

**POSTMODERNISM**

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**AESTHETICS**

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**COLLIDE**

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*or*

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**STEER?**

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Kyunghee Pyun, Editor

Organized by the AHL Foundation  
in collaboration with  
the Korean Cultural Service New York







# **POSTMODERNISM AND AESTHETICS: COLLIDE OR STEER?**

Edited by Kyunghee Pyun

**POSTMODERNISM AND AESTHETICS: COLLIDE OR STEER?**

Exhibition Date: October 10th – December 14th, 2018

Preview: Wednesday, October 10th, 3:00 – 4:00 Pm

Opening Reception: Wednesday, October 10th, 6:00 – 8:00 Pm

Gallery Hours: Monday—Friday, 10:00 – 17:00

Location: Gallery Korea, Korean Cultural Center New York  
460 Park Avenue New York NY 10016

**PUBLISHER:**

AHL Foundation

420 West 23rd Street #7A

New York, New York 10011

ISBN- 978-0-9890378-3-9

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Printed in the United States of America

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# Foreword

The AHL Foundation's Contemporary Visual Art Competition was established in 2003 to seek out talented Korean and Korean-American artists working in the United States and to promote their work. For the past fifteen years, AHL has identified and awarded the Contemporary Visual Art Award to sixty-three artists.

I would like to first thank the Korean Cultural Center New York for accepting our proposal to exhibit the works by our past Contemporary Visual Art Awardees. My special thanks go to Curator Hee Sung Cho and other staff at the Korean Cultural Center New York for their unwavering enthusiasm and support of our programs. It has been a great pleasure to see how the previous three exhibitions of AHL's Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA) presented in collaboration with the Korean Cultural Center New York in 2013–2015 have received much attention among researchers and artists. As the mission of AHL Foundation states, we have worked hard to recognize talented artists of our own time and to preserve documents and materials for artists of Korean heritage throughout different time periods through our AKAA project and exhibitions.

I am delighted to present twenty-two of our past awardees for Postmodernism and Aesthetics: Collide or Steer? in New York. While many artists remained in the United States as active participants in contemporary art, some awardees have returned to Korea to teach at art colleges and to continue their artistic endeavors in Asia. We are preparing another exhibition for those artists in Seoul to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the AHL Foundation. Curated by So-ok Park and Eunsil Cha, *Connected* will be on view in Seoul as well.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Professor Kyunghee Pyun, AHL's former Director of Programs, for her significant effort in inviting writers and artists for this exhibition. Her unfailing enthusiasm for living artists and numerous hours of research must be highly praised. I would also like to thank Laura Hillegas, Dana Liljegren, Jinkyung Choi, and Mary A. Valverde for their insightful contributions to our exhibition. Additionally, it is noted that AHL's Curatorial Fellows Ms. Jinkyung Choi (2017–18) and Ms. Margaret Tae (2018–19) have worked with great dedication and patience to bring together this successful exhibition. It will be another precious memory to have worked with participating artists and sympathetic scholars on this meaningful project.

I am deeply indebted to all our generous funders and supporters who have assisted us tremendously in our long journey of growth. The AHL Foundation and its programs could not have flourished without the generous support of our individual and corporate donors. The public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council have also been particularly instrumental in organizing and sustaining our high-quality exhibitions.

Last but not least, I am compelled to express my heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated staff and Board of Directors of the AHL Foundation for their steadfast support and hard work, and for the strong

leadership that Mme. Eun-ae Ryu Kim, Chair of the Board, has provided. As we celebrate our fifteenth anniversary, I hope the AHL Foundation will be able to continue this worthy cause and to develop even more robust programs and services to promote, recognize, and highlight artists of Korean diaspora working in the United States.

Sook Nyu Lee Kim  
Founder and President  
The AHL Foundation

# Greetings

It is a great pleasure to host this exhibition, Postmodernism and Aesthetics: Collide or Steer. Inaugurated in 1979, the Korean Cultural Center New York is a branch of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) of the Republic of Korea. Under the authority of the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in New York, KCCNY works to promote cultural arts exchange and stimulate interest in Korean culture through diverse activities including gallery exhibitions, performing arts concerts, film festivals, and educational workshops.

