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# MEGA SEOUL 4 DECADES

08.04.2021.-21.05.2021.  
Korean Cultural Center Brussels

KOO BOHNCHANG  
SUNKWAN KWON  
HYEWON KEUM  
KIM KICHAN  
CHANMIN PARK  
BANG BYUNGSANG  
AHN SEKWON  
LEE GAP-CHUL  
EUNJONG LEE  
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HAN CHUNGSHIK  
HONG SOONTAI  
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MEGA SEOUL  
4 DECADES

MÉGA SÉOUL  
4 DÉCENNIES

MEGA SEOEL  
4 DECENNIA

Date April 8-May 21, 2021  
 Venue Korean Cultural Center Brussels  
 Artist HONG Soontai  
 HAN Chungshik  
 KIM Kichan  
 JOO Myung Duck  
 Bohnchang KOO  
 Gap Chul LEE  
 AHN Sekwon  
 BANG Byungsang  
 Eunjong LEE  
 Chanmin PARK  
 Sunkwan KWON  
 Hyewon KEUM

This publication is accompanied by the exhibition *Mega Seoul 4 Decades* which is curated by The Museum of Photography, Seoul, held at Korean Cultural Center Brussels in Belgium from April 8, 2021 through May 21, 2021 as part of '2020 Traveling Korean Arts' project organized by Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE).

KOFICE's 'Traveling Korean Arts' Project, which has laid the foundation for sustainable cultural exchange through various connections across Korea and other countries, was designed to support the overseas tours of Korea's quality exhibitions and performances, and encourage long-term collaboration and exchange in cooperation with Korean Cultural Centers.

## 4 Decades of Seoul Seen with 12 Photographers' Eyes After the "Hymn of Seoul" (1969)

The Museum of Photography, Seoul

Seoul has now become a worldwide megacity, not simply because its total population is over 10 million people but because it is the capital of South Korea where its political, economical, and cultural capabilities are concentrated and its force is released toward the world.

Seoul, the capital of the Joseon Dynasty for 500 years and the center of the Korean Peninsula for 100 years afterwards, has undergone a history full of extreme ups and downs that was distorted more than any other megalopolis in the world. Seoul was the stage of political upheavals, the arena of struggles among imperialists, the site where the old and new, progressive and conservative come into conflict, and the testing ground for industrialization and modernization.

The scars of its history have been concealed due to rampant, excessive urban development. Its past and past appearance have faded from the eyes and memories of people. At last, Seoul has become a weird megalopolis without any fossils or physical marks to reveal its true age, like a monster that is born with an adult body and keeps growing.

Its transformation into a megacity with no past is closely related to the economic development policies of the 1960s. As centrally planned economic development began attaining considerable accomplishments in the late 1960s, a large number of Korean people congregated in Seoul, a political, economic, cultural hub of South Korea. They abandoned their lives and their families to come to Seoul with aspirations of escaping from their poverty-stricken, shameful pasts. By the time "Hymn of Seoul", a song performed by South Korean singer Patti KIM gained popularity, Seoul's buildings ascended heavenward, and began extending into the Gangnam area. There was

broken time and cracked space behind its growth and expansion. As its traditional aspects died out, alienation in the city became a serious issue.

This photo exhibition, *Mega Seoul 4 Decades* is a showcase of Seoul's changes from the late 1960s when the song "Hymn of Seoul" was popular. The exhibition explores 40 years of Seoul when mutually heterogeneous tendencies coexisted and collided from the views of 12 photographers. It demonstrates Seoul where tradition collapsed and destruction and construction piled upon itself, through the eyes of senior, mid-career, and newly rising photographic artists.

The artists' gazes are imbued with indigenous irony and nostalgia, and their cameras react to the contradictory nature of Seoul with keen eyes or cold-hearted aloofness.

Their works armed with emotional, intellectual photographic language are a documentation of vivid traces with which we can remember and understand Seoul's 40 years of history. Through the show, viewers may experience remorse at the rapidly fading past of Seoul, the contradictions of the "Hymn of Seoul", and the absurdity of the spaces of Seoul.

# HONG SOONTAI

1934~2016, Born in Seoul, South Korea

HONG Soontai, a native Seoulite photographer, photographed various places in Seoul since the 1960s. Scenery of Seoul in his works shows the changing appearance of Seoul and the hopes of life, and the cultural landscape reflected in the city.



