



**The Korean Pavilion  
at the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**

Exhibition Title: History Has Failed Us, but No Matter

Period: May 11- November 24, 2019

Artists: siren eun young jung, Jane Jin Kaisen and Hwayeon Nam

Curator: Hyunjin Kim

Commissioner: Arts Council Korea

Under the title *History Has Failed Us, but No Matter*<sup>1</sup>, the Korean Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia is curated by **Hyunjin Kim**, Lead Curator for Asia at KADIST. “Who canonized the formation of history and whose bodies are yet to be written about as part of that story?” It is this vital question that frames the exhibition, presenting the work of three women artists: siren eun young jung, Hwayeon Nam, and Jane Jin Kaisen. This exhibition explores the history of modernization in East Asia through the lens of gender and the agency of tradition. Questioning the canon of the heterosexual male as much as it questions the West, this is also an argument over the many boundaries and borders of modernity that are carved into today’s aporia. In particular, in its critical understanding of the problems of the modernization process in Asia, this exhibition investigates how tradition is invented and generated in close relation to modernity and explores the emancipatory potential of tradition in Asia through a perception of gender complexity that goes beyond the canon of Western modernity.

**siren eun young jung** is widely recognized for her practice that looks at how one’s individual desire impacts their experience of world events, and how such encounters become forms of resistance, informing history and politics. Winner of the Korea Artist Prize in 2018, her work over the past ten years has focused on *yeoseong gukgeuk*, a genre of Korean traditional theater that features only women actors. The genre still survives today in an altered modernized form, but it is waning quickly. Documenting the performance of second generation *gukgeuk* actor Lee Deung Woo (aka Lee Ok Chun), jung’s *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity and Noise* also calls forth four performers that succeed the genealogy of contemporary queer performance—a transgender musician, a disabled woman performer/director, an openly lesbian actor, and a drag king performer. Engaging in these performers’ contestation against aesthetic canons, the artist lures the audience into an audiovisual setting activated by the feast of light, noise, and the moving body. siren eun young jung’s new production for the Biennale Arte 2019 was co-commissioned by KADIST.

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<sup>1</sup> The exhibition title is borrowed from the first sentence of the novel *PACHINKO* with the generous permission of its author, Min Jin Lee.



**Jane Jin Kaisen** is a Berlin and Copenhagen-based visual artist and filmmaker. Stemming from the artist's own diasporic awareness and experience, Kaisen's new piece *Community of Parting* keenly interprets the ancient Korean shamanic myth of Bari, in which an abandoned daughter revives the dead and ultimately becomes a goddess who mediates at the threshold of life and death. For the artist, a different approach to memory, borders and translation can be traced in the epic myth that resonates with gendered migrations caused by war, nationalism, ideological conflicts, rapid modernization and patriarchic oppression in East Asia. Dissolving spatial and temporal boundaries by juxtaposing images, sounds, archive material, and poetry with the redemptive performances of shaman Koh Sun Ahn, the artist explores the embodiment of liminality as she sharply dives into stories of resilient women and images of borders throughout the history of the Korean peninsula.

**Hwayeon Nam's** experimentation with archives investigates how human desire can amplify certain myths and values in today's discursive operations of nation and economy. In her new video *Dancer from the Peninsula*, Nam traces the fragmented archive of Choi Seung-hee, a legendary but controversial choreographer and modern dancer, whose life intersected many of the most tumultuous events of the 20th century in East Asia. Nam's manifold presentation includes single-channel videos that utilize found footage and images from Choi's archives, as well as a large sculptural structure, and a small garden installed behind the Pavilion. This layered multi-media installation offers an enchanting and performative bricolage of a controversial woman artist figure's life and her lofty aspiration toward an East-Asian dance, mobilizing her from the simplified nationalistic or ideological arguments against her.

Generating a complex narrative assemblage of historical interventions, the three artists in this exhibition seek to resist and create ruptures in the logic of systems and power; and they are keen to question how the development of civilization, violence of convention, and the norms of such history take place in our times. In alignment, the streamlined curves of the exhibition space further encourage the audience to explore and to experience the space through the coexistence of elements; such as the various heights of the space, lightness and darkness, and the relationship of the space inside and outside.

Saturated with the performance of tactile knowledge and the experiences of affect that are manifested through the sounds, rhythms, waves, series of scattered images and bodily movements; the exhibition attempts a space for the veiled, the forgotten, the exiled, the condemned, and the silenced. Here, they murmur, sing, cry, pause, laugh, express, move, and dance, and finally speak out loud. "History has failed us, but no matter."