KCCNY presents and supports performing arts events that span traditional Korean music and dance to contemporary works. With our annual Open Stage program that provides rising performers to showcase their works in New York to special presentations of institutions like the National Gugak Center of Korea, KCCNY's performing arts section attracts audience from all over the country. Gallery exhibitions are organized by Gallery Korea, a division of KCCNY, utilizing 2,500 sq. ft of exhibition space for various Korean, Korean-American, and international artists. Each year, multiple exhibitions are held with more than 100 artists showcasing their works.

KCCNY's film division is a dynamic part of KCCNY with increasing attention and support from the New York audience. Through Korean Movie Night New York, KCCNY introduces new Korean films and features Korea's most prominent directors. The film division also sponsors various international and local film festivals including the New York Asian Film Festival and the Tribeca Film Festival.

The library at KCCNY provides information on Korean culture through more than 18,000 books, magazines, and audio-visual materials, and also publishes brochures in-house to further share Korean culture. In addition, KCCNY's E-library has made it even easier to access hundreds of books, magazines, and reference materials.

"A Korea in New York" is KCCNY and the Korean Consulate's collective slogan that encompasses the mutual aim to promote Korean content to the communities in New York and the surrounding areas. The slogan is used to proactively share these elements in a way that best contributes and gives back to our neighboring communities as well as the entire United States. Beginning in 2017, KCCNY initiated the "Korean Culture Day" program, featuring specially curated Korean cultural events every month.

*For more information and to sign up for our newsletter: [www.koreanculture.org](http://www.koreanculture.org)  
Follow us on Facebook ([KoreanCulturalCenterNY](#)) or Instagram ([@kccny](#))*

## A Korea in New York

“A Korea in New York” is a slogan that we launched in 2016 that encompasses our aims to promote Korean content to the communities in New York and the surrounding areas in the most impactful, effective way possible.

We wish to present Korean content in a consistent manner and in a way that makes cultural content localized and valuable to the community.

What do we mean?

- 1) A singular, unified Korea made stronger through partnership and alliance to create consistency
- 2) An organic blending with mainstream U.S. culture and to give back to the community by creating shared values
- 3) An authentic yet creative Korea, maintaining tradition while embracing new creative fields, and to create of a set of best practices to be used and spread globally

# Why Postmodernism?

Kyunghee Pyun

Mun Hyejin, professor of art theory at the Korea National University of Arts, wrote an M.A. thesis, “Debate over Postmodernism in Korean Art Criticism from 1987 to 1993” in 2009, which was subsequently published as book titled *90’s Korean Art and Postmodernism: In Search of the Origins of Contemporary Korean Art*.<sup>1</sup> If one wants to understand a historical development of small groups, art associations, or individual artists being engaged with Postmodernism, Mun’s book provides a comprehensive overview. The same period is also covered in Sohl Lee’s book, *Being Political Popular: South Korean Art at the Intersection of Popular Culture and Democracy, 1980–2010*.<sup>2</sup> In fact, postmodernism had been a force of visual arts in Korea in the late 1990s. For example, Professor Jeong-ae Park at the Gongju National University of Education is an advocate of postmodernism’s application in art education in South Korea and has created a discourse as a chief editor of the *Misul-gwa-gyoyuk (Journal of Research in Art and Education)*. In her dissertation she discussed how art education can be revised due to new demands by artists and parents.<sup>3</sup> Her ideas were explicitly summarized in her books, *Postmodern Art and Art Education* (2001) and *A New Paradigm for Art Education: Art as Meaning*

