

Kimsooja

2014-07-08



Kimsooja, To Breathe: Bottari, 2013, mixed media installation, partial installation view of the Korean Pavilion, The 55th Biennale di Venezia
photography by Jaeho Chong, courtesy of Arts Council Korea, Kukje Gallery and Kimsooja Studio



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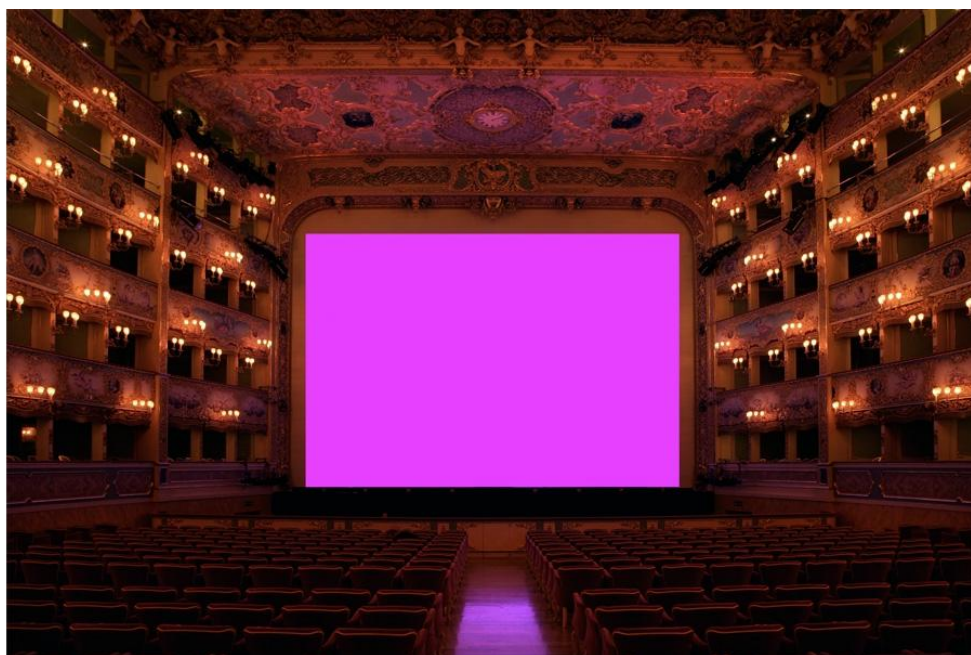
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Kimsooja, To Breathe: Invisible Mirror/Invisible Needle, 2006, sound from Kimsooja's A Weaving Factory (2004) voice performance, shown at Teatro La Fenice, Venice
 photo by Luca Campigotto, Courtesy of The Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation and Kimsooja Studio



Kimsooja, Respirar – Una Mujer Espejo / To Breathe – A Mirror Woman, 2006, Diffracton grating film, mirror, “The Weaving Factory”, 2004 (sound performance by the artist), The Crystal Palace, Madrid photo by Jaeho Chong, courtesy Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid and Kimsooja Studio



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photo by Jaeho Chong, courtesy Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid and Kimsooja Studio



Kimsooja, Bottari, 2005, 3 Bottari installation, Used Korean bedcovers, used clothes, installation image at Kewenig Gallery
photo by Simon Vogel, Courtesy of Kewenig Gallery and Kimsooja Studio
Kimsooja's recent work 'To Breathe: Bottari' turns the empty space of the Korean Pavilion outside in. Reflections of light and sound finding space amongst reflections of feeling and thought – giving voice to awareness and ear to presence in turn.

art4d.asia: I would like to ask you to please firstly introduce your work 'To Breathe: Bottari,' in the Korean pavilion at the Venice Biennale; I haven't had an opportunity to experience the work myself, but from the images I have seen, I imagine that being inside the space would evoke feelings of the world being turned inside-out, or perhaps better described as outside-in.

KIMSOOJA: It is interesting that you perceive the installation as if you were inside it. Sometimes audiences get lost in the space with the reflections of different pockets and shapes that are created by the materials and the space itself. And sometimes audiences find their own image and the sound of their breath takes their focus away from the whole structure. Perhaps audiences like you who have an understanding of the structure and a certain distance, can give a more comprehensive analysis of the piece and the experiences it generates.

The "skin" component demonstrated in this installation has a long relationship to my questions with regards to various issues, such as the physical/metaphysical division in relation to the human body; gender related problems, privacy and also cultural, socio-political and religious problems. Although I must say, in the beginning I was less aware of the connection between politics and the skin, until I began traveling around the world. An awareness of the skin as a surface and/or a division has been present in my work and my thinking since my early print making practice. I paid a lot of attention to these questions of surface (of paper, metals and stones) through dealing with the canvas, copper plates for etchings, serigraphy and lithography.