Myeong-dong, 1974



Myeong-dong, 1973



Changgyeonggung Palace, 1971

Old Villager Visiting Seoul (Midopa Department Store), 1974

Seoul Station, 1975

## “Seoul at Present”

Seoul feels like a heartless cave of cement and concrete in short supply of the bonds between friends and neighbors as the city is being filled with high-rise apartment buildings. My neighbors here also do not bother to get to know each other. They rarely say hello. It is so cold and dreary. I miss the old days. We used to know every neighbor in town. We knew how many family members lived in each household. Today's world lacks such a human touch and continues to turn soulless. It is no longer fun to take photos. It is still fun and heartwarming to photograph kids playing at a playground, but you really have to be careful these days about taking photos of children without permission. Besides, due to an increase in violent crime, people try to interact less and keep their distance from each other. That is why photos these days are filled with nothing but inhumane concrete blocks.

This interview with the late photographer HONG Soontai was conducted during the exhibition entitled *Mega Seoul 4 Decades* at The Museum of Photography, Seoul in 2012.

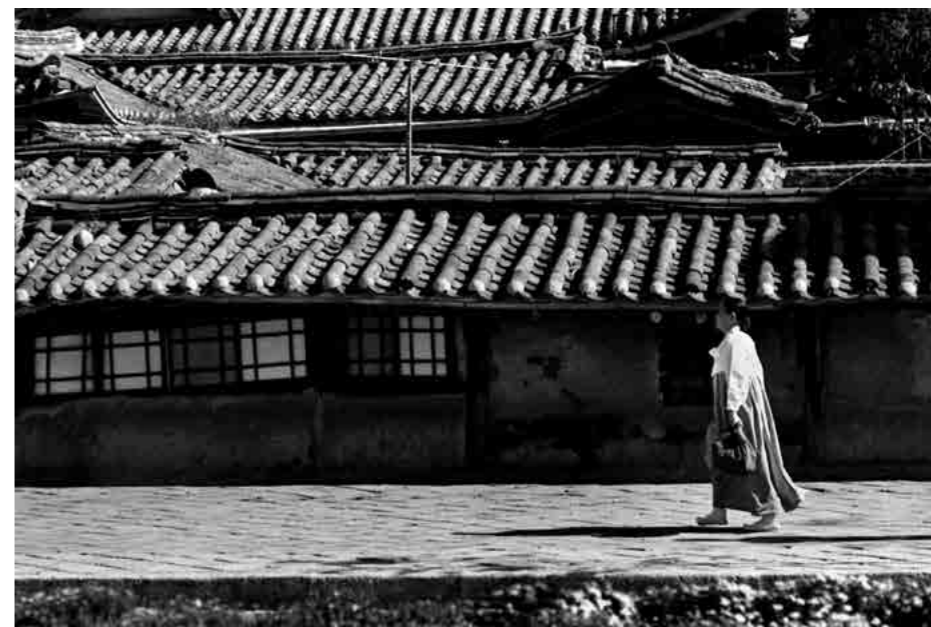
# HAN CHUNGSHIK

1937~ , Born in Seoul, South Korea

The center of Seoul as a historic city photographed by Chungshik HAN, has now become the past which has disappeared. His works contain the silent and beautiful landscape in the past of Seoul that now exists only in someone's memories.



Donhwamun, 1972



Sagan-dong, 1972  
Naesu-dong, 1981



Gahoe-dong, 1978  
Wonseo-dong, 1980

## “ If I Take More Photos of Seoul ”

I would like to find and capture images of Seoul as my hometown, although it seems bleak. I decided on the title already: Seoul That I Leave Behind. However, as it has been quite a while since I produced any decent work in the field of my expertise, which is fine photography, I am not sure if I will have the time and energy to spare for executing this project. I just know that it is my way forward if I ever decide to take photos of Seoul again. Such a project cannot be carried out unless you have the dedication and passion of someone who has lived in Seoul for long and was born and raised in Seoul. I am not sure how many such people are left residing in Seoul.....

# KIM KICHAN

1938~2005, Born in Seoul, South Korea

*Back Alley View* series presents the development scenery of Gangnam area in the 1980s. KIM Kichan's works reflect how this warm and silent area was rapidly changing and becoming urbanized during the development.