*Making* (2008), the latter which was awarded as a 2009 Excellent Academic Publication by the Ministry of Culture and Sports and Tourism of Korea.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes a personal story is more effective in delivering a snapshot of history. Many artists in this exhibition *Postmodernism and the Aesthetics: Collide or Steer?* are my contemporaries, who, like myself, lived through the 1990s studying at an institution of higher education and visual arts. What I remember vividly during this time is a newspaper advertisement for Michel Foucault. On the subway trains, people were assiduously reading newspapers as cell phones were not emergent yet. A college friend of mine used to carry a huge Motorola mobile phone which originally belonged to his father. People were still reading many books and would often gather at either a large bookstore chain or small independent stores near campus, to wait for friends or to read new books. By riding the subway, one could easily see large book advertisements on the lower half of the newspaper—usually below a section of art and culture. While Foucault’s books were often introduced in the newspaper, either as advertisement or as news articles, students at college did not yet study postmodernism. It was something too trendy and too contemporaneous, as of yet. At my own college,

students took courses on philosophy or aesthetics by reading Kant, Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, or sometimes Jurgen Habermas. However, I saw graduate students or those about to graduate reading and discussing Deleuze or Barthes. Some would go to see *Minjung* art exhibitions in Insa-dong, but never discussed these artists in class. It was in 1991 when a university student named Kang Kyeong Dae was brutally killed at the hands of the police.

Nonetheless, around 1995, postmodernism was not an esoteric field of research anymore. To me, a new way of epistemology came with Seo Taiji and Boys, a group of singers and dancers who suddenly appeared to the public and were broadcast in 1992. The summer of 1992 was all about their music. Just like Seo Taiji's music, postmodern art from the United States was shocking and disturbing to me. From April to June in 1993, the Ho-Am Art Gallery in Seoul near the City Hall hosted an exhibition called *American Postmodern Artists: David Salle, Eric Fischl, Julian Schnabel, and Robert Longo*. I hadn't seen the original works by Manet, Monet, or Van Gogh yet. I was supposed to tour European museums in the summer of 1993. The only original works I had seen among the Old Masters or the Modernists, up close and personal, were some ceramics by Pablo Picasso in 1982. In my personal life, 1993 was a groundbreaking year for exposing my aesthetic judgment to the Old Masters, Modernist, and Postmodernist art. The Centre Georges Pompidou, with all the pipes and staircases on the façade, was the first postmodern-looking building to me. Nonetheless, I loved Giovanni Bellini, Auguste Rodin, and Nôtre-Dame de Paris so that I convinced myself that I should find a major field of study among those—not postmodernism.

Things were moving fast after 1995. Mas-

ters, old and new, are not so scarce to be discovered in galleries and museums across Seoul. Amazon, Inc., an online commerce company founded in 1994, slowly made its way via internet. We just started using Netscape as an internet browser and hesitantly made an email address at Yahoo. We all had an email address given by college, but never communicated via emails. As we got used to sending and receiving emails, English-language books became readily available through the Amazon shopping service in the late 1990s in South Korea. People did not rely so much on translated books or on import book stores like Gyobo Books. When they needed to read foreign-language books, they could order one or two directly at Amazon. I was already living and studying at New York University by 1996. Requests from other people asking me to copy a journal article or to send a book to Korea became less and less frequent.

Now full of enthusiasm for new learning, I was struck, once more, by the prevalence of Postmodernism in graduate seminars at New York University. Postmodernism books were not for underground reading groups or for those studying foreign or comparative literature. It was a *lingua franca* for academics in arts and sciences. My advisor, Professor Jonathan J. J. G. Alexander, a great authority on illuminated manuscripts, told me that he never knew the coming of postmodern theories; as a Marxist intellectual, he worked with Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, or Marcia Pointon when he was professor at University of Manchester. With the rise of new critical theories and art criticisms, as he emphasized to me and others, one must read what contemporaneity brought to the table. It turned out that he was one of the pioneers giving methodology seminars on critical theories at the Institute of Fine Arts. He



was reading new volumes by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, and others in the 1980s along with graduate students. By the time I went to the Institute of Fine Arts, he was well grounded in theories of postmodernism and eager to introduce Michael Camille's new interpretations of the Middle Ages to me. Thus, my graduate school years were all about postmodernism and new historicism. Literary scholars and art historians alike were studying the so-called "masterpieces" with non-literary texts such as magazines, pamphlets or theater programs, exhibition postcards. Decorative arts came to rise as an important, less-studied, field of research.

