

KUKJE GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE

U Sunok Solo Exhibition, *In Praise of Inaction*

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Exhibition Venue: Kukje Gallery K1



"Inaction" ironically means "to achieve everything by doing nothing," and to me is a practice of the way of existing and an ethical attitude in my hope of achieving ultimate value in harmony with nature.

- U Sunok, artist's notes

Kukje Gallery is pleased to announce *In Praise of Inaction*, a solo exhibition by U Sunok, one of Korea's most acknowledged artists. This exhibition marks her fourth solo exhibition at the gallery since 2011, and features twelve works that span more than two decades of artistic practice and encompass drawing, video, text, and installation. Taking the most poignant and philosophical concepts of artistic reason for being that encompass time and space, U Sunok has been visualizing works through her formal and methodological experimentations and poetic variations. U Sunok explores the theme of "inaction", tying a long philosophical history with contemporary concerns—confronting memories of disappeared places and absent subjects, and compelling her audience to think about how things are in constant flux. *In Praise of Inaction*, which began with the artist's re-reading of the "Doctrine of Inaction" by philosopher Lao-Tzu, confronts contemporary existence and the rise of overwhelming competition in life – in response, U Sunok's work proposes we slow down and observe things more closely.

The exhibition begins with U Sunok revisiting her own artworks produced thirty years ago. *Sea of Silence* (1983), an oil painting produced in school and dealing with the fundamental questions about the meaning of existence, was unstretched and rolled on her travels between Seoul and Germany, and until recently was left behind in Professor Günther Uecker's studio. Safely kept in storage for the next decades, in 2016 U retrieved the works and was confronted by the many small but discernible ways the objects had changed, and the traces of time embodied in them. The artist gave this painting a new title, *Painting of Time* (1983/2016), and presents it at Kukje drawing attention to this subtle evolution. For U Sunok, time is the medium of memories and a shadow of our existence; the painting embodies this, even if it is from the past and physically distant, it acts like an umbilical cord continually connecting her to its making, and also a part of the artist herself.



Painting of Time, 1983/2016, Oil on canvas, thread, wrinkles of time, 142 x 121cm
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

Upon entering the K1, *The Landscape of Inaction* (2014) immediately comes into view, where the artist recorded the path that leads to the Brother Klaus Field Chapel near Cologne, Germany. This work shows U Sunok's interest in a philosophy that emphasizes waiting and the way form is manifest through the long trace of time, frames her belief in the freedom afforded by "inaction." Designed by celebrated architect Peter Zumthor and known for its humble form and eco-friendly design, this beautiful place of meditation frees the mind through silence and absence, and evokes limitless depth. U Sunok presents the long journey of life by stretching the video that follows the winding road to the chapel to a ten-hour screening.

Empty space is one of the two major themes in the artist's oeuvre. For the artist, emptiness, whether it manifests in a drawing or sound or installation is not a negative thing at all, but rather speaks to the

pregnant possibilities that exist in all things. This latent potential can be seen in the work *Paradrawing* (2014/2016) where the artist records the total transformation of the former Tempelhofer Airport¹ into a public park. For U Sunok, this artwork is a “joyous practice, much like a journey of slowness, inputting meaninglessness to artistic meaning, or inputting meaning to meaninglessness.” Rejecting the city of Berlin’s plan to replace the airport lot with residential buildings and cultural facilities, its citizens established a civic group and led actions to achieve the formation of Tempelhofer Park instead. The park became a symbolic victory of the citizens gaining the freedom (Freiheit) against both capital and materiality. In U’s video, people go in and out of the large field freely, clearly testifying to the fact that this empty space is in fact fulfilled.



Paradrawing, 2014/2016, Video, 5 min 5 sec
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

The powerful affirmation of nothingness seen in the empty space of the park is a recurring theme in another of the artist more recent works *The Garden of Inaction* (2015/2016). An ephemeral work, it was first installed in the Buttes Chaumont Park located in the 19th arrondissement of Paris. The artist visited this area immediately after the Paris terror attack in November 2015 and wrote “Form is emptiness, Emptiness is form” in golden powder. This profound testament comes from the *Heart Sutra*, a classic Buddhist teaching. This intervention balances on her use of the gold powder in a place that is dangerous but peaceful, and silent but disquiet, ironically juxtaposing nothingness with a symbol for meaningless greed. A work that was temporarily present in the Buttes Chaumont Park, the artist will reinstall this message in the windows of the K1 gallery, illustrating the artist’s unique poetic approach to paradox of the world.

¹ The Tempelhofer Airport was designated as an airport in 1923, and was utilized as a major military base of West Berlin and commercial airport until its closure in 2008. It has been used as a public park since 2010.



Silence, Please, 2014, Video, 4 min 34 sec
Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Empty Space – We are all Passengers, 2007, Video, 45 min 14 sec
Image provide by Kukje Gallery

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U Sunok, 2011. Image provided by Kukje Gallery

Born in 1958 in Incheon, Korea. U Sunok earned her BFA and MFA in Painting at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, and left to study abroad as an apprentice to Professor Günther Uecker at Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Germany, in 1985. The seven years in Germany exposed the artist to a deeply philosophical and conceptual artistic culture, becoming the foundation for her own creative and artistic development. Since returning to Korea in 1995, she has been living and working in Seoul, and teaching as a professor of College of Art and Design at her alma mater Ewha Womans University.

With time as a major theme of her work, the artist brings the past into the present, thereby overlaying new meanings. *We are all Passengers* (2007), a video recording of a performance in Seongsu-dong, Seoul, shows the attaching of letters to the windows of an old building while crossing a pedestrian crosswalk. This action acts as a mirror reflecting the panorama of life in an artistic landscape. In another work U revived the deserted greenhouse within the former Defense Security Command (DSC) – now the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul – by planting flowers, and watering and caring for them. In this work titled *Greenhouse* (2009), the artist finds new possibilities and beauty, illustrating how things forgotten in time and memory are never-the-less still active and connected to the present. Through the recordings of these modest actions, U Sunok is able to visualize abstractions of her underlying investigations of time.

U Sunok had major solo exhibitions including *Drawing for a while* at Kukje Gallery, Seoul (2011); *Lunar Oasis-The Moon and Her Friends* at Atelier 705, Seoul (2009); *microhome-aichi* at Aichi Prefectural Art University, Aichi (2009); *Microhome* at Kukje Gallery, Seoul (2006); *abi~me d'un lieu* at Daelim Contemporary Art Museum, Seoul (2002); *Hanok Project* at Art Sonje Center/Samcheong-dong, Seoul (2000); and *materiellmateriell* at Kukje Gallery, Seoul (1993). She also participated in several group exhibitions such as the 9th Gwangju Biennale (2012); *Abstract it!* at MMCA, Deoksugung, Seoul (2011); *Vide & Plénitude* at Espace Communes, Paris (2009); the 15th Biennale of Sydney (2006); *Leaning Forward, Looking Back: Eight Contemporary Artists from Korea* at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (2003); and *A Second Talk: Contemporary Art from Korea and Japan* at the MMCA, Gwacheon, Korea and the National Museum of Art, Osaka (2002).

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* High-resolution images are available for download via Webhard.

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