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SUNG HWAN KIM, *Woman Head by the Water (Hand)*, 2015, poster pen, pencil, acrylic, acetate and tape on paper, 52 × 56.5 × 5 cm. Courtesy Wilkinson Gallery, London.

DRAWING FROM A PLAY SUNG HWAN KIM

AMBIKA RAJGOPAL

KOREA, SOUTH

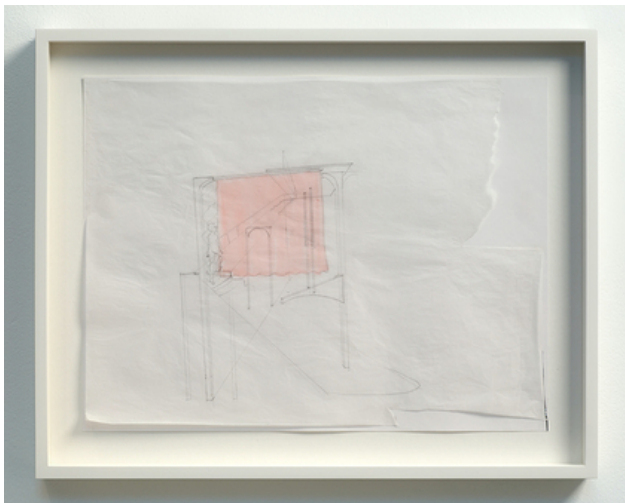
UNITED KINGDOM

Sung Hwan Kim's exhibition "Drawing from a Play," currently on view at Wilkinson Gallery in London, is a great deviation from what the artist is generally known for. Kim abandons his immersive multimedia works, which incorporate installation, text, film, video and music, to go back to the humble medium of drawing.

The alabaster white walls and high ceiling of the gallery are the perfect backdrop against which Kim's works project meaning and a

perceived sense of intimacy. The drawings on display had served as studies for a theatre work by Kim, entitled *A Woman Whose Head Came Out Before Her Name*, which was conceived and performed in Gwangju, South Korea, in 2015. This body of work is a response to a set of poems composed by Chilean poet Roberto Bolaño. Kim had a very charged reaction after reading the poems in their original Spanish language. Fuelled by the fire these stanzas ignited in him, he wrote counter-verses in English. The verbal volley of translation continued back and forth, until it was visualized as a drawing. Not meant as a direct translation, the resultant version of the poem embraces the idiosyncratic nature of lingual interpretation. In the stage production, Kim's hybrid poem-drawing was translated into the language of movement, and interpreted through sinuous gestures, woven together in a chain of sorts.

This is Kim's specialty—making hyper-dynamic, mesmeric installations that often arise from artistic collaborations. His work occupies the realm of video, performance art and drawings and evades categorization. The seed of his ideas arises from within; each work becomes a deeply personal project, amalgamating anecdotes, images, confessions, encounters, Korean mythology and folklore. Mentored by pioneering American video artist Joan Jonas, Kim is greatly inspired by the former's confrontational mode of appeal, which, in turn, enables him to adopt a confessional rhetoric within his own work.



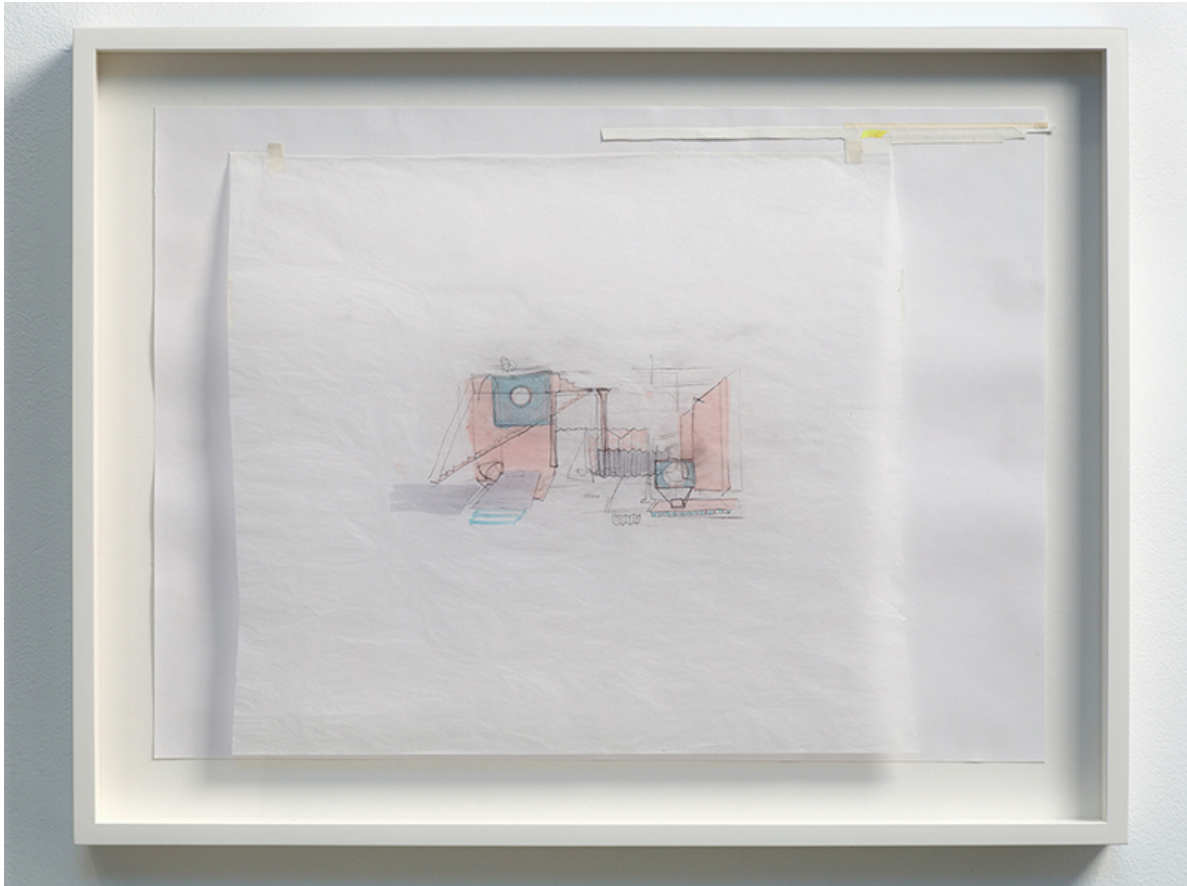
SUNG HWAN KIM, *Stairs Through the Scrim*, 2015, poster pen, pencil and tape on paper, 42.5 × 53 × 5 cm. Courtesy Wilkinson Gallery, London.

