-produced goods, and unfolded an art practice which critically analyzed female images that are produced and stereotyped by mass media, sociopolitical systems based on her own specific experiences and on sociological theories and cultural studies. Through such projects, the artist was not only able to express the potential for anti-aesthetic, non-artistic art to the Korean art world — which had started with Art Informel in the 1950s and progressed onto abstract art in the 1960s and 1970s before moving on to Minjung art in the 1980s — but also embody feminist art in a practical fashion amidst male-dominated mainstream Korean art.

However, Yee did not stop at this type of art, which is productive in regards to concepts and controversies, but which rarely draws a reciprocal response in terms of aesthetic value or a viewer’s aesthetic experience. She neither limited herself to contemporary art that was conceptual and critical in nature nor produced self-replications of similar projects; rather, Yee executed her art in new sensorial and perceptual perspectives which also satisfied intellectuals.

I believe that the uniqueness in producing such art is best represented in *Painting For Out of Body Travel* (2000). The work displayed in her 2000 exhibition *Song of the Land* (2000) at Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany, combines the external forms of a ready-made product with a one-of-a-kind creation. The art consisted of a kitsch landscape painted by an anonymous artist and Yee’s intervention into the landscape, created by halving the ready-made painting, extracting the painting’s colors, rendering them into horizontal stripe patterns, and inserting them in between the split. More intriguing than the physical form is the fact that the work claims to serve as a ‘tool’ in an active manner by lending a favorable glance to the viewer’s aesthetic experience toward art as well as by maximizing the illusory aspect of such an experience. Yee’s *Painting For Out of Body Travel* neither ridicules kitsch nor sneers at modern art. Instead, it is an artwork in virtual reality that lures us to gladly surrender our souls to the illusion of the painting, like in the Chinese tale about an old man who, fascinated by the exquisite landscape painted on a porcelain vase, walks into the painting. As the title hints, the work prompts the viewer to travel out of the body. The artist herself wrote: “Relax and stare at the center of the painting until you feel dizzy...you will finally experience ‘out-of-body travel,’ arriving at the landscape in the painting. When you practice out-of-body travel, it is possible to fall into the waterfall or lake in the painting.”⁵

On the other hand, Yee’s artistic transition has been manifested in her works through the weaving of cultural differences. This is best represented by a series of works, such as *Parental Plates* (2003) and *Translated Vase* (2002/2006-). In 2003, during her visit to Savona to participate in the *Second Ceramics in Contemporary Art* (2003) held at the museum Palazzo Gavotti, Savona, Italy, she went and interviewed twelve residents in Albisola and Savona, which are sites that are well-known for the manufacture of porcelain. The twelve interviewees personally selected a few porcelain plates inherited from their parents or ancestors, and revealed to the artist the stories that are woven into the plates. The artist captured the faces and voices of the Italian residents with her video camera, who, though

⁵ Yeesoookyung’s Homepage www.yeesookyung.com

seated in a living space of reality where they actually worked and lived, were traveling the micro-world of reminiscence in the spatiotemporal setting of imagination activated by the plates. Although perhaps considered mere objects, the plates functioned as a time machine or Aladdin's magic lamp at that specific moment. The video showed the twelve people recall the lives of their parents' generation in a sincere and candid manner, before an artist from Korea, which is a country that is unfamiliar to them. They shared with others their own experiences and memories accumulated through such plain and ordinary objects. But video art, by its nature, transforms such sharing beyond the one-to-one relationship with twelve individuals, into something that can be disseminated and shared with any viewer of the work *Parental Plates*. The artist would probably have wished to produce this type of sharing (the pleasure of such sharing) not only through videos, but also in forms with material and physical properties. After the interviews, Yee had 20 near-replicas of the plates that had belonged to the Italians manufactured at the Eran Design studio in Albisola, and served Korean food on them to visitors at the opening of the exhibition. This would probably remind one of Rirkrit Tiravanija (1961-) and his art performance of serving his own cooking to the visitors to the gallery. It is this very art that Nicolas Bourriaud (1965-) imputed meaning to, stressing "a place where people once again learn what conviviality and sharing mean" and "exploring the possibility for relational aesthetics."⁶ Taking the circumstances into consideration, Yee might be included in such an aesthetic category. However, Yee's art goes beyond offering a space of general cultural sharing and appreciation, to offering a 'subjective experience' in which individuals bring out their indivisible inner selves in a stranger, who gladly shares them with a large number of other individuals. Such structure is 'the dividing-sharing of individuality' and 'rendition of varied emotions' that can only exist in the cultural form of art.

