

17th Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival

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10—30 September 2021

Berwick-upon-Tweed
online

Sung Hwan Kim

“The question always has been whether these stories of Hawai’i have any worth to anyone in Gwangju, or vice versa. Furthermore, should the worth be the end of all stories? Why should one care, and how does one really care about the trouble beyond a national border, let alone the border of one’s skin? Here, does film educate about this method to care; or is it regenerating and readjusting the area of one’s skin?”

—Sung Hwan Kim

New York-based artist Sung Hwan Kim presents *Hair is a Piece of Head*, the first part of a multi-part research work, *A Record of Drifting Across the Sea* (2017–ongoing). The project comprises short films, books, and installations grounded in the artist’s ongoing exploration of the histories of Korean immigration to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. In this presentation, we show the film and the accompanying publication, which both explore the key sources of imagery which provide motifs for the first iteration of this ongoing research.

The film references the May 18 Democratization Movement in Gwangju, South Korea (also known as the Gwangju Uprising, 18–27 May, 1980) in which it is estimated that around 600 people were killed. During this period, Gwangju citizens took up arms after local Chonnam University students—who were demonstrating against the martial law government—were brutalised by government troops. Through the oral histories

of Korean picture brides in Hawai'i from the early 1900s, Kim connects this history to Hawai'i. As the artist notes, "for centuries, Hawai'i has served as the integral point of passage for most, if not all, immigrants first crossing the Pacific, including Koreans, and the first patch of "U.S. soil" that many migrants encountered historically. This historicising is often oblivious to the dwindling fate of another nation, that of kānaka maoli, Native Hawaiians."

The practice of Japanese, Okinawan, and Korean immigrant workers in Hawai'i selecting brides using photographs represents the collision of fantasy and material reality. This echoes how, in the film, Hawai'i is both a location and a concept. Continuing his ongoing interest in the ways that language can be a space of insight as well as struggle, Kim's film is spoken in English, Korean, Mandarin, and Hawaiian, in order to weave together the different subjectivities embedded in different languages.

Edited using the iPhone's "Live Photos" feature, the artist evokes what he has called a "psychological hesitancy" to the seemingly definitive act of photography: bracketing a moment rather than capturing an image. Kim observes that "the vanity embedded in Instagram culture is visible in the postures, expressions, outfits, and circumstances of these bygone beings and their many personal photographs." His striking, lyrical evocation of this imagery through performance, fragments of research and haunting sound design (composed by long-time collaborator David Michael DiGregorio aka dogr) creates space of connection between what he describes as "the moment of catastrophe, such as a national trauma, and the moment in which aesthetics slips into the form of reason, education, tradition, pride, justice, love, and glory."

—Jemma Desai

Hair is a piece of head

머리는 머리의 부분

Sung Hwan Kim

United States, South Korea | 2021
25 mins | World Festival Premiere

Filmography

Hair is a piece of head (2021), Love Before Bond (2017), Temper Clay (2012) Apologize at UNIS (2016), Temper Clay (2012), Washing Brain and Corn (2010), Manahatas Dance (2009), Drawing Video (2008), Summer Days in Keijo—written in 1937 (2007), From the commanding heights... (2007), This is a scene (2006), Dog Video (2006), Three Videos by SUNG HWAN KIM and a lady from the sea (2004-2005), Green Lotte (2005), 12 minutes (2005), Flat White Rough Cut (2004), Her (2003), A-DA-DA (2002), J story (1998)

Sung Hwan Kim (1975, South Korea) lives and works in New York. He studied architecture at Seoul National University, followed by a BA Mathematics and Art at Williams College, Williamstown (2000), followed by a Master of Science in Visual Studies at MIT and a residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam (2004–5). Over the past two decades, Kim has been producing lyrical multimedia installations, films, and performances that merge the mythological and the everyday. Kim participated in the 57th Venice Biennale and had solo exhibitions at MoMA (2021); DAAD Galerie (Berlin, 2018); Artsonje Center (Seoul, 2014); the Tanks at Tate Modern (London, 2012); Kunsthalle Basel (2011); Queens Museum (New York, 2011); Haus der Kunst (Munich, 2010).

Kim's short film *Love Before Bond* was screened at BFMFAF 2017.

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