**Artists' Websites:**

siren eun young jung <http://www.sirenjung.com>

Jane Jin Kaisen <http://janejinkaisen.com>

**Website of the Korean Pavilion:**

<http://www.korean-pavilion.or.kr>

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**Korean Pavilion - Significant Dates:**

Preview: 2019 May 8 – May 10

Press Opening: 2019 May 9, 13:30

Opening Ceremony: 2019 May 9, 15:30

Korean Pavilion X Hyundai Party: 2019 May 10, From 21:00 – 02:00

Venue: Laboratorio Occupato Morion (Calle del Morion, 2951, 30122 Venezia, Italy)

- With performances by Asian musicians: CLEO P (Thailand), CHANGSIE (Japan),  
IRAMAMAMA (Indonesia), KIRARA (South Korea), DJ YESYES (South Korea)

- Main Sponsor: Hyundai Motor Company



## Appendix 1 - Work Description

**siren eun young jung**

***A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise*, 2019, Audiovisual installation, multi-channel video, stereo and 5.1 surround sound, dimensions variable**

As an extension of siren eun young jung's ongoing *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* Project (2008–), *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise* (2019) transcends being a mere homage to the narratives within the genre of *yeoseong gukgeuk* or a spatiotemporal analysis of the period when the genre was active; it pictures an “impossible” genealogy that is transferred and expanded through the practice of today's queer performers. The *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* Project, a decade-long ethnographic research project into the unique theater genre of *yeoseong gukgeuk*, seeks to critically deconstruct the oppression-bordering conventions around gender, tradition, and historical consciousness. The most distinctive formal trait of *yeoseong gukgeuk* is that women perform as men. Each actor's technique of playing a man varies according to their own analysis and understanding of the male role. The men represented by *yeoseong gukgeuk* actors may seem like stereotypes—barely breaking away from social conventions—but at the same time the performers represent a unique gender that transcends any specific definition of masculinity. Their performances shake and provoke the biased notion of gender.

Presenting the performance of a second-generation *yeoseong gukgeuk* actor Lee Deung Woo, *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise* also calls forth four performers that provide a genealogy of contemporary queer performance. Lee Deung Woo is the most brilliant *yeoseong gukgeuk* male-role actor still performing today, who has also constructed a unique aesthetic with her extremely exaggerated ballim (gestures) and theatrical acting style. Lee's style of acting and the subsequently generated image embody the paradoxical presence of *yeoseong gukgeuk*, forgotten and unwelcomed by both the traditional and the contemporary theater. The performance and music of electronic musician KIRARA actively incorporates the sense of physical disjuncture and



segmentation that she experiences as a transgender woman. Lesbian actor Yii Lee has always provided the male-centered and gendered theater scene with an independent and unorthodox alternative. Seo Ji Won is a disabled woman, performer and director of the Disabled Women's Theater Group "Dancing Waist" where she has developed a very exceptional action aesthetic. DragKing AZANGMAN has strived to create a drag culture and community at the feminist-queer intersection. The practices of these women oscillate between the formal challenge of escaping conservative theater genres and the body's own uncomfortable and irregular modes of anomalous performativity that are prompted by each of their physical experiences. At the same time, they summon the history of the almost extinct art of *yeoseong gukgeuk*, bringing it back into the context of queer performance.

The ontological tradition of oral transmission, which is the basis of *pansori* and which *yeoseong gukgeuk* has followed, has been expanded to include more physicality and more performance. By flowing, stopping, deferring, or layering moving bodies, the methodology of oral transmission mirrors and impacts an "inter-body transmission" of queer bodies. The work is therefore an endeavor to repeatedly awaken the "queer turn" within an artistic practice, weaving moments of performing and sensing the performing as a form of "queering." At the same time, it seeks to question political aesthetics through its feminist-queer methodology of re-summoning the narrative of those isolated by official history.

### **Jane Jin Kaisen**

#### ***Community of Parting*, 2019, Double-channel video installation, dimensions variable**

*Community of Parting* traces a different approach to borders, translation, and artistic expression by invoking the ancient Korean shamanic myth of the abandoned princess Bari and employing female Korean shamanism as an ethics and aesthetics of memory and mutual recognition across time and space.



Rooted in oral storytelling and embodied by female shamans, the legend of Bari and her abandonment at birth for being a girl is mainly understood as a story of filial piety. However, Kaisen frames the myth as a founding story of gender transgression that transcends the logic of division, but has the experience of othering and loss at its core. According to the myth, Bari regains the community's acceptance after reviving the dead and is offered half the kingdom as a reward. Yet, the heroine refuses to abide by human borders and instead chooses to become the goddess who mediates at the threshold of the living and the dead. This is what distinguishes the myth of the abandoned Bari from other Korean myths about women.