5. *Translated Vase*, The Task of the Translator

The art project, *Parental Plates*, has a prior history: *Translated Vase Albisola* (2001). In 2001, Yeesoonyung devised a translation project to be submitted for the *Ceramic Biennale in Albisola* (2001), Italy, in which an Italian potter named Anna Maria 'translated' 18th century Joseon porcelains. What translation refers to here does not correspond to the manner in which a contemporary potter molds works into Joseon porcelains in physical or visible dimensions. If it does, it would be considered 'reproduction,' rather than 'translation.' The artist recited a Korean poem translated into Italian to Maria, with a motif that centers around white porcelain, namely *Ode to a Porcelain*⁷ a 1947 verse by Kim Sang-ok (1920-2004) ; she then requested

that the potter expresses imagery that comes to her mind into ceramic works. What Yee attempted to 'translate' was an interpretation between different languages across cultures as well as between imaginative and physical features. At first glance, the results of the translation resembled ordinary porcelains in Asia in external appearance; a closer examination, however, reveals that they are twelve foreign ceramic vases, produced from different ceramic cultures of the East and West and which do not fall under any conventional category of ceramics. These twelve vases allow viewers to cross the familiar boundaries of cultures to which they belong and have gotten accustomed. The vases also trigger peculiar sentiments and imagery, not fixed to any specific race, territory, history or taste. However, what we need to keep in mind is that such uniqueness does not stem from something rootless that floats aimlessly. Given that such peculiarity is a manifestation occurring in the negotiating process of Joseon porcelain and Italian ceramics, the vases are truly art of today, developed with nourishment drawn from fairly deep roots. Simultaneously, they are contemporary works of art in the here and now, created in an experimental manner through cultural rendition and cooperation. In short, *Translated Vase Albisola* is a contemporary work based on ethnic and cultural backgrounds uniquely formed by Korea's Joseon dynasty and Italy as well as by the past and present. Furthermore, *Parental Plates*, which Yee created two years later from the aforementioned work, is another contemporary work featured in the present context, breaking free from grand narratives and using sources of individual family histories and memories.

According to Benjamin, "The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original."⁸ In other words, the translator's task is to translate the history of the original in the context of the present time as well as to realize the potential of the original in the here and now. I believe that Yee's pieces constitute an art practice which parallels such a task. Art is not a denial of origins/sources under the banner of cultural plurality and nomadism of artistic tastes; rather, it is the manifestation of essential factors resonating in our lives here and now, and a site for possibility of narratives of histories, communities and individuals.

In the same context, Yee's 2011 work titled *Dazzling Kyobangchoom* (2011) presents significance. The work realizes unique aspects of Korean modern history and culture in the form of a symphonious combination of 'sculpture, site-specific installation art and performance (dance and music).' The main themes of *Dazzling Kyobangchoom* are the preservation of 'Kyobangchoom,' originally a dance from Joseon Dynasty generally performed by state-sponsored female entertainers, as well as the rebirth of this dance tradition into a novel artistic form in the present. First of all, the artist took note of the historic fact that the traditional dance degenerated into a form of sexual entertainment during the era of Japanese colonial rule. She organized five *Kyobangchoom* performances on a stage of her own design that utilized, both directly and indirectly, conditions specific to 'Cultural Station 284,' the former site of the central Seoul Train Station that was recently restored in order to

⁶ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Simon Pleasance & Fronza (trans.), *Relational Aesthetics*, (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), p. 70

