

Rolling clay into balls for inner peace

August 4, 2016 | Kwon Mee-yoo



"Archive of Mind" is a new participatory artwork by Kim Soo-ja as part of "MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2016: KimSooja — Archive of Mind" exhibit at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul.

Courtesy of MMCA

Rolling clay into balls for inner peace



Artist Kim Soo-ja stands next to "Deductive Object" at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul.

Courtesy of MMCA

By Kwon Mee-yoo
meeyoo@koreatimes.com

Soil is vital for human life, but we, in our modern lives, have little opportunity to touch it and we have put soil out of our minds. Artist Kim Soo-ja, 59, gives back the primitive tactile sensation to visitors at a new exhibit at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Seoul.

Kim, known for her "Bottari" series exploring the relations between materiality and immateriality, presents a series of new works expanding her thematic consciousness at the "MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2016: KimSooja — Archive of Mind" exhibit. The annual exhibit is sponsored by Hyundai Motor and sheds light on a prominent Korean artist each year, giving the artists since 2014 the chance to broaden their artistic horizons.

The main piece of the exhibit is "Archive of Mind," a site specific installation which invites visitors to make clay balls and place them on a large wooden table, accompanied with the matching sound performance "Unfolding Sphere."

Upon entering the gallery, visitors will be given a clump of clay. Each visitor can sit around a 19-meter-long oval table and roll the clay into a ball

and then will be asked to leave them on the table when they have finished as their contribution to the participatory art piece.

The viewers become part of this artwork as they move their hands, adding temporality to the material and transforming it into something nonmaterial.

"I was interested in clay and pottery for a long time. When I attended pottery classes in New York, I was immediately attracted to the raw sense of touching clay with my hands since I hadn't touched earth since childhood," Kim said. "I thought rolling clay into a ball is similar to bundling a bottari, but rolling a clay ball has a solid geometric logicality more than we imagine, coming from the continuous, repetitive rotating action and pressing the clay toward the center. Such logic corresponds with the basis of my work."

According to the artists, hand-rolled clay balls are not perfectly round. "There are edges somewhere on the ball, just like the sharp corners of our minds."

As the visitors leave the wet clay balls on the table, the balls will become dry on the table eventually. This is a process intended by Kim as she considers each ball a cosmic element and object including water.

As time passes, more and more clay balls will be placed on the table and Kim has a bigger picture for those.

"The empty, flat surface will be filled with clay balls, a kind of painting. I have installed a camera above the table and the changing view can be seen at the end of the exhibit," the artist said.

The accompanying "Unfolding Sphere" consists of the sound of clay being rolled into a ball and the artist gargling and this is Kim's approach to the geometry in sound.

"The oval table is a representation of a galaxy to me. The sound of rolling clay balls can be cosmic, while the bubbling sound from gargling reminds us of the psychological borderline when one cannot either swallow or spit out water," Kim said.

The artist's interest in the movement of the human body is reflected in "Geometry of Body," which was made from Kim's yoga mat she used from 2006 to 2015. The worn-out mat bears the traces of Kim's movements for a decade, suggesting a new type of painting created by physicality.

Kim's long-standing interest in contemplation of vertical and horizontal structures is seen in a handful of her works. "Deductive Object" is two plaster castings of the artist's arms on a wooden table. The position of the

fingers represent void, but also can be seen as a pair of hands sewing.

She also presents the fifth installment of her "Thread Routes" series. The 21-minute video explores the performative elements of the textile culture of Native Americans and the geological scenery of America. "This visual poetry is an anthropologic approach to the textile culture and nature," Kim said.

Site-specific installations "Deductive Object" and "To Breathe" are set at the courtyard of the museum. "To Breathe" uses Kim's signature diffraction grating film to emphasize the concept of void.

"Deductive Object" is a colorful egg-shaped object on a mirror surface, inspired by the Cosmic Egg, or Brahmanda of India. "For me, it is a reinterpretation of bottari," Kim said. "Material and immaterial are two sides of the same coin. I have researched such duality for a long time and this Cosmic Egg is a transformation of bottari, covering various issues such as totality, temporality, family, asylum and cultural gender."

The exhibit runs through Feb. 5, 2017. Admission is 4,000 won for adults. For more information, visit www.mmca.go.kr or call 02-3701-9500.