Community of Parting draws on Kaisen's extensive research since 2011 into Korean shamanism and her long-term engagement with communities affected by war and division. The piece features imagery filmed in various locations including Jeju Island, the DMZ, South Korea, North Korea, Kazakhstan, Japan, China, the United States, and Germany. Combining shamanic ritual performance, nature and cityscapes, archival material, aerial imagery, poetry, voiceover, and soundscapes, the work is configured as a multi-scalar, nonlinear, and layered montage loosely framed around Bari's multiple deaths.

Both intersubjective and deeply personal in her approach, Kaisen treats the myth of the abandoned as a gendered tale of migration, marginalization, and resilience told from a multi-vocal site. In the shamanic ritual, the shaman abandons herself in order to mediate, gathering an assembly of the living, the dead, and multiple spirit witnesses. In a similar vein, a "community of parting" is formed in the piece around the shared sentiments of the abandoned. Ritual performance and chants by shaman Koh Soon Ahn, a survivor of the 1948 Jeju Uprising and Massacre in South Korea, constitutes a recurring rhythm and culminates in a ritual for the dead that involves the artist and her own personal abandonment. The myth is also reflected in the poetry of Swedish poet Mara Lee and in the poetics of Kim Hyesoon from whose book *Woman, I Do Poetry* the translated title Community of Parting derives. It further resonates in various narratives by South Korean, North Korean, and diasporic



women who negotiate how gender bias along with colonialism, modernity, and war have resulted in radical ruptures while unfinished histories continue to linger.

Infused by the living, the dead, and those yet to come, *Community of Parting* is actualized through a process of dissolution, revival, and becoming. Informed by shamanic practice, properties integral to the filmic medium are employed to contest and diffuse spatiotemporal boundaries and hierarchies of knowledge and being. In doing so, *Community of Parting* proposes other ways of *thinking and being with others*, including our relationship to nature and other life-forms.

## Hwayeon Nam

***Dancer from the Peninsula*, 2019, Multi-channel video installation, dimensions variable**

***A Garden in Italy*, 2019, Mixed-media installation, dimensions variable**

First, to learn and present the existing tradition, such as seung-moo (Buddhist dance). Second, to imagine and newly produce, informed by clues from past legends—for instance, working with the theme of Joseon Dynasty days and working around the concepts of their good-for-nothing leisurely men (hanryang), straw-hatted child (choripdong), the totem pole of the Great General (cheonhadaejanggun). Third, to choreograph the Eastern and the Asian, such as the notion of bodhisattva. Such are my three plans.

—“Choi Seung-hee and Women Celebrity Dialogues,” *Choonchoo*, March edition, 1941

In previous works such as *Orbital Studies*, *Imjingawa*, and *A Garden in Italy*, Hwayeon Nam investigated the methodologies of how movement conveys the various facets of an object by investigating it via archives. Her new work, *Dancer from the Peninsula*, focuses on the history of dancer Choi Seung-hee (1911–1969), specifically the period after 1941 when she defected to North Korea, and how her art mirrors the trajectory of her own life and that of the mid twentieth century. After touring around Europe, North America, and Latin America, Choi declared her ambition to invent



a uniquely modern East Asian dance, one that transcended the boundaries of Joseon (Korea). Japan initiated the Pacific War in December 1941, the year that Choi returned to Korea and it was during this period that she performed for Japanese soldiers in China as a part of their morale-boosting campaign. At the same time she announced new works inspired by classical Japanese musical drama *noh* (能) and Japanese court dance *bugaku* (舞楽). Living mostly in China during the war, she stressed the importance of modernizing Peking opera and the need to establish a new modern East Asian dance. Bridging these complex cultural positions, she had many names: not only was she Joseon's Choi Seung-hee and Japan's Sai Shoki (the Japanese pronunciation of Choi Seung-hee), she was also an internationally acclaimed dancer. During these tumultuous times, she witnessed the independence of Korea and the collapse of Japan in Beijing; in 1946, Choi defected to North Korea.

The works that Choi Seung-hee produced after 1941 remain the cornerstone of her legacy, forming the basis for both the creation of East Asian dance and what later developed into North Korean dance-drama. The context of this period complicates Choi Seunghee's legacy, but *Dancer from the Peninsula* does not focus on the conditions surrounding her life or judge her as a person. Rather, it focuses on her art and her research at the time, exploring the process through a framework of outside forces, aspirations as an artist, individual will to survive, and multiple bodies that have split in the collision of two contrasting timeframes—both the imminent tomorrow and the remote future that her ideals were headed toward. It also presents the trajectory of her life as the contour of an abstract and contradictory space that she dreamt of and ran toward, but could never reach. Is it possible for Choi Seung-hee to yet again be mobilized, not as an historical figure, but as an artistic force, not as the narrated past, but refracted through an ontology of the present?



