

BIENNALE ARTE
2017



la Biennale di Venezia

57. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte



EXHIBITION

SUNG HWAN KIM

Born in the Republic of Korea in 1975
He lives and works in New York (USA)

An experimenter with language and an erudite author of stories with a political charge and a touch of fantasy, Sung Hwan Kim arrived at visual art after training in architecture and mathematics. He left Korea in 1996 and studied in Cambridge (Massachusetts) and Amsterdam before finally settling in New York. His interest in writing and poetry flows into his video art thanks to his frequenting the course of the American artist Joan Jonas at Harvard and the MIT. The relationship between thought and image in communication structures is the object of a vast body of work that includes video, drawing, installation and performance. His works combine elements of biography and science-fiction influences, folk tales and collective memories, creating metaphors for historical and social issues. The artist gives form to “parallel narratives,” stories that grow out of real history, revealing the relationship of individuals with their own era. In the film *From the commanding heights...* (2007), Kim was inspired by a rumor heard in his childhood that the frequent blackouts that punctuated life in Seoul helped the president conceal private encounters with a well-known actress, plunging the city into darkness. From the particular to the universal, the dialectic between light and darkness, between true and false, underlies all of Sung Hwan Kim’s work. The work on display is a fairy tale about people who have never met; it refers to the potential of a story to conceal or reveal the connections between individual and historical events. Through his own experience with displacement, Kim tackles identity or cultural otherness by using explicit references to Korean history and to African-American communities, before then dedicating himself to the lives of writers and intellectuals who have translated their experiences of integration or alienation in the field of poetry or music.

“I really like the idea of storytellers. In ancient times, before there were films and the news media, it was they who brought the news from a foreign land, and they were believed, because no-one had been there. Now we have information everywhere, from newspapers, books and television. I’m interested in the way, from all these sources, an individual system can emerge to link the stories, or to connect to them.”¹

From a stylistic point of view, the work of Sung Hwan Kim is immediately perceptible as an orchestration of techniques and languages aimed at integrating the narrative potential of the different media. In film, for example, the story can be joined by a drawing, or be reflected in the dialogue with the exhibition space through objects, drawings or sculptures that draw in the spectator into an immersive space. And in their internal structure too, his videos reflect a plurality of influences. Behind the taste

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César Aira, *Un episodio en la vida del pintor viajero* (An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter), 2000.
James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 1955.
Mirok Li, *Amnokgangeun heureunda* (The Yalu River Flows: A Youth in Korea), 1946.
William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 1600.
William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1597.

1 From the video
interview with Joan Jonas,
*Artist Talk | Conversation B: A Room
and the Nervous –*
[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=BiEMA4CIapQSystem](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiEMA4CIapQSystem)

for low-fi effects, the choice of typical costumes and grotesque stage devices, like paper masks and sheets, there lies a complex organization of the visual text. The artist has said that his architectural studies influenced his *modus operandi* and the “construction” of his works. His drawings present a very precise order, comparable, according to Kim, to that of writing, or performance. And the latter too, requires a stability of sequentiality in order to be reiterated. In terms of content, every work is preceded by a conceptual elaboration—often a written text—in which the artist unravels the theoretical, political, and literary references. If Rilke was the cue for *Washing Brain and Corn* (2010), the *Temper Clay* works (2012) and the video shown here combine Western thought (Wittgenstein and Shakespeare), with the counterculture of writers like James Baldwin. The idea of dialogue and exchange is central to Kim’s collaborative approach, and indeed he produces many of his works in company with other artists, such as musician David Michael DiGregorio, dogr, with whom he has worked since 2006. Music and sound are constituent elements of their installations and include concrete and electronic sound sources thanks to the use of multi-track synthesizers, environmental recordings or talking voices, with the effect of concentrating and expanding space.

C. Me.

VIVA ARTE VIVA Pavilion of Joys and Fears



Sung Hwan Kim, Production sketch for *Love Before Bond*, 2016.
Acrylic, pencil, marker and tracing paper on paper, 45.5 × 61 cm.
Courtesy the Artist



Sung Hwan Kim, *Six Birds Through Lighting*, 2016.
Chalk, acetate, tape on blackboard, 114 × 127 × 7 cm.
Courtesy the Artist; Wilkinson Gallery