What makes this exhibition so distinctive is that it allows the viewer a peek into the workings of Kim's installations and performances. It opens a window to the intimate, behind-the scene musings of a highly collaborative artist. One particular recurring partnership in Kim's practice, which is featured in the show, is his musical collaboration with Dogr (the nom de plume of sound artist David Michael DiGregorio). Haunting vocals and intense orchestrations play within the exhibition space, transforming the gallery into a reverent chamber, where Kim's work becomes the point of focus. This choral intervention is further "sanctified" by a stack of lyric sheets piled neatly in the corner, free for anyone to take, in a manner similar to hymn sheets in a church.

The works presented in the exhibition are preliminary, but in no way rudimentary. Kim employs the reverse-painting method, using pen, pencil and acrylic on acetate to produce delightfully liminal works, suspended between the blueprint stage and completed work. The multilayered abstraction may appear to be enigmatic and incomprehensible on the surface, but Kim's works calls for one to adopt a new method of decoding.

Associations enable Kim to create works akin to poetry, which need complete submission on part of the viewer in order to be appreciated. One needs to completely concede to the flow of the work before the work will reveal its coherencies. As writer and artist Travis Jeppesen writes, in the exhibition's accompanying text, "one has a set of ideas that is really like a potent haze that follows wherever one may wander, a haze derived from all that one has lived and absorbed, that fascinates and disturbs, and from that haze, the poem, the work unfurls itself."

Many of Kim's associations occupy a liminal position, because his visual narrative takes into account the "expanded language," which encompasses the use of light, action, movement and projections, in addition to utilizing words. Such language enables him to work between modes of expression and makes his work function between different mediums. Many of the drawings on display have an inherent theatrical element. Works like *Stairs Through the Scrim* (2015) and *Maudlin Hole and the Moon (Set)* (2016) make use of a medley of blueprints from his performances—such as initial set and stage designs, as well as architectural and spatial elements—making the work both preparatory and finished. The works are a glimpse into the creator's thought process—open-ended, frenetic and ongoing.



SUNG HWAN KIM, *Maudlin Hole and the Moon (Set)*, 2016, poster pen, pencil, masking tape and tape on paper, 43 × 56.5 × 5 cm. Courtesy Wilkinson Gallery, London.

Before becoming an artist, Kim studied mathematics and engineering and was en route to becoming an architect. Although his career path diverted towards the arts, his fascination for architecture never really left the artist. This fixation is notably present in his drawings, which incorporate a meticulous, almost sculptural feel. In *Woman Head by the Water (Hand)* (2015), bits of acetate thrust into the third plane give an added dimensionality to the work. Part visceral, part abstract, the work functions in multiple layers, giving rise to a sensorial reaction that relates to the phantasmagorical and the magical.

These drawings relate to many of Kim's video works that are composed of short, fragmented dreamscapes, often introducing tropes of fantasy, magic realism and science fiction. Rather than mapping a linear way of realization, these works bring to light the inner complexities and subtleties that go into conceiving a performance.

"Drawing From a Play" is on view at Wilkinson Gallery, London, until February 21, 2016.

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