Concurrent with this trend, I was working with professors who proclaimed themselves as "feminists" during the 1970s. By the time I met them in the late 1990s, they kindly declined to be labeled as feminists as if it were an old story of 100 years ago. Instead of preaching politics, they had fought (or were still fighting) the system by themselves and had created a big change in academic lives. At Seoul National University, where I studied in the early 1990s, here were few female professors and only a handful of women's bathrooms. I remember when I had to skip a floor or two to find a restroom for women in college. It was inspiring to see professors like Linda Nochlin or Penelope D. Johnson, so accomplished yet genuinely brilliant intellectuals and activities.

Artists in this exhibition may have gone through a similar encounter with postmodernism. Some were proponents of postmodernist visual culture; some were aware of it but not so sure of it; and some were rather resistant to it. Nonetheless, postmodernist books were part of graduate seminars or of studio critiques. As if the wave of internet and then mobile communication over-

whelmed everybody, postmodernism surrounded many of these artists from all directions. Whether to become an early adopter or a late bloomer, it was their philosophical choice. Nobody pretended to be a postmodernist out of pressure or of curiosity. Recently, I had the privilege of reading Sooran Choi's dissertation, *The South Korean 'Avant-Garde,' 1967–1992: Subterfuge as Radical Agency*.<sup>5</sup> In it, she argued that Korean artists were eager to apply their own understanding of avant-garde art to new modes of performance art and happenings during a military dictatorship and a relentless censorship in South Korea. The spirit of humor and subterfuge (or duplicity) was clever, genuine, and witty. The 1987 democratization movement brought the flowering of socially engaging art forms. When the official ban on foreign travel in 1989 was lifted, artists in this exhibition truly embraced new opportunities to travel abroad and study in the United States. Their spirit of escapade is thus related to the temperament of pioneers of conceptual art in the 1960s. With due respect and honor, I would like the audience of this exhibition to reflect on the legacy of contemporary art entrenched in painful conditions of social injustice, discrimination, gender inequality, racial segregation, and the concentration of capital—economic, cultural or social.<sup>6</sup>

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Mun Hyejin, *90s Korean Art and Postmodernism: In Search of the Origins of Contemporary Korean Art* 90 nyeondae-hanguk-misul-gwa postmodernism: Dongshidae-Misul-eui-Giwoneul-chajaseo (Hyunsil Books, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Sohl Lee, *Being Political Popular: South Korean Art at the Intersection of Popular Culture and Democracy, 1980–2010*, (Seoul: Hyunsil Publishing, 2012). This became part of Lee's dissertation, *Images of Reality/Ideals of Democracy: Contemporary Korean Art, 1980s–2000s*, Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Jeong-ae Park, *Modernism and Postmodernism in Contemporary Korean Art: Implications for Art Education Reform*, Ph.D. diss., University of Surrey, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> 박정애 Jeong-ae Park, *포스트모던 미술, 미술교육론* Postmodern Misul, Misul-gyoyuk-ron (*Postmodern Art and Art Education*) (Seoul: Shigongsa, 2001) and *의미 만들기의 미술* Eui-mi-mandeulgi-eui-misul (*A New Paradigm for Art Education: Art as Meaning Making*) (Seoul: Shigongsa, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Sooran Choi, *The South Korean 'Avant-Garde,' 1967–1992: Subterfuge as Radical Agency*, Ph.D. diss., City University of New York Graduate Center, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” *Poetics* 14, nos. 1–2 (1985): 13–44. For “The Forms of Capital” by Pierre Bourdieu, see chapter 15: The Forms of Capital in *Readings in Economic Sociology*, ed. Nicole Woolsey Biggart (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), 280–291.