⁷ The full text of the verse is as follows: In the freezing blizzard, the pine tree stands faithfully green, / Its crooked branches sway in the wind. / A pair of white cranes flies over and sits, and folds their wings. // The day the tingling of a wind-bell resounded from lofty eaves. / When my beloved, whom I have waited and longed for, arrives, / I shall bring out the liquor I've kept under flowers. // The elixir of life sprouts from a slanted rock chasm. / Auspicious clouds float, a stream runs, / A deer still frisks about the woods. // Skin as

white as ice even after burning in fire / Even a speck of dusk can leave a flaw. / The day, lost in clay. How simple and honest.

⁸ Benjamin, Walter, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers", *Gesammelte Schriften* Bd. IV/1, p. 16

serve as a complex cultural space in 2011 after three years of renovation. What is notable here is the mechanism in which the social and historical consciousness of the artist is actualized into art, as well as the aesthetic approach employed for the exploration of not the abstract space for art, but rather, the overall context of an actual specific site. Of significance is also the open attitude that studies media and expressive methodologies on multiple levels from a pluralistic perspective. In so doing, the artist brings together her art in the context of the contemporary. On the other hand, Yee has established her own uniqueness in her practice and identity as an artist by establishing concrete instances from modern and contemporary Korean history and contemporary culture and art as the fundamental narratives and original concepts for her art.

6. *The Very Best Statue* : Universality and Uniqueness of Beauty

During Goryeo and Joseon Dynasties when Korea's ceramic culture was at its most refined stage, ceramic masters did not hesitate to destroy their creations when they were unable to meet the standard of 'highest quality' and were considered failures. While they appeared similar and adequate enough in others' eyes, they were considered by ceramic artists as defective products that should not be shown to the world. The fact that this tradition has continued to the present suggests that there are strict aesthetic criteria among master potters beyond clear logical description.

Interesting enough, Yeosookyung has continued a series of works titled *Translated Vase*, which uses gilt to paste together discarded shards and pieces of pottery broken by ceramic masters into a new sculpture with a new life. The series would either probably fall under the form of development in *Translated Vase Albisola*, as described above, or under an entirely different series; but the artist connotes contiguity between them through the title, *Translated Vase*. If so, then, what does 'translation' mean in the latter series? To simply put, it is a translation between 'fragments' and 'the whole' or 'the discarded' and 'artworks.' However, I suppose that *Translated Vase* stands at a point beyond such an interpretative perspective. The point is a final destination for all artists; in other words, it is the point of dynamics created between 'the realization of absolute beauty' and 'the practice of every single minute to achieve it.' The reason ceramic masters inevitably destroy their works for failing to meet standards is that their minds and senses have an absolute standard for beauty. To reach that standard, they willingly endure the pain and anguish that come from breaking ceramics into shards. However, it is of great significance that Yee uses abandoned shards to pursue absolute beauty according to the definition of contemporary art. This signifies a reversal of dynamics. Although it may obviously be difficult to attribute this only to the reversal of dynamics, it explains *Translated Vase* effusing a distinct exquisiteness from what is generally assumed to be beautiful. On the other hand, the fragments of ceramics appear as if they were body organs that have erupted from beneath the smooth skin, becoming disfigured, and going through the process of deconstruction/reconstruction in an odd manner. And yet, they are perceived as attractive objects for their cold yet soft textures as well as for the glamorous yet decorous shapes of gilt layers weaving broken shards. It is the combination

of these contrasting aesthetic properties that intensifies the unique artist aura of *Translated Vase* and provides the viewers with a moment of unique unparalleled exquisiteness.