These questions on the canvas/surface led me to my sewn practices (early 80's) -together with my interest in the human body and its presence—as a means of reflection on life and art. The sewn pieces, wrapping object pieces, as well as bedcovers and Bottari installations revealed my focus on the surface and an understanding of borders in my practice. Lately, I've also been experimenting with lights onto architectural skin, videos that are composed of different sequences of digital color spectrums and questioning the definition of the surface by measuring the depth of it.

By applying the diffraction grating film onto the skin of the glass pavilion, I was able to experiment with another methodology in order to define the skin of the architecture as that which was built with glass. Particularly, this translucent film installation naturally responds to the rhythms of nature with the flow of daily sunlight around the clock so that the Korean pavilion itself breathes and continually transforms its own interior and exterior.

Your work, 'The Weaving Factory, 2004-2013' fills the air inside the space, 'transforming the pavilion into a breathing bottari.' In many ways, the breath is the ultimate physical manifestation, and symbol, of the manner in which we take-in and also extend-out through the practice of living - swinging between a pendulum of reacting to and acting upon the world in which we live, moment by moment. Could you please introduce the auditory component of the work and how it helped to realize your vision for the composition as a whole?

KIMSOOJA: I grew up in a musical family - auditory experience and sensitivity was an integral part of my family's daily life in my youth. I remember that singing was a great practice that made me feel my own body, feeling oneness within emotion and a certain rhythm of breathing. But I almost stopped singing for so long as I haven't felt any passion to sing a song or present a bodily expression since the late 80's. My pieces have been seemingly related one after another in all directionality of experiments in my practice. The Korean Pavilion was composed of many components of my former practices and experiments. For example, 'The Weaving Factory', 2004 is a breathing sound performance that was inspired by visiting an empty former weaving factory in Lodz, Poland. It was then adopted into a video installation 'To Breathe-Invisible Mirror, Invisible Needle' 2005 which was played at 'La Fenice' theater in Venice and then re-edited for the Korean Pavilion. All the architectural conditions of a glass pavilion and the surrounding nature were perfect for the diffraction grating film installation, which I had experimented with earlier at the Crystal Palace in Madrid in 2006. And as related to my earlier fabric works, I considered the glass pavilion a Bottari as my body that breathes. Many of my pieces have re-engaged with other elements or contexts, which has allowed me to experiment with conceptual links and evolve new dimensions of the works.

The work also includes 'To Breathe: blackout (2013),' an anechoic chamber that "creates a soundless dark void and infinite reflection of self: a black hole." In some ways, this component of the work amplifies the opposite end of the spectrum as the iridescent film placed on the inner windows of the space. What do you hope viewers will take away from the experience of journeying through and between these extremes – from a place where the space, light and temperature are amplified all around us, celebrating the ever-changing phenomena that paints our experience of the world, to a space where such phenomena are refused voice?

KIMSOOJA: I wished to create a translucent Bottari by using diffraction grating film, mirrors and the void of the space. I tried to adopt the particular architectural condition of the Korean Pavilion, while contemplating the conditions of humanity in this era after my experience of 'Hurricane Sandy', from which I was deeply affected. 'Hurricane Sandy' hit New York right at the moment when I was discussing the Korean Pavilion, and as I was experiencing it, I realized that this kind of event is very much related to audio-visual phenomenon in our lives. After that, I couldn't help composing all the extreme elements of nature in the pavilion—light and darkness; sound and soundlessness—and this led to the desire to create the anechoic chamber. I filled the emptied space of the pavilion with inhaling and exhaling sounds, while trying to define and extend negative and positive pockets of the interior space. With the reflections of the rainbow spectrum, I juxtaposed the Obangsaek color in my practice, which signifies five directionalities and the characteristics of Yin and Yang. Sound and light waves constantly bounce back and forth showering the interior and exterior space while composing the negative and positive spaces, nature and life. Together with the performative element of the audiences' body within the pavilion, the installation attempts to grasp light and darkness; the moment of life and death within breathing practice; time and space: Bottari as a whole.

