



WILKINSON

Upper Gallery
15 January – 21 February 2016
Opening: Thursday 14 January, 6 – 8pm

SUNG HWAN KIM Drawing From a Play

DRAWING LESSONS

Written by Travis Jeppesen

For an artist whose work is as complex and at first mysterious to the spectator as Sung Hwan Kim, an exhibition of drawings seems like a welcome prospect. This is not meant as a slight, but as yet another opportunity, a new entrance-point for an artist whose entire oeuvre seems to be comprised of provocatively fashioned entrances into an interiority that fascinates and perplexes so many.

The exhibition has its roots in a theater piece Kim staged in Gwangju in 2015, whose English title was *A Woman Whose Head Came Out Before Her Name*. (As often in his work, Kim eschews direct translation; the Korean title of the piece could be rendered as *Trying Until You Bleed*.) The theater piece was initially inspired by a set of prose poems by Roberto Bolaño. After reading the poems in their original Spanish, Kim would then “translate” the poems, in fact penning his own poems, in English, in response to Bolaño’s. The act of translation, or *intentionally failed* translation, would then continue in a sort of chain, producing then a drawing. Finally, Kim would translate these poem-drawing-?s into movement, gesture, which he then chained together into a series, forming a libretto. This – excluding the integration of further textual elements (namely, a bit of dialogue from Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* and an adaptation of a speech from Electra) and the music produced in collaboration with dogr (David Michael DiGregorio) that would resound throughout – describes the genesis of *A*

Woman Whose Head Came Out Before Her Name.

The audience members who had also encountered Kim’s commission for the Tanks at Tate Modern in 2012, *Temper Clay*, would surely recognize Kim’s propensity for telling stories utilizing what might be deemed an *expanded language*; rather than restricting himself to words, Kim’s expanded language extends into space through the use of light, gesture, movement, projected image. What is overwhelming, initially, about these experiences is how uncommonly layered they are; the result of such density is that it challenges the procedural logic that unfurls in our brains when we set out to absorb a narrative- and time-based work of art.

Like a poet, Kim works by association. This fact alone, I believe, is essential, the key to understanding his works, which otherwise appear dense, complex, unfathomable. Contemporary art audiences are accustomed to a specific kind of language that might best be summed up as *conceptualist*, which is in many ways but a heightened form of symbolism. Kim’s work implicitly requires a completely different way of reading, of decoding. But it is not intrinsically difficult, on its own terms. All one has to do is surrender themselves completely to it, to its flow, much in the way one surrenders to a piece of music, in order to comprehend its inner coherencies. The poet does not set out with a fixed idea in mind as to what the poem will be, or even what its logic, so-called, will allow

to proceed. Rather, 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.

His associations at times appear unconventional, but that is precisely because he speaks in this expanded language; so what he deems “a poem” might look to his audience like a film. A drawing could turn out to be... a work of theater. This doesn’t matter, he is not trying to be provocative; rather, Kim is obedient to the strictures of the language he has authored, the language within he continues to work, to explore.

Kim’s universe is a theater of gestures. But with every gesture proffered, a great deal of effort is invested in bringing forth a myriad of possible textu(r)al qualities. One image, moment, that recurs in his drawings, is a bird being struck by lightning; therein: the terrible tragic ironies of fate, the laughter of *Schadenfreude*; the (im)possibility of documenting such an occurrence; the interaction between the supernal and the natural, the super-natural; ... there remain many more; hence, the adventure of discovery. For in the end, one comes to realize, Kim’s art doesn’t merely document a process; it is that rigorous process, of the endless inquiry that forms the very core of the imagination.