A similar sense of aesthetic dynamics is also demonstrated in *The Very Best Statue* (2006-), a project shown in *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial* (2006), the *Anyang Public Art Project* (2007), the *Liverpool Biennale* (2008) and the *Kyiv international Biennale* (2012). As briefly mentioned in the introduction, this project consisted of the artist asking people to state their favorite body parts from images of gods or saints and assembling them to create the 'best sculpture.' Through this process Yee created a standing statue of what appeared to be Jesus wearing the crown of thorns, yet with Asian eyes, along with Confucius' right upper torso and a left half that belongs to Buddha. Another statue of a near-naked Jesus coming into the world with a soft smile across his face, reminiscent of the face of Virgin Mary, recalled the image of Crucifixion with his both arms stretched out. What is surprising is that if one were to ponder and verbally explain the idea, those statues would seem to turn out grotesque or even monstrous; however, if you actually look at them, one does not find them unnatural or strange. The icons are in harmony, friendly yet sacred to the extent that viewers seldom find them odd, distorted or degraded. This is possible because the individual features claiming to be the best by their own standards were recreated into that a whole consisting of disparities by the artist. This is similar to the dynamics through which *Translated Vase* becomes an uncanny, incarnate beauty composed of pottery shards discarded by ceramic masters who adhere to strict standards of beauty. In *The Very Best Statue*, individual parts selected as 'the best' based on the aesthetic concepts as well as religions mental representations prevalent in the general public in each culture are re-created as an icon that is simultaneously universal and unique, and familiar and unfamiliar.

As I appreciated *Translated Vase* and *The Very Best Statue*, I came to think of the relationship between universality and individuality. We generally assume that there is an absolute and fundamental beauty. In addition, we usually say that beauty endures beyond space and time and that universality is achieved through its dissemination among people. Beauty is purely unified and whole. However, Yee's works show that it is possible for absolute beauty, which is both unified and whole, to not only consist of a combination of individuals, but also of a network comprising heterogeneities. Her art presents the possibility that an innovative type of universality might be achieved through the translation of things that are distant from one another and whose origins are extraneous.

Slavoj Žižek declared that in the schematized time of past, present and future, nothing really new can emerge. For the truly new to emerge out of the destruction of pre-existing circumstances of time systems, relationships and networks, which cannot be accounted for by reference to existing causal relationships, Žižek wrote, the 'sublime' marks the moment in which something emerges out of nothing. "When, 'against their better judgment,' people disregard the balance sheet of profits and losses and 'risk freedom'...The feeling of the Sublime is aroused by an Event that momentarily suspends the network of symbolic causality."⁹ The important phrase here is to 'suspend the network of symbolic causality and risk freedom'. It probably sounds reasonable, but specifically, how is possible?

⁹ Žižek, Slavoj. *Ibid.*, p. 43

From the aesthetic perspective, this would mean to disconnect the network that exists among nature, forms, modes and conditions for beauty that is premised in the name of universality, and then venture into individual freedom of creativity. Remember that I have emphasized the experimental spirit discovered in Yee's art several times by broadly examining her art in various dimensions that encompass the appearance and nature of her works, the mechanisms and consequences, and in light of presentation and appreciation. I also hope that readers will not forget my assertion that, while Yee's pursuit of 'experimentation' has moved in directions not in line with conventional trends in art, this does not simply mean the denial of existing trends, but rather, that this pursuit is linked with a practical desire to derive the production of certain things. Her pursuit of art will truly become a case of contemporary art in which, as Žižek stated, the suspension of the network of symbolic causality and the risking for freedom will enable 'something really new to emerge.'

Lastly, I must make the following confession as an art critic. I can tell you what is happening in the arena of contemporary art, but I cannot specify its exact scope. In addition, when an artist introduces an experimental work of contemporary art, I am capable of adding a critical dimension to the work by interpreting and analyzing it. However, I cannot make any assertion regarding where the artist will be heading next, what kind of works she should produce, or even what kind of aesthetic value she may pursue. This is partly due to my own incompetency, but more importantly, it is due to the fact that contemporary art itself has been progressing based on an extremely individual aesthetic. Of course, that individual aesthetic is able to be assigned a name only after it achieves artistic success, and the individual aesthetic discussed through this lengthy essay is the particular aesthetics of the artist Yeosookyung.

