

A vertical strip of ten grayscale images showing the progression of a handwritten digit '0' from a noisy, pixelated state to a clean, solid state. The images are arranged vertically, with the most noisy and pixelated version at the top and the cleanest, most solid version at the bottom. The digit '0' is the central focus of each image, and the background is a light gray. The progression shows the digit becoming increasingly defined and less noisy as it moves down the strip.

[illegible]

Golden Times

Part 1

Steven Claydon, Diango Hernández, Mai-Thu Perret

15/01/10 > 11/04/10

Part 2

Sung Hwan Kim

12/02/10 > 11/04/10

hausderkunst

Exhibition

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Booklet

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The blank pages of this accompanying booklet can be filled with the installation photos of your choice. This is a reference to the concept of early exhibition catalogues such as the Haus der Kunst's Frank Lloyd Wright catalogue from 1958 that like traditional albums could be illustrated retrospectively by pasting photographs in.



Sung Hwan Kim is a storyteller. In episodic tales, Kim interweaves fictional or actual events, making it nearly impossible to distinguish between truth or mere grains of several truths. As Alexander Kluge says: «The best storyteller is reality»<sup>1</sup>, an insight Sung Hwan Kim is clearly aware of, since his video *From the Commanding Heights...* (2007) begins with the artist saying: «I know that it does not matter if things are true or not, but this is a true story (...)», and later, «everything I say is real».

In Korea one of the main traditions of storytelling, namely *p'ansori*, is said to go back to the 17th century. The word literally means «story singing» in Korean: *p'ansori* singers combine *ch'ang* (song), *sasol* (narration) and *pallim* (dramatic gesture) to tell a story.<sup>2</sup> When talking about his own work, Kim acknowledges the references to Korean traditions: «There are specific Korean elements that I deal with such as *jae-gum* (Korean cymbals), *pang-eul* (Korean bells), etc., so the resemblance and reference to Korean culture is naturally sifted through my work by way of various elements, such as language, thought process or aesthetics (...); but it is always masked, replaced and displaced.»<sup>3</sup> He also speaks about the rituals of shamanism in a conversation with Renske Janssen. In 2002, Sung Hwan Kim witnessed the 12-hour initiation of a shaman conducted by Keum Hwa Kim, a well-known female shaman (or *mudang*) living in South Korea. «There were twelve colourful drawings of different ghosts, all of which were invoked one after the other: A woman circled around with the decapitated head of a cow on top of her head, a pine tree branch was dressed as an old woman, there were bells and cymbals, singing and crying, and then there was lunch, when everyone sat around and talked the usual talk. But afterwards the singing and crying started again, a man bounced over a pot of water, and so forth. Props were not only to be looked at but also to be used.»<sup>4</sup> During this intense and long ceremony, Sung Hwan Kim felt as though memories and experiences were beginning to overlap and meaning unravelled only to then be tied up in a different form. «I was taken by this casual flow of poetry, music, sound, visuals, imaginaries and reality. Movement was followed by movement, and there wasn't a space for any dead thing. Once movement becomes part of what you see, you begin to find rhymes in unusual places. Thoughts start to have shapes. Shapes start to rhyme with sounds.»<sup>5</sup>

Kim might have been describing one of his own performances, where visual imagery, music, video, drawing and narrative come