# Performing the Postmodern: Notes on the Body as Muse and Medium, in Selected Works by Korean Artists

By Mary A. Valverde

Threads of the abstract and conceptual run through scientific, political, and cultural work. As a cultural practitioner, I focus my personal interests into research that develops into a range of creative projects and subject matter including art, teaching, and writing. I am invested in the abstract, the conceptual, systemic work or work in series, and ways in which people choose to subvert the self in gestures as a comment or critique of larger issues. I find that many artists who choose the language of art go to great lengths to create their own coded vernacular in efforts to describe the visceral world. Sometimes, being an artist is more of a compulsion; an exercise in solving problems and answering questions. As artists we may consider ourselves privileged or plagued by these compulsions. We are in the position to work through these compulsions and be objective, thoughtful and creative in how we respond to our world, our history, and the effects of our experiences as well as our traumas.

There is a specific characteristic to artists who were college-aged in the 1990s and 2000s. They are distinct in being a generation that grew up with the onset of an unregulated internet that

gave them unlimited music, images, and references in addition to the overflow of seemingly endless cable television channels further expanded from government-censored broadcasts in the 1980s. For this generation there was an intense learning curve of reading and assessing visual language and an inherent feeling of a smaller world that is both more saturated and more accessible. The artists of this generation are heavily influenced by cinematic imagery, sometimes accompanied by internal or literal soundtracks—a “common” experience to generations watching the Hollywood movies across the countries affiliated with the United States. In use is a visual language that looks to engage the audience into a full sensory experience. Artists today must consider the intersecting roots of those images and references. Contemporary works have the ability to pull from the *academy* of art and art history through its use of formal art elements, and intersect the personal, traditional and culturally specific, through the production of works that span genres without hierarchy.

While reviewing the work for this exhibition, *Post-modernism and Aesthetics: Collide or Steer?* I am considering how ideals, politics, and

policies of the *modern* world have influenced the creative circumstances for this generation of artists. I also consider the direct connection between access and agency that is derived from shifting perspectives, cultures norms, and migration. I consider the context of the Postmodern through these artists' works as possibly an observation and, if not, a direct challenge to false utopias and limited progress. The ripple effect of information overflow, the ability to move internationally in and out of spaces, and diversifying of cultural institutions, is artwork that reflects the need to questions the state of the world, our place in it, and how we respond to our circumstances.

Author René Guénon wrote a chapter titled, "Cain and Abel," in his book *The Reign of Quantity & the Signs of the Times*.<sup>1</sup> Guenon uses the name as a metaphor to theorize the creative direction of two distinct types of societies. He describes a *nomadic* civilization and a *sedentary* civilization, each having developed a specialization of arts as a result of their societal needs, experiences, and traumas. The *sedentary* group focused their creativity on fixed arts; building grand architectural structures, fixed reliefs, sculptures motivated by longevity and permanence. The *nomadic* groups developed a specialization of ephemeral arts; excelling in dance, song, storytelling, textile work motivated by agility and movement. Guenon argued that the groups were able to offer their civilization a mastery of specialized art because their survival and quality of life depended on it. Perhaps today societies and individual groups of peoples are becoming closer, physically or through technology, and we artists choose to consciously overlap the approaches, *sedentary* and *nomadic*, in order to ensure the survival of our existence and the chronicling of our experiences.

## *Portraiture and Embodiment*

I want to see how the rise of large-scale, colour photography in the art gallery has reframed issues of photographic conventions and expectations that have been the material of most postmodern art...[.]... by taking genres such as the portrait and re-staging them in a way that both acknowledges the challenges of postmoderism and conceptual art, as well as embracing the visual pleasures normally associated with painting and cinema, these works articulate a sense of history dragging on the medium of photography.

— "The Performance Space of the Photograph: From the Anti-Photographers to the Directorial Mode" by Catherine Grant<sup>2</sup>

Jung S Kim describes her large-scale photographs as inspired by Korean folk tales. The photographs look like theatrical stills, making use of illustrated backdrops, costume, makeup, and dramatic posturing. These photographs are heavily contrasted to augment the gestural lines found in the back-drop, with the textiles and objects the artist wears front and center. The images present the artist in a range emotional states and characters, reminiscent of cinema posters that capture top billing actors. She moves fluidly from one persona to the next through a dramatic usurpation of those qualities and attitudes.