## Appendix 2 – Curator Biography

### Hyunjin Kim

Hyunjin Kim is a curator and writer, currently the KADIST Lead Curator for Asia and the curator of the Korean Pavilion at the 58<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, 2019. She was a co-curator of the 7th Gwangju Biennale (2008) and worked as the director of Arko Art Center, Seoul (2014–15). Her numerous curatorial projects include *2 or 3 Tigers* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2017), *Gridded Currents* (Kukje Gallery, Seoul, 2017), *Tradition (Un)Realized* (Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2014), and *Plug-In #3-Undeclared Crowd* (Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2006). Kim has also curated and written for artists such as Nina Canell, Hwayeon Nam, Haegue Yang, Jewyo Rhii, and Seoyoung Chung, and commissioned performance/theater works of Sung Hwan Kim, siren eun young jung, and Jewyo Rhii, among others. Kim was a member of the advisory board for the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2014–16) and a jury member for the DAAD Berlin artists-in-residence program (2017–18).

## Appendix 3 – Artist Biography

### siren eun young jung

Born in 1974 in Incheon, South Korea, siren eun young jung currently lives and works in Seoul. Within her projects she explores how the yearning desires of anonymous individuals merge with events of the world, and how such contacts become sites of resistance, history, and politics. Seeking an artistic practice that would expand feminist artistic language, she began the *Yeoseong Gukgeuk Project* in 2008; the project traces the lives of surviving actors of the genre that emerged in the newly independent nation in the 1950s and waned during the military dictatorship. In her work, the artist employs various media, performance, and video in order to question the concept of gender and critically analyze the construction of tradition and history. She has been particularly active within Asia, participating in *Tradition (Un)Realized* (Seoul, 2014), *Ghosts, Spies, and Grandmothers* (SeMA



Biennale Mediacity Seoul, 2014), *Discordant Harmony* (Hiroshima, 2015/2016), Asia Pacific Triennale (2015), Gwangju Biennale (2016), Taipei Biennial (2018), Shanghai Biennale (2018), TPAM – Performing Arts Meeting (Yokohama, 2014/2018), and Serendipity Arts Festival (Goa, 2018). She is the winner of the Hermes Foundation Missulsang Prize (2013), Sindoh Art Prize (2015), and Korea Artist Prize (2018).

### **Jane Jin Kaisen**

Jane Jin Kaisen is a visual artist born in Jeju Island, South Korea, and adopted by Danish parents in 1980. She currently lives in Berlin and Copenhagen. Working across different media—film, video installation, photography, and performance—she engages themes of memory, migration, and gender through poetic modes of storytelling and non-linear montages of image, sound, voice, and embodiment. Recent exhibitions include *2 or 3 Tigers* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2017), *Forum Expanded* (68th Berlin International Film Festival, 2018), *Decolonizing Appearance* (CAMP: Center for Art on Migration Politics, Copenhagen, 2018), *Asian Diva: The Muse and The Monster* (Buk Seoul Museum of Art, 2017), *Art Spectrum 2016* (Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul), *Interrupted Survey: Fractured Modern Mythologies* (Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, 2015). She was awarded the Montana Enterprize at Kunsthallen Brandts in Denmark, and has participated in the Liverpool Biennale, the Gwangju Biennale, and the Jeju Biennale, among others. Kaisen has an MFA from UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) and an MA from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, and participated in the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program.

### **Hwayeon Nam**

Born in 1979, Hwayeon Nam lives and works in Seoul, South Korea. Nam has worked on choreographic movements through archive materials, capturing the various phenomena surrounding social systems, time, and space. She is also interested in rethinking the structures of cultural reproduction related to human desires, delving into the stories contained in artifacts, the history of colonial annexations, and the advent of the natural sciences, especially astronomy, flora, and fauna. With a focus on performance and video, her work lies in the linguistic performativity of



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questioning contemporary values and temporal notions of the present. Nam's solo exhibitions include *Imjingawa* (Audio Visual Pavilion, Seoul, 2017) and *Time Mechanics* (Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2015). She has participated in group exhibitions *Reenacting History* (MMCA, Gwacheon, 2017), *wellknown unknown* (Kukje Gallery, Seoul, 2016), *All the World's Future* (56th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, 2015), and *Nouvelle Vague* (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2015). Her performances include *Orbital Studies* (MMCA, Seoul, 2018), *Dimensions Variable* (Festival Bo:m, Seoul, 2013), and *A Garden in Italy* (Festival Bo:m, 2012).