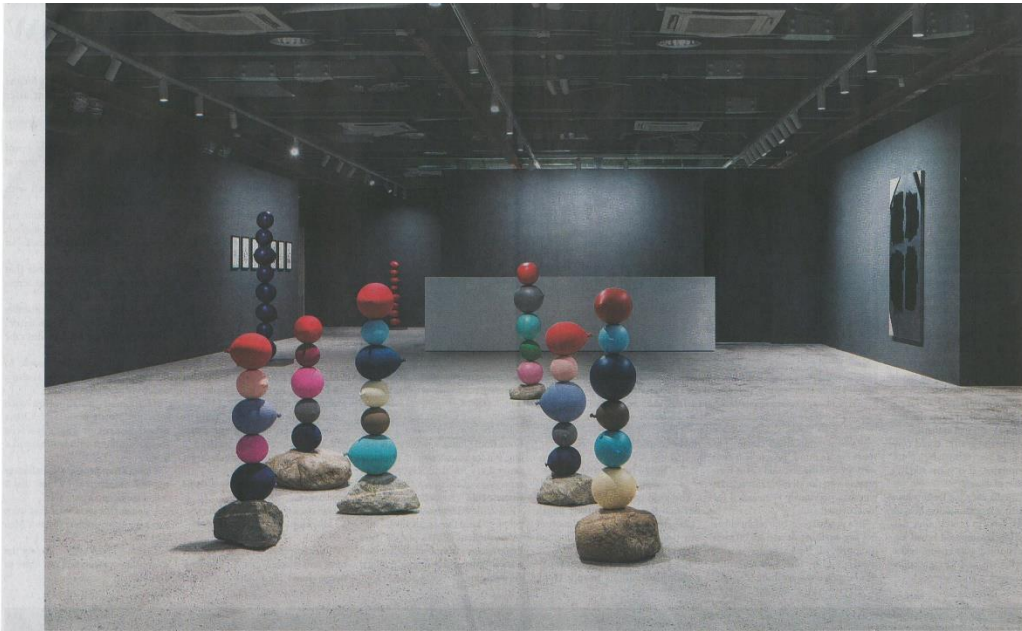


# Philosophical questions behind colorful balloon sculptures

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Installation view of Gim Hong-sok's solo exhibition "Short People" at Kukje Gallery Busan

Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

## Philosophical questions behind colorful balloon sculptures

### Gim Hong-sok captures breath in metal balloons

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BUSAN - Colorful balloons are stacked on a large stone. However, instead of their original lightness, these balloons are hard, made of metal. Artist Gim Hong-sok, stylized as Gimhongsook, transforms the materiality of this familiar object to question beliefs on the role of art.

At his solo exhibition "Short People" at Kukje Gallery Busan, Gim presents his signature balloon sculptures in new styles along with spray-paintings titled "Human Order". He experiments with a variety of materials, questioning the boundaries between completion and incompleteness and providing new ways of communication through art.

"When people see balloons, they immediately relate it to cute and familiar in their cognitive system. I wondered why such cute and pretty things exist and tried to give the viewers food for thought as I believe that art provides something more than immediate familiarity," Gim said during a press preview of the exhibition on June 26.

Gim believes Korea imported and translated Western systems and spirit without hesitation.



"Untitled (Short People) — 8 balloons" by Gim Hong-sok



Artist Gim Hong-sok, also stylized as Gimhongsook

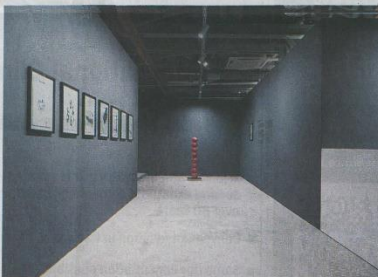
"The modernization of Korea is all about translation. Even I learned Western art without questioning why at university and studied abroad. After all this, I asked myself a fundamental philosophical question — what formed myself and what function does art serve in moderners' lives?" Gim said.

Gim is known for his crushed version of Robert Indiana's iconic sculpture "LOVE"; the artist explains that the work is a result of translating Western art as a Korean artist.

"We see the original as a perfect state and the distorted version as imperfect. It is difficult for most of us to accept the buckled, imperfect one as it is," Gim said. "However, I think Korea and other Asian countries that went through Western-led modernization imported the crushed version and considered it perfect. This is my way of translating Western art."

The new balloon series is extended from Kim's previous work "MATERIAL" (2012) and "8 Breaths" (2013).

The artist handed out balloons to his family members and had them blow them up with a single breath, thinking about a wish when inflating the balloon.



Installation view of Gim Hong-sok's "Short People" exhibition at Kukje Gallery Busan

Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

The wishes were "Mother, Achievement, Travel, Everyday Wonders, Rightness, Interest, Attraction and Love" and Gim named the work "MATERIAL," combining the first letter of each word.

"These balloons became a portrait of my family members, and at the same time a memory of their breath. In this way I suggest that a person's breath has two different meanings: a life and a wish," Gim said.

Gim said the works were made possible with 100 people who contributed their breath to the balloons.

"As an artist, this series is about the process of collecting their breath. I am sharing the breaths of my family, students and factory workers who cast the balloons in bronze or stainless steel," he said.

Gim, who uses diverse balloons for his work, said he visits stationery stores and markets whenever he travels to collect balloons.

"Interestingly, each country has different balloons. For instance, American balloons are thick and durable," he said. "I often visit large stationery shops in Korea to check the balloons in person as well."

Casting the balloon in metal is another important aspect of the work as Gim believes that material has a stronger political hue than the color, shape or size of an artwork.

Gim, who teaches at the Department of



Gim Hong-sok's "Public Blank — Everyday Monument"

Stage Art of Sangmyung University, said students nowadays prefer easily destructible materials as it is difficult to store or move their works afterwards.

"Compare luxurious marble and waste paper as materials for art. The material creates a hierarchy in the value of the piece. That is where I came up with the idea of using light but voluminous balloons in my work," he explained.

The "Human Order" painting series are sprayed with silver industrial paint on traditional canvas. With the primer exposed, the paintings look unfinished.

"The human cognitive system is a result of layers of education. I think an artist's role is to make a crack in the established order. People expect beauty in art, but the beauty is determined by the educated recognition system. If I present something that looks incomplete, saying it is a finished product, it might release a fissure in people's ideas of art, beauty and completion, which are merely a temporary social consensus lacking philosophical and practical value," he said.

Also on view are some sketches that give a glimpse into Gim's innovative yet witty thoughts on public art. Among them, "Public Blank — Everyday Monument," depicting two people blowing balloons and making a tower with them, is a nod to the balloon stack sculptures. The exhibit runs until Aug. 16.

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