Daechi-dong, Gangnam-gu, 1982.3.7



Bangi-dong, Songpa-gu 1981.7.5



Samseong-dong, Gangnam-gu 1981.5.17  
Samjeon-dong, Songpa-gu 1982.12.12

## “Seoul as I Perceive It”

What used to remain surprisingly unchanged in the middle of the fast-changing city of Seoul was the cobweb of back alleys. Back alleys accommodated the poor and their warm, compassionate hearts and served as my spiritual home. After Jugong Apartment Complexes were created in Jamsil in the early 1970s, the tide of urban redevelopment swept across the surrounding neighborhoods. The completion of the Olympic Stadium and accessory facilities in Jamsil also led to dramatic changes in the nearby neighborhoods of Seokchon-dong, Bangi-dong, Ogeum-dong, and Munjeong-dong. With the land value of these neighborhoods surging, real estate agencies began to sprout up from the stretches of rice paddies and fields. These changes looked quite alien to me as I mainly photographed scenes of back alleys.

This is a virtual interview created based on the late photographer KIM Kichan's posthumous scripts and the author's notes included in his photograph collections entitled *Lost Landscapes* and *Complete Works of Back Alley Landscapes*. The final approval of KIM's family was gained.

# JOO MYUNG DUCK 1940~, Born in Anak, Hwanghae-do, Korea

JOO Myung Duck's photographs show the scenery of modern Seoul changing into mega city. Through the superposition and reflection on glasses, he reveals the complex life style and desire of modern people in the city such as the incompatibility of past and modern and the coexistence of virtual and reality.



Seoul, 2007



Seoul, 2009



Seoul, 2013

## “Aspects of Seoul I Find Familiar and Alien”

Seoul has 600 years of history as the nation's capital city. However, Seoul has undergone the most dramatic development and consequently the most extensive changes during our times. This is why the city feels both familiar and strange. I often had the heartbreaking experience of spotting a fantastic location, pledging to come back for a photo shoot, and finding it demolished by the time I returned. It is sad, but I believe such continued evolution makes Seoul dynamic and energetic.

# BOHNCHANG KOO 1953- , Born in Seoul, South Korea

After returning from studying abroad in the early 1980s, Bohnchang KOO captured a changed Seoul which felt unfamiliar to him. In his work he focused on topics such as disappearing old towns, the standardized life of people and the desolate urban cityscapes.



Toegy-ro, Seoul, 1985-1989



Jongno, Seoul, 1985-1989



Yeouido, Seoul, 1985-1989



Banpo, Seoul, 1985-1989

## “ Why I Came to Take Photos of Seoul ”

I wanted to preserve the scenes of my everyday life and my surroundings using my camera. In particular, after six years of living abroad and returning to Seoul, everything looked strange and different and I felt the need to perceive and record all of it through my camera's viewfinder. I studied abroad for six years from 1979 to early 1985, and, after returning to Seoul, I felt like a stranger in my old hometown. At the time, the development of the Gangnam area was in full gear in preparation for the 1988 Summer Olympics with traditional buildings being demolished and replaced with new buildings. I eye-witnessed the faded gentility of back alleys marking a sharp contrast with edifices constructed in haste, time-honored neighborhoods disappearing under the pretext of urban planning, and rows of standardized apartment buildings with green spaces in short supply.

# GAP CHUL LEE

1959~ , Born in Jinju, South Korea

Gap Chul LEE photographed the people and nature of Korea through an unfamiliar and unrealistic vision. He captured Seoul at the starting point of modernization with the '88 Seoul Olympics, using drastic angles and shrewd snapshots.



Seoul, 1988



Seoul, 1986  
Seoul, 1984



Seoul, 1987  
Seoul, 1987

“Seoul as I Have Witnessed It through My Viewfinder and Myself”

In the 1980s, many campaigns and events were initiated and led by the government. The College Students' Song Festival was one of them. I presume that our own culture of festivities began around that time. There were also campaigns to discourage spitting on the streets and to promote queuing up. It was hard to imagine queuing up anywhere before then. As soon as a bus arrived, people just darted forward and tried to get on board, creating chaos. And there was a campaign to keep public restrooms clean. I believe such campaigns showed the direction towards which our society should progress. After the 1988 Summer Olympics, we came to realize the current status of our nation and our way forward. This is why I think the 1988 Summer Olympics served as momentum for our nation to achieve a new dimension of modernization.

My photos were taken in the middle of the 1980s. I was young and passionate, and our society was passionate. Looking back, I realize now that it was one of the most dynamic times. I was also in my 20s and full of passion. Although I am widely known for *Collisions and Rebounds*, I feel more attached to *Land of Strangers* that I took in the 1980s. I must have been quite lonely back then as I came up to Seoul all by myself. But I had no time to spare to be lonely. I just kept pressing the shutter of my camera while I was awake. Even when I was asleep, I was taking photos in my dreams.