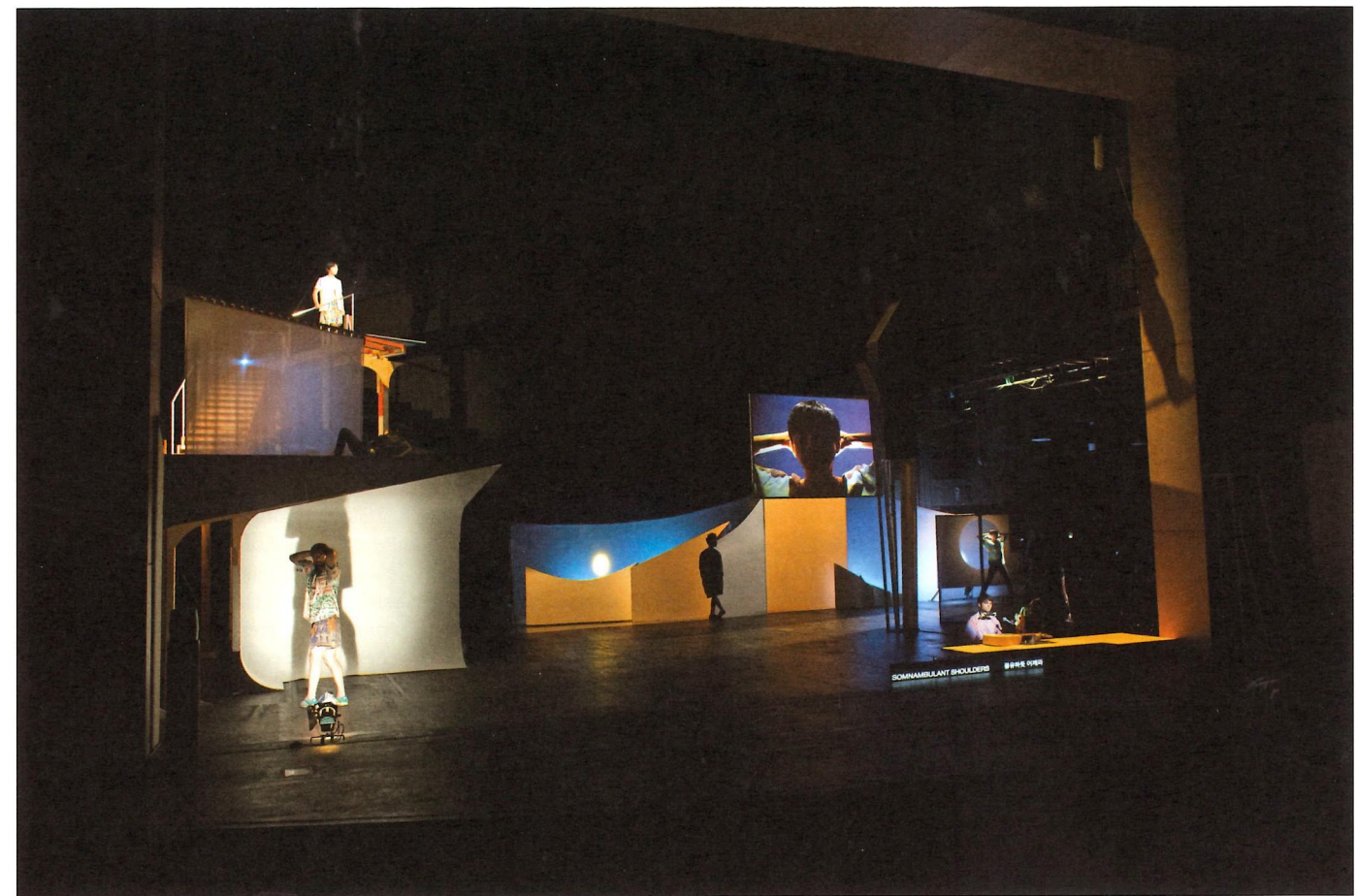
Sung Hwan Kim, Production stills, size variable, 2017
Courtesy the Artist

I imagine a blade excising the rotten heart from a goodly apple without a drop of blood, which is never demanded by the bond. An excision of this heart, uncompromised, leaving the remaining healthy arteries, veins, and muscles intact and functional, is an impossible one. This is a fantasy around this

impossible task. Draw this heart, a debt to my foe. In this drawing, the participants and the bonds stay as performers and props. One looks to the moment before the bond, any bond. When two meet each other in a masquerade without knowing the color of each other's race. When love is without the

knowledge of the past. When his memory is not marked by the image of his death. The two meet in joy. After joy, skipping all else, is only death.

Sung Hwan Kim, *Love Before Bond*, 2017



Sung Hwan Kim and David Michael DiGregorio, Scenes from 피나는 노력으로 한 [A Woman Whose Head Came Out Before Her Name], 2015, Asia Culture Theater, Gwangju, Korea.
Photo Suin Kwon. Courtesy the Artists