The Bottari is a symbol and a medium that you seem to come back to again and again. I see the work in the pavilion as a sort of path, one moves from a position of external perception, toward realization of his or her own presence, and ultimately resolves their journey in a state of absolute internal reflection. I feel that the Bottari, as medium, has traveled, with you, on a similar trajectory. It has served as an object for contemplation of the external, vehicle for movement of thought, and conceptual focal point for accessing internal contemplation. Could you please describe this material and its significance within your practice, perhaps how its capacity or function may have changed over the years? It seems like it plays a role similar to that of a long time friend, one that can always aid in realizing new possibilities without losing any of the ground over which they (and you) have already traveled.

KIMSOOJA: It is interesting to hear how your observation evolves together with the history of my practice. I don't know how all these questions and answers came to relate to one another by expanding and at the same time, focusing my questions in the concept of Bottari. All that I've been doing is responding to each question that arises from one piece to another, or one event to another, face to face, following my sensibility, intuition and truism. I can say that if I was dishonest about my own questions and answers, I might not have been able to create this continuity and integrity of Bottari concept that expands to different issues and practices in the context of contemporary art, and the condition of humanity in this world.

I have read that you feel the "highest ideal that can be achieved by an artist is to be as minimal, as unprepossessing a presence as possible." This work succeeds in so much through incredibly minimal physical or tangible results of your own, personal expression in the sense that there is really nothing that you put into the space of the pavilion that wasn't there before, be it the physical characteristics of light and sound or the opportunity to reflect upon and realize one's presence in space, it is as if everything that comes forth in this work were just waiting to be seen, heard, felt - waiting to be arranged in a manner that viewers would entertain them and allow their presence form. Therefore, I believe this work achieves your aforementioned ideal; it is as if you play the role of a silent composer, allowing or encouraging the instruments of experience to come forth seemingly all on their own. Through this type of artistic practice, do you consider yourself a creator? Or is the designation of 'composer' perhaps more fitting?

KIMSOOJA: I am very touched by your comments, especially the fact that you can see what I've done within this empty space. Your comment 'me as a composer' might be a more accurate description in this case, or perhaps, not even a composer, but as a witness who lets things be, by simply being present with my gaze. I am an anti-creator, and more a thinker who is endlessly trying to understand the world, myself, and the problems of humanity, which also expands to the phenomena of nature; discovering new definitions through the medium of art. What is all this about politics, money, and power in art? In the end, we are a handful of memories, or not even as much.

What are you working on currently? What's next?

KIMSOOJA: I am working on building a new pavilion called A Needle Woman - Galaxy was a memory, Earth is a Souvenir and it will be the first time I have built a physical architectural structure. The pavilion will be installed at the Cornell University campus and is in collaboration with a group of Nano scientists and architects. It is a narrow, high-rise, translucent, needle-shaped pavilion; the skin of which is being formulated in collaboration with the Nano science lab at Cornell and which will create rainbow spectrums of color using Nano material. I was very much inspired by the perspective of Nano Science in dealing with the question of scale, and the structure of Nano scale units of material, which is similar to the structure of a fabric. I found a great similarity between a Nano Scientific approach and my own artistic approach. At the same time, I was struck by Henri Bergson's 'Notion of Memory' while I was contemplating the concept of scale. In fact, the title itself is already a piece as a statement and it is an exciting project for me.

I also want to introduce An Album: Borderlines - a site-specific video installation that I've been working on. It is a video work on a large LED screen which is installed above the revolving door of the pedestrian entry into the United States, right on the US and Mexican borderline in Nogales. It is a very delicate and vulnerable site with high death tolls across the borders of both countries. Sadly, there has already been vandalism of the screen from people throwing stones. At the same time, interestingly, we had to fix the damage and turn the screen to face towards the US side rather than Mexico as was originally intended. This creates an interesting relationship between the installation, the viewers and the video piece itself as the screen plays video portraits of local residents in three positions: frontal, from the back and turning to face the viewer. After this process of turning the screen to face a different direction, the commuters crossing the border will now have to turn to look over their shoulder in order to see the video, in this way mirroring the postures of the individuals on screen.

Besides these projects, there are other commissions and biennales but I am also planning to travel to China to film the fourth chapter of my film project 'Thread Routes' that I conceived in 2009. Following the first three chapters, which I shot in Peru, Europe, and India respectively; Chapter 4 will continue my exploration of the physical, psychological and anthropological journey of threads within the unique structures of each culture. Through a visual examination of performative activities such as weaving, spinning, knitting, lace making, dyeing and embroidery I am able to reveal connections within and between cultures, architectures and landscapes. I consider this project a retrospective research of my practice and a form of visual poetry that I've been investigating since the late 70s.

URL: <http://www.art4d.asia/interviews-detail.php?id=622>