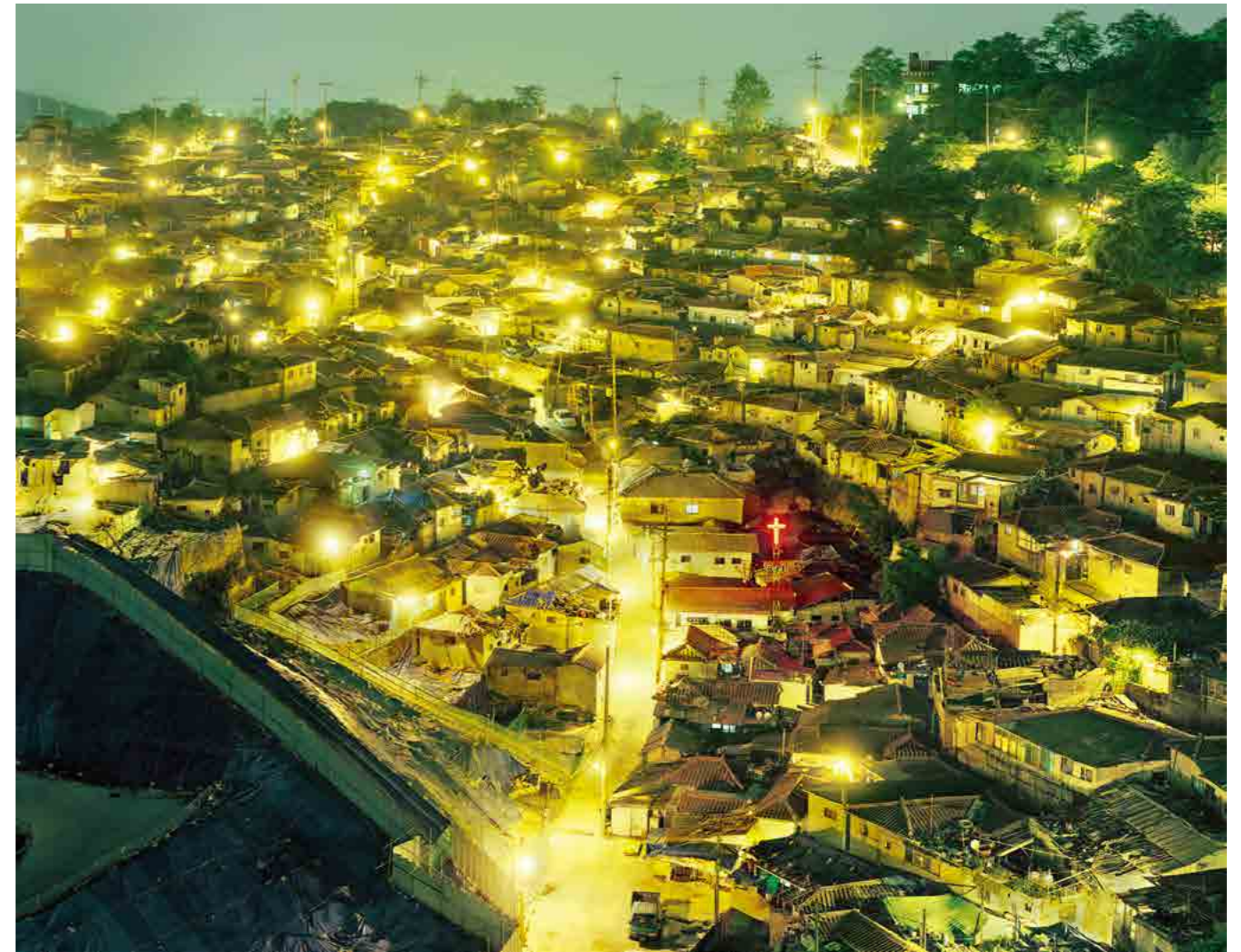
# AHN SEKWON

1968- , Born in Jeongeup, South Korea

AHN Sekwon's *The light of Wolgok-dong* which presents the disappearing areas of Seoul due to the redevelopment of Cheonggye Stream and Shantytowns. His works reminds us of vestige of the past, a scenery of the city which are destroyed and reconstructed.



*Disappearing light of Wolgok-dong, 2007*



*The light of Wolgok-dong, 2005*

## “Seoul as I Have Witnessed It through My Viewfinder”

To me, Seoul was a venue of countless construction sites. I witnessed the Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project launched in 2003 followed by an endless series of new town refurbishments led by the central government and Seoul. They eliminated spaces and stages of life and generated ruins in silence.

