

## Ahn Kyuchul Words Just for You

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# Ahn Kyuchul Words Just for You

21 Feb — 31 Mar 2017 at the Kukje Gallery in Seoul, South Korea



Ahn Kyuchul Words Just for You, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

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Kukje Gallery's first exhibition of 2017 showcases work by Ahn Kyuchul in a solo show titled *Words Just for You*, open from February 21 to March 31. Ahn's practice uses everyday objects and language to engage audiences, allowing them to encounter his work directly and powerfully framing both the irrationalities and paradoxes found in modern societies. His diverse body of work revolves primarily around observing objects and the way people understand them. The artist manipulates these innate characteristics and the function of objects, humorously altering their context to reframe their essence as well as their utilitarian uses and symbolic meanings. While Ahn is often described as a conceptual artist, his work transcends categories, seeking to fundamentally engage people and highlight the society in which they live. His unique conceptual work engenders the audience to reflect on their lives and suggest a new perspective on society. Ahn's varied oeuvre includes his early "object sculpture" works personified by the artist's own descriptive text-based narratives about the objects, as well as architectural installations, and more recently performance and video works. The artist pushes beyond structural and visual boundaries, expanding his purview to include linguistic, spatial, tactile, and auditory

experiences. This synthesis reflects Ahn's steadfast attempt to broaden artistic possibilities by inviting audiences to actively participate instead of passively stand by.

Ahn's new works on exhibit in *Words Just for You* can be seen as an extension of his early practice that focused on "object sculpture." However, this new body of work is more inspired by primary forms including circles, spheres, straight lines, and spiral structures. If Ahn's recent solo exhibition at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, *Invisible Land of Love*, was organized around a literary narrative, this exhibition focuses on the condition and physicality specific to an object.

"*Words Just for You* is a vanishing point where all human potential for connection disappears, a black hole that engulfs all of our secrets, and a threshold that leads to a realm beyond truth and falsehood. A space of eternal silence and solitude.

It is a monological void just for your words, a space no one else has to know of."

The titular work of the exhibition, *Words Just for You*, is a wooden armature covered with thick, gray felt installed on the wall. Hovering between an amorphous relief sculpture or a monochromatic painting, *Words Just for You* provides not only a soft darkened environment that absorbs all ambient sound, but also a place where the audience may find relief from a world filled with noise. Ahn's work encourages a space of reflection, where one finds "words just for oneself."

*Silent Bell*, like *Words Just for You*, is made of felt, resulting in a bell that has lost its capacity to produce sound and communicate. This paradoxical state signifies the "sound of silence," alluding to a faraway signal that cannot be reached.

In another work, titled *Lingering Time I*, the artist has created a gently sloped, zig-zagged wooden track attached to the wall, designed to let wooden balls roll freely. Ahn was interested in how attributes of gravity influence the ball's behavior, causing it to change directions or stop. The work consists of a track that changes directions and halts intermittently, delaying the descent of the ball as much as possible. The work can be understood as a metaphor, framing the many twists and turns that govern life and poetically illustrating movement as time. If the balls were dropped without the track, they would take less than a second in free-fall to reach the same destination.

*The Way to Draw the Moon II* is a work on canvas that explores the gap between a reproduced image and its real life counterpart. A bright and round circle appears when moonlight is cast on the painting. The artist has interpreted this symbolic moon by painting its circular form onto thirteen identical canvases—each painted in a different monochromatic color. The result is an abstract representation that resembles neither a "light" nor a "moon." Much like how the full moon is both a concrete form and an abstract symbol for "unattainable utopia" and "longing," the abstract painting is the outcome of an attempt to create a realistic depiction, revealing the irony that accompanies intentional "failure."

*Paddle Chair* features a reconstructed chair with paddles for legs. The artist animates the chair, a stationary object, by giving it a means of locomotion, suggesting that it dreams of sailing far away on an adventure. *Two Bicycles* consists of two cleverly manipulated bicycles that have been cut in half and reassembled. One of the bikes consists of two matching handlebars facing in opposite directions and the other two seats. Arranged next to each other, these absurd bicycles can neither move nor perform their function but nevertheless beautifully suggest

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Box II is an “object sculpture” that combines the object and a story. The wooden box seems to desire that it will one day travel away on the wheels enclosed.

Ahn Kyuchul was born in Seoul in 1955 and graduated from Seoul National University in 1977 with a BFA in Sculpture. He was an editor of *Art Quarterly* from 1980 to 1987, during which time he also participated in the artists' collective “Reality and Utterance,” in 1985. The artist went to France to study in 1987, later moving to Germany in 1988 to attend Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart. He graduated in 1995 after completing both undergraduate and research programs. He currently serves as a professor at the School of Visual Arts, Korea National University of Arts.

During the early 1980s in Korea, Ahn became critical of the monumental sculptures that were thoughtlessly and repetitively erected without any consideration of their social context. Motivated by his observations, Ahn was compelled to create a small series of paper clay and plaster molds, called *Story Sculpture*. Through this series of narrative scenes made with simple and widely used materials, Ahn's work criticized the sculptural norms of the time.

After his studies in Germany, the artist began to develop his use of language as well as his representative “object sculpture” works that imbue everyday objects with new contextual significance. The various strands of Ahn's practice reflect the artist's long experience as a journalist. Working for seven years, this professional experience honed his writing skills and conceptual discipline, which today is the foundation for his artistic practice.

In 2015, Ahn was selected to hold a solo exhibition, titled *Invisible Land of Love*, as part of the Hyundai Motor Series 2015 at the MMCA, a project that showcases major Korean artists. His other solo exhibitions held at major institutions include *All and but Nothing* (2014) at HITE Collection, *Alles hat seine Stunde* (2013) at the Goethe Institut, and *Forty-Nine Rooms* (2004) at Rodin Gallery (formerly known as Plateau). Group exhibitions with the artist include *Variation of the Moon* (2014) at Nam June Paik Art Center, *Roundtable*, the 9th Gwangju Biennale (2012), *Korean Art-Void* (2007) at Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, and *Parallel Life* (2005) at Frankfurter Kunstverein.

Ahn's works are in the permanent collections of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art; Amorepacific Museum of Art; and Wooyang Museum of Contemporary Art (formerly known as Art Sonje Museum). The artist also created the permanent public installation *Path of Wind* (2010) in the Yeouido neighborhood in Seoul. Ahn Kyuchul has published several printed works including *Nine Goldfishes and Water in the Distance* (2013), *The Man's Suitcase* (2001), and *Museum without Painting* (1996). He was awarded the 19th Kim Se Choong Sculpture Award in 2005.



**Captions**

1. Ahn Kyuchul Words Just for You, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Kulje Gallery
2. Ahn Kyuchul Words Just for You, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Kulje Gallery
3. Ahn Kyuchul Words Just for You, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Kulje Gallery