Theatrical candy and visual overload are the elements Yaloo Ji Yeon Lim presents in her video installations. Her obsession with organic textures and forms are evident through the repetitive use of bubbly orbs moving across the silhou-

eted free-standing walls she creates as shaped fixtures to project her video onto. There is a carnival of imagery and sound alike present in her work. She screens an arrangement of narrative projected in real time and offers immediate sensory imagery as well as contemplative allegory for the audience to reflect on at a later time. Lim proposes a future invested in reigniting nostalgia through a reverence for material objects; a scenario that romanticizes man-made machinery rather than the natural world.

Sang Woo Koh creates large-scale photographs with dramatic negative chrome colors and opposing images. He juxtaposes English and Korean text along with portraiture as a distinctive call to a dual consciousness. He intends to present an alternate perspective by use of heavy contrasts with brilliant colors instead of the palette seen in the natural world. Koh engages with the language and format of protest and urgency in his images. Koh has also created a performance piece, in collaboration with Yang Hye Won, in which he recorded various protest poses staged for a live audience through elegantly choreographed gestures and movements. Koh handles the live performance as a composer, both in his orchestration of the selection and cueing of sound with the performers' interplay, and the additional visual elements brought to it. The dancer, Won, seems to respond to the music in a riff of modern dance movements, sometimes quick and expressive, at other times slow and melancholy, giving the audience an emotional narrative through her body's elongated lines and directional curves. She ends her dance with the floral remnants of her performance giving an additional palette to the performance space. Later, these floral elements are reconfigured by Koh, as he adds an additional layer to the work by appro-

priating remnants into a series of photographs that anchor it to this time and place. It functions as an archive of the collaboration and as a separate series of photographic works.

In these works, the artists choose to make use of the genre of portraiture by marrying the inherent qualities of image-making, and the cinematic push for staging and presenting drama; sometimes in still single images, and at other times as a sequence of chronicled and/or projected images. The artists use the spectacle of bright color, forms, figures, and backdrops to grab and seduce its audience with the purpose of leaving a visual imprint. This language of image making is effective and immediate. I believe it reflects our current obsession with social media and the digital age with its need to put forth not one, but a continuous array of compelling images to strike at our wants, needs, fears and compulsions.

### **Sacred Cues**

“We are stardust brought to life, then empowered by the universe to figure itself out—and we have only just begun. [...] Scientists asserted that the aether must exist, even though not a shred of evidence supported this presumption [...]. Could we be seeing the effects of forces from another dimension? Are we feeling the ordinary gravity of ordinary matter crossing the membrane of a phantom universe adjacent to ours? If so, this could be just one of an infinite assortment of universes that comprise the multiverse.”

—Neil DeGrasse Tyson, *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*<sup>3</sup>

Prior to our current understanding of *modern science* many cultures used and described their place in the universe through a deep investment of the *sacred sciences*. We acknowledge the symbiotic relationship that our lands and the stars had, and how that relationship worked congruently to give us our understanding of time. Our perception of time and space allowed for the unknown and unseen, to be explained and exist alongside our physical world. Our ancestors and protectors held a significant place in our everyday lives, and they were able to transcend and communicated with us through dreams and offer persuasive direction. We received their sacred cues, energy, and sentiment. They were proof of our existence in alternate planes and our physical limitations as creatures in this world. There was a moment of dry science; qualifying information absent of sentiment and stripped of cultural meaning. Information based only on quantifiable material with an archaeological tag and number application was accepted as viable truths. More recently advancements in science reignited interest of the theoretical, and the *abstract*. It has made way for the application of monumental advancement in our understanding of the universe. Because we imagined the impossible and we factored in the unseen we are now able to create images of our universe and further understand our relationship to the elements, energies, and creatures in our world, and our place in it.