## “Memorable Episodes”

I witnessed many episodes as I continued to photograph redevelopment areas across Seoul. Wolgok-dong New Town is one of them. The residents of Wolgok-dong protested against redevelopment for over three years, but the demolition began in 2007. I aimed my camera at the scene of houses crumbling into heaps in an instant, the houses that I had photographed over the past three years. At that moment, one of the neighborhood redevelopment committee members tried to hold me back. I hastily handed over a catalog with my photos of Wolgok-dong to put him at ease and succeeded in taking photos. He was still going over my photos from one page to the next after I was done. He told me he was born there and lived there for over 30 years and asked if he could keep the catalog. I gave it to him as a present.

# BANG BYUNGSANG

1970- , Born in ChunCheon, South Korea

BANG Byungsang's works demonstrate his interest in human coexisting with the giant city. The city provides life and rest to humans, and the humans tries to find life and rest in their city.



Rescue Team, 2004



Guard, 2004



Tree II, 2004



Puddle, 2004

## “ The Han River Captured in My Photos ”

I attempted to illuminate the Han River and how it relates to the city, parks, people, environment, waterside esplanades, building facades, dystopia, utopia, places, non-places, man-made elements, natural elements, spectacles, daily life, and diverse events.

# EUNJONG LEE

1970~ , Born in Seoul, South Korea

Eunjong LEE's photographs, which focus on the artificial cityscape of Seoul, is a landscape of trees evolve to threaten buildings or to control surroundings of the well-organized vertical and horizontal urban city.



Library, 2012



Rainbow Bridge, 2012  
Nobel Snack Bar, 2011



Playground, 2012  
Observatory, 2010

## “Aspects of Seoul I Find Familiar and Alien”

Seoul is the source of energy that pushes me forward. I believe I have a love-hate relationship with the city. I have dissatisfaction about it and that provides the driving force to create more works. My findings from my observation and exploration of Seoul motivate my intuition and will to take action. This is the reason I cannot live elsewhere. Seoul is full of active energy. It offers inspiration for my work and a platform upon which I can generate and expand new ideas. When I decided to photograph Seoul's cityscapes, what visually stood out most was rows of apartment buildings. I am not fond of apartments although I live in one. Seoul is already crowded with apartments, but more are on their way in redevelopment areas and their prices are absurdly high. I am not sure for whom they are being built. Is it necessary to own an apartment to reside in Seoul? On the other hand, I find Seoul familiar because of the apartments. However, the city's urban environments formed as a result of policies that lack an understanding of the residential conditions of Seoul citizens are alien to me. Residential areas that are adjacent to commercial districts and shopping centers in the middle of mountainous areas look and feel strange. Of course, strange landscapes also inspire and motivate artists.

# CHANMIN PARK 1970~ , Born in Seoul, South Korea

Chanmin PARK shows the skyline of Seoul which is filled with high and dense buildings without traces of human, and the typical residential space high apartments which are only created for the convenience of human life.



Blocks series, BL215375573126950232, 2015



Urbanscape: Surrounded by Space series, Urbanscape\_106, 2016  
Blocks series, BL212373113127061324, 2015



Urbanscape: Surrounded by Space series, Urbanscape\_098, 2015  
Urbanscape: Surrounded by Space series, Urbanscape\_094, 2015

## “ Where I Was Born and Raised ”

I was born and raised in Seoul. I have vague, fragmentary memories of my childhood in Heukseok-dong and Sangdo-dong. Houses on the slope, the rice seller on the first floor, narrow passages, and the handcart of a yeot (Korean taffy) vendor..... There was nothing unique about these neighborhoods. And they are beyond recollection unless I am assisted by old photo albums. Then, my family moved to Dongbuichon-dong in the Yongsan area in the middle of the 1970s. After my father's business collapsed, we moved from one rented house to another across Yongsan. I also lived in one of the completely planned cities in Gyeonggi-do for a short period of time. I am now a Seoul resident again. From my past experience of moving around different neighborhoods, I came to conclude that Seoul retains a chameleon-like identity. To me, Seoul is an ambiguous place that cannot be defined clearly.