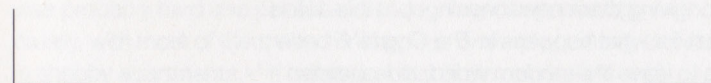
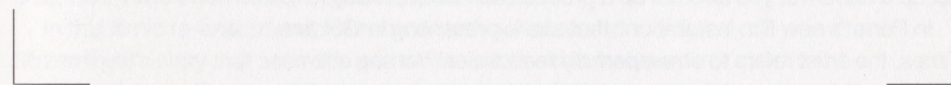
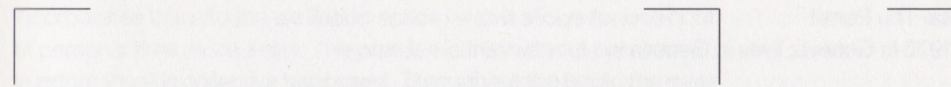
together to create a whole: a mixture of theatre, performance art and concert incorporating live video feeds, as well as pre-recorded material. A combination that is also indebted to «the interdisciplinary practice in music and sound; history and culture»<sup>6</sup> that could be attributed to Kim's predominantly Western training. His work owes much to such pioneers as video and performance artist Joan Jonas, whom he met in 1998 at Harvard and also studied with at MIT in 2003.<sup>7</sup> Both artists tell stories in fragmented forms preferring the gaps or slippages between the various elements as the space where narratives and meanings unfold.

Furthermore, both use masks in their performances. Jonas began to incorporate masks having visited Japan in 1970: «The minute you put a mask on you erase the recognition that the audience has of a person. (...) if you put a mask on you can enter a different world.»<sup>8</sup> With the help of masks, Sung Hwan Kim slips into the roles of the various protagonists in his stories, however, it is also a way of working for him. He is director, illustrator, cutter, narrator and performer all at once, as well as collaborator, particularly with musician David Michael DiGregorio (alias dogr). Together with DiGregorio, Kim creates enigmatic, even haunting music. Single guitar strands are plucked allowing the individual sound to be drawn out, altering its pitch in a whiney upwardly arch. In tender male voices they sing mesmerisingly: layering and at times harmonising the sounds. It is sparse music that draws one in and entices one deeper into another world that is occupied by Kim's performances and videos. A visual, verbal and aural collage emerges that, in its intensity and the way it captures one's attention, is perhaps more affine to theatre or cinema.

Beyond his live, theatre-like performances, Kim is able to translate these into another medium: His installations are equally immersive and engaging. «Today, an effective storyteller might have to construct a land from which he travels from. This land might not always [be] physical. Nor is it permanent. *In the Room* series is a construction of this land. Formal «choices» such as music, variation, translation and series naturally coincided with this construction.»<sup>9</sup> Kim's installations reflect this form of travelling: He lights the spaces only sparsely, the only guide being the pools of light emitted by the monitors or projections that act as spatial islands to each work. The films he shows are either works within themselves, or they are documents of one of his performances. But rather than incorporating a straightforward documentary, Kim chooses to show only a fragment of the live action: Having pointed the camera at a particular detail on stage, an edited focus is created that, while relating to a bigger whole, gains an autonomous, artistic status. This shifting between the mediums,



as well as layers of reality and time, is also apparent in his treatment of props used in film or on stage. Certain objects reappear as artefacts displayed on low tables in front of the corresponding film, or costumes are turned into mysterious, figure-like sculptures in the spatial set-up. Elaborate drawings — often white chalk on a black wall — pick up on themes in the films. They seem like automatic drawings that express dreams or could come from a ritual. Notable is also Kim's use of the colour green that runs like a red thread through his performances, films and installations. «Green in the series is always attached to some other objects. There is green on tissue paper, felt cloth, or leaves of a forest. Often green is used between cuts in this video [*From the Commanding Heights...*]. But this green is the surface of my computer screen as one can conjecture from little white specs and dust over the green image. In other words, this green is colourless. I think of this green as construction units laid out in matrices, not unlike spaces for pixels or bricks. They hide under other stories and sounds, and once in a while, they emerge, carved out by other meanings.»<sup>10</sup> Green is generally associated with life, nature, hope and harmony, however, it can also signal jealousy, sickness and the demonic. Kim creates an atmosphere that contains both: positive and negative energy. Maybe it is even a certain shamanic quality that is present here; each filmic installation an interrelated island of ritual that in its mythic and lyrical storytelling always also portends to reality.





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