Yeon Jin Kim immerses us into her intricate world; where she narrates the fragile psychology of creatures and families in delicate layers of paper and sound. Kim combines drawing, and the innate softness of watercolor, to create maquettes that are brought to life through stop animation. Her piece *Ghost in the Yellow House* (2016) captures an intimate look at a young moth-

er's fear and desperation brought on by a series of interactions with the spirit world. The presence in her home seems to complicate her family life and further emphasize feelings of isolation in the mother. This ghost interacts with the objects, turns on the TV, moves furniture, and is drawn to the baby, communicating a sentiment of distrust and criticism that crosses the boundaries of conscious space or realm. The ghost seems to symbolize the displacement and discomfort of a generation grappling with the effects of navigating the modern world and the need to adjust values and traditions. The piece presents a woman's view on the modern family, the sacrifices, fears and definitive choices that allow for the success and happiness of their unseen future. In this work the allegory of Good and Evil are the subjects and our fears are the instigators.

Eun Sook Lee creates installations describing the body, our anatomy, growth and regeneration. She uses formal understanding of line and color to present organic connections between the divine and our material world. Arrangements with spools of neon thread exist as a code in systems of organized growth, and pods of vessel like structures. The work is contemplative and functions as a visceral call to the divine. Lee draws from her own experience, having survived an accident which left her with burns over a significant part of her body. She regained the ability to move her right hand and makes work that reflects on the trauma, and resilience of her mind and body. Lee proposes that the use of thread, translucent fibers, and text in her installations are an abstract representation of divine light and connection. Lee forges the spiritual pathways by creates lines that form sequences and rhythmic groupings. Sometimes the lines are gestural structures, and other times

Lee uses text to imprint the names of specific people who Lee feels deserve reverence and acknowledgement.

These two ways of working allow for the artists to present parables through an employment of beautiful arrangements and the space and time for contemplation. They are utilizing their artistry to introduce a possible explanation or meaning to a monumental occurrence in their life and the lives of others they consider important. The works become parables; lessons and reminders to those who view them. To the artists it is a chance to share and bear witness to significant moments and people. These works carry the burden of presenting resilience and strength through the sentiment of loss and survival, while acknowledging our will to “succeed” and the inability to control all aspects of our lives.

### Poetic Gesture

[...]“Symbolism,” which is a mode of expression, must be distinguished from “the symbolic,” which is the application of a “state of mind,” or, again a “mentality.” Symbolism is technique; the symbolic is the form of writing of a vital philosophy[...]. It is property of thought to need a support, a hypothesis of a specific nature. This can be called an intuition-base, forming a scaffolding for the expression of knowledge through series and groups, implied ideas, atmosphere, analogies—in short, all the radiation stemming from this symbol-syntheses. Evolved thought, which is only an expression of consciousness, then rids itself of the support. It could be said that the abstract Spirit need a concrete

support, which, by in nature, must be the synthesis (located in Time and Space) of the form to be given to the Spirit so that it may have available the body necessary for experience. Later this support is cast off, leaving the new concept in its purity.

—*Symbol and the Symbolic, Ancient Egypt, Science, and the Evolution of Consciousness* by R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz<sup>4</sup>

The body is the form. The movement is the mark. The language of visual arts performance is archived and translated through video in John Seunghawn Lee’s work.

I was raised bilingual and understand the complications of speaking, translating, and communicating gestures between two languages. In an edited video series called *Body Calligraphy* (2013), Lee maneuvers inside fabric to create organic forms, reminiscent of ink brush calligraphic gestures. His gestures leave a trail of black and white impressions layered into a continuous digital drawing that ends as a final single image. A great understanding of his physical strengths and limitations is on display in Lim’s performance videos. He uses his body as a catalyst for motivation and criticism of social and political issues. In other works, the performances function as direct interventions and offer opportunities for immediate responses from a live audience. Lim uses body-cams as well as a surveillance lens to contrast the intimate and passive onlooker’s perspective. The audience’s response and/or ambivalence are important to the work and function as an archive of social behavior and interpersonal relationships.