# SUNKWAN KWON

1973- , Born in Jeongeup, South Korea

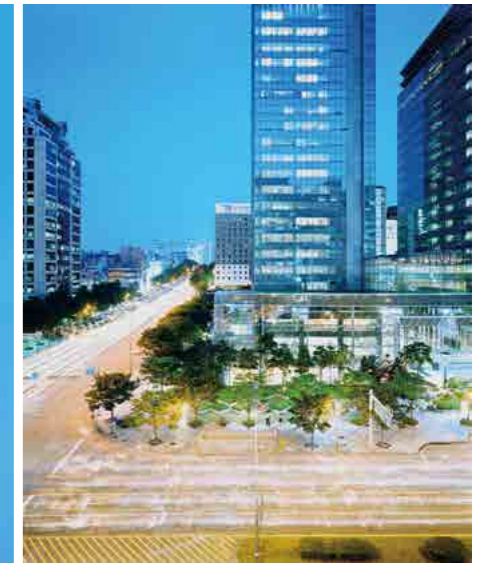
Sunkwan KWON shows people as a small entity in the giant city.  
His works make viewers interested in finding private relationships  
hidden in fancy buildings and in rapidly changing city.



*A man listening to words, from a man who is angry with a woman silently sitting on the flower bed and passing by, 2007*



*A woman taking for a while on the street after the man left, 2007*



*A man silently looking at the angry woman, 2007  
A man speechlessly looking for a while a man in a cap.  
Leanig against a tree with his head hanging, 2007*

## “ What I Try to Convey through My Photos about Seoul ”

Seoul is the foundation upon which I live, think, and work. For me, it represents diverse elements closely intertwined with our lives, from knowledge to violence, authority, hierarchy, value, competition, the common good, and belief. This is why I always leave Seoul and yet always end up returning. Seoul is the point where reality and imagination cross. It is a world seen in a phantasmagoria, where multiple realities merge into one another and where a variety of desires are belched out. I observe many events that unfold in the murky air of Seoul as I await the bleak morning to arrive while roaming around empty spaces with my camera. These events, although as mundane as episodes of popular soap operas, embrace the stories of Seoul that can rise to surface and unfurl at any unexpected moment.

# HYEWON KEUM

1979~ , Born in Seoul, South Korea

Hyewon KEUM witnessed at close range the traces of accumulated long lives consistently covered and uncovered with blue vinyl because of redevelopment and reconstruction.



*Blue Territory the green pond 2, 2009*



*Blue Territory 13, 2009*

*Blue Territory 5, 2007*

## “ Seoul as I Perceive It ”

Seoul appears to be a city built upon an obsession with change and speed. Urban redevelopment continued to take place across the entire city, replacing old traces with newfangled buildings at breakneck speed. It is now difficult to come across a neighborhood that retains the look of the old days. Instead, most areas are occupied by high rises. Throughout my elementary, junior high, and high school years, I had to cope with constant noise from construction sites while at school. This process, through which familiar spaces continuously transform into strange ones, became the identity of Seoul and the backdrop of my life. Seoul expanded as rapidly as it darted forward, but it also lost as much. I find this bizarre city both pitiful and interesting.

# KEONG-A SONG

Artist Keong-A SONG majored in Oriental painting at Sungshin Women's University and studied at L'école nationale supérieure d'art et de design de Nancy in France. She is an illustrator and writer and currently working on several projects in Luxembourg, including various solo exhibitions, painting exhibitions and book production.



*The nomadic world of Mr. Godinho (Seoul)*

This book was published on the occasion of the exhibition Marco Godinho - Written by Water, as part of the 58th international art exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. Publisher: Casino Luxembourg - Forum d'art contemporain, Luxembourg.

## “ Panorama Séoul - Drawing of Seoul ”

Even though a lot of time has passed since I left Seoul like that, my “Seoul” in my memory is still alive and move around continuously.

“Seoul,” is a very special city that cannot be compared with any other places. Sometimes it overlaps here and there and the face of Seoul, where something is subtly mixed, is warm, nostalgic and familiar, but strange, from time to time, calm to then turn to violent swirls.

The back alleys of Eulji-ro, which witnessed many years, the gorgeous and lone streets of Kangnam, quiet temples and palaces in a forest of buildings, endlessly connected structures and roads, mountains enclosing edges which divide into north, south, east and west, subway lines entangled like a spider web turning on itself endlessly. A city of people running in the past, present and future at the same time, where there are tacit orders and rules, the Han River separating them.

I always missed “Seoul” with these numerous faces and I draw “Seoul” like this in the end.

Seoul, an eternal mega city, which seems to have neither beginning nor end, is described by the tip of a brush so that you can see it at a glance for a moment.

Hoping ‘Panorama Séoul’ in this painting will become a longing for the present and future for anyone far from here.





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