Jaye Rhee’s work maneuvers playfully through abstract gestures in video, photography,

and performance. Rhee has an interdisciplinary approach when attempting to diagram music notes, emotions, and memory. In one of her video works, *Notes* (2007), lines of rope and performers' bodies create a giant three-dimensional music stanza graph. The performers step in and out of the measures making their bodies stand in for musical notes that are able to shift and change their position. Moving back and forth between time is a concept readdressed in her video work called *Mediterranean* (2010). The video attempts to reframe a stark white room that is inhabited by the artist using blue tape to create patterns on top of her white clothing. Soon the artist is met with other blue objects that occupy the same white space and begin to fill it, one more object at a time. The work seems to run backwards but, feels like a "real time" accruing of materials. Viewing the video creates an uneasy sense of direction presented in the idea of time not moving in a linear fashion. In her video, time is understood as moving forward by the accruing of materials, and backwards by the reduction of the space in the frame, both happening simultaneously.

kate-hers RHEE is invested in researching identity politics and how many cultures create and disrupt models of acceptability and authenticity. RHEE critically investigates her own understanding of womanhood, self-worth, beauty, and power, while navigating social spaces and languages as she travels and participates in other cultures. RHEE makes us confront racist language, beauty myths, and personal traumas through documentary-style video diaries, live performances, and the residue of performance materials. Her work attempts to create an archive of social interactions. She executes both live performances and then gathers the material remnants, to reinstall them

as evidence of the acts. Each project feels like an attempt to unpack and discover the root of passive marginalization in different groups and communities. She finds ways to show the audience how failure to empathize or shift perspective can create a complacent society, with a tendency to focus on blame instead of healing. Her performative gestures force us to bear witness and acknowledge otherness.

It is apparent that the space for self-criticism is important to these artists in their work. Also, from conception to presentation it is clear that a great degree of thought and research went into the formal read of the work as it was originally presented, as well as how the work resonates and is accessed by others when the work is no longer in an exhibition space. The artists seem to be empowered with agency. Each of them re-contextualizing social, political, and traditional views through a critique, a conceptual act of resistance or protest, and social commentary. The results are works engaging in our humanity through humor, cynicism, sexual tension, violence, apathy, or desire. In varying degrees, the artist chooses to play the orchestrator, aggressor, victim, savior, or archivist to effectively challenge the viewer and their presumptions. Their work is motivated by the need to present alternate perspectives and accounting of facts and histories.

## **Epilogue**

Institutions of public culture were being forced to rethink how they conceive of their publics: who they represent, whose interest they serve. The crucial difference is that the first type of culture war is a war on culture by those who exploit the finan-



cial and legislative power of the state to demonize art, attack artists, and defund institutions for political gain. The second type is a war to expand the terms of culture by those who are largely artists, and who want to participate fully in the art world even as they challenge its terms. We make a grave mistake, it seems to me, by conflating the two.

—*Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts* by Aruna D'Souza<sup>5</sup>

Recently, I was asked to consider my place in the canon of art history as a U.S. -born Latinx artist. I spent quite a bit of time exploring the what ifs of future artists like myself. I answered questions about my upbringing, my traditions, my experiences navigating the educational system and academia. In my work I try to address my interest and research through conceptual work. My installations, drawings, and performances try to consider the physical and ephemeral space where the work is presented, as well as how the audience interacts with the work. I spend a lot of time writing and sketching ideas; and creating drawings in series as a way to synthesize my research and concepts into physical work and/or gestures. As the world becomes smaller through its intersecting connections in the real and digital world, I am contemplating the power and usefulness of art to inspire and present ideas with a much larger audience. I am also sure there will be a need to more frequently adjust perspectives as we learn new things, to archive the new, and to question the motivations and implications of our actions on the future. I am confident that many of the artists of my generation and most certainly the generations of future

artists, will be empowered with the necessary raw materials, references, and agency, to contribute to culture.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> René Guénon, “Cain and Abel,” *The Reign of Quantity & the Signs of the Times*, revised edition (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004; originally 1953), 144–51.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Grant, “The Performance Space of the Photograph: From the Anti-Photographers to the Directorial Mode,” *Rebus*, Vol. 5 (Spring 2010), 1–29.

<sup>3</sup> Neil DeGrasse Tyson, *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), 33; 89.

<sup>4</sup> René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz, *Symbol and the Symbolic, Ancient Egypt, Science, and the Evolution of Consciousness* (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1981), 44; 49–50.

<sup>5</sup> Aruna D’Souza, *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018), 7.