

a Nurvista

30 January 2021 // Cemeti - Institute  
for Art and Society // Daily Visit Registration  
is Required

Youngho Lee



BHOFODL

**Reconstructed Biotope**  
**19 - 30 January 2021**

Daily Visit  
19 – 30 January 2021  
Open: Tuesday - Saturday | 11 am - 4.30 pm  
4 session per day

\*Limited to 8 persons per session

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Elia Nurvista and Youngho Lee's artistic practices are marked by an enthusiasm for representing the global migration of resources. Their practices show a striking combination of "expository tendencies" and "poetic aspirations" in composing political statements about cross-geographical events and phenomena. They utilise the diverse content that is dispersed across the information wilderness, which is increasingly formed from arbitrary sources in today's era of technology. "The globalisation of ideals and material conditions," is the focus of the issues that they attempt to examine by each exploring different subjects: while Elia unpacks the political behind (the leftover) food, Youngho re-maps any experimental (remnants of) sounds. Global migration not only problematises the active movement of humans, but also encompasses ceaseless (and unlimited) exchange of inanimate objects (commodities) and abstractions (concepts), both actually and virtually. The process

# Reconstructed Biotope

Curator: Manshur Zikri

of migration seems influential on our senses when we translate meaning and context of what is migrated (in this case food and sound). In response to these problems, Elia and Youngho's artistic journey has led them to encounters with the visual jargon that represents mechanisms of data-based labour, surveillance systems, digital technology and social media in the lives of society. Playing an analogical role in order to demonstrate the tensions between a number of binary oppositions (for instance: global-local, West-East, modern-traditional, aural-visual, ordered-random, synthetic-organic), their work uses materialistic approaches to expose

imagination, memory, perception, and even stereotypes about situations that are invisible but firmly embodied. With this orientation, their works concur with the appropriation of the past and the adoption of the present.

# Mediated Resource Migration; Constructed Cultural Biotope

Curator: Manshur Zikri

The issue that forms the basis of the artistic practices of Elia Nurvita and Youngho Lee, through which they attempt to draw connecting threads in this exhibition, is an enthusiasm for representing the phenomena of global migration of resources. They have investigated a number of these sources as historical issues, while others have been collected from contemporary encounters. Their practices, however, find their most exciting polemic in the field of study rooted in “historical materialism” on the one hand, and on the other, in stimulating spirited reflection on the experience and modes with which people represent the “objects” that they frame.

From a curatorial reading the starting point for explorations of this enthusiasm is the project they developed during a residency at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany, in 2018 – 2019, although the residency project is not the only reference from which the concept of this exhibition was constructed. That project was a continuation of what they had already done in previous years. Their work on the narratives that form the background to these works clearly differ: if Youngho prioritises historical motifs, Elia foregrounds political attractions. However, we can sense the similarities in their paradigms in their translation of the relative progress of a civilisation that, it might be said, is the product of ceaseless conflict: “North-South” — West versus East. That is, a paradigm which attempts to understand how modern products (or the by-products of modernity’s incursions on all parts of the world) have come to play such a significant role in

our lives today. Their paradigm for understanding all of this comes from the perspective of “post-protectorate-era” or even “postcolonial” nations. In other words, there is a desire in their work to offer an “decolonising” interpretative model—although not drowning in analytical terms, it still proposes a programmatic framework—to investigate the development of today’s world, “the progressive era,” which in fact now towers over narratives of tyrannical power, the cruelty of war and new and old forms of colonisation and exploitation.

This “progressive era” remains unbalanced as a result of the remaining injustices that reside, obscure in people’s subconscious, hidden behind the pretext of cultural assimilation, manifesting in the “global system” that never ceases to repress those who are marginalised and continues to influence the way we view our local environment. The paradigm that links Elia and Youngho’s work is an attempt to deconstruct, or invite us to understand, this imbalance.

With an awareness of the characteristics that underlie the practices of both these artists—practices that are very different but which have a magnetic attraction that allows them to connect with each other—this exhibition is presented as striking combination of “expository tendencies” and “poetic aspiration,” which both artists attach to their arrangement of political statements about cross-geographical events and phenomena. They utilise the diverse content dispersed across the information wilderness, which is increasingly formed from arbitrary sources in today’s era of technology. “The globalisation of material conditions and ideals” is the focus of the issues they examine by each exploring different subjects—food and sound—free from the constraints of how major historical narratives connect the two subjects. While Elia investigates the politics behind food (waste) Youngho re-maps any kind of experimental sound (waste).

Although they are very different, we can sense how Elia and Youngho’s works in this exhibition both target the issue of global migration, which not only problematises the active movement of humans, but also encompasses ceaseless (and unlimited) exchange of inanimate objects (commodities) and abstractions (concepts), both actually and virtually. The process of migration itself seems influential on our senses when we translate the meaning and context of what is migrated (in this case food and sound). In connection with these two subjects, we can see that the artists’ journeys have led them to

encounters with the visual jargon that represents mechanisms of data-based labour, surveillance systems, digital technology and social media in the lives of contemporary society. However, their work has a more analogical role—far from analytical although it carries that decolonial paradigm—when demonstrating, if not transfiguring, the tensions that often surface between binary oppositions such as global and local, East and West, Orientalist and Occidental, modern and traditional, authentic and reproduces, aural and visual, ordered and random, between the synthetic and the organic. In that context, the construction of the two works by these artists seems to have a strong orientation to materialise—or to use a materialistic approach as its foundation—imagination, memory, discourse, and even stereotypes around situations that are invisible but firmly tangible. Their experiments concur with efforts to appropriate the past and adopt the present.

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***Savage Noble Series, No. 6 and 7***, which is the result of digital processes applied to *Papaya and Watermelon (1860)*, a painting by Brazilian artist Agostinho José da Mota, and *Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge* (probably around 1601-1610), by Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, are parodies of iconic images which radiate “Renaissance symbology” (or at least, the formal images particular to Europe). These digital prints on canvas are part of Elia’s ***Früchtlinge*** series (produced in 2018-2019) are deliberately displayed in this exhibition as “opening works” to present the context of the artists efforts in contesting, or pointing out the standards of Western knowledge and, primarily, the European model of identity construction around globalised subjects and objects. Spatially, Elia’s images are presented alongside videos titled ***You Are Not Paranoid; Observed Yourself Being Watched (2018)***, a single channel version from an installation that, when presented in Berlin, was part of Youngho’s ***Clinamen – Matter Misprision*** project. As a short essay showing the possibilities of audio-visual sublimation within the phenomenon of technological dependence in mediated human life, this video’s suggestion of futuristic tendencies stimulates our awareness of control over contemporary human activity, the way in which our routines are noted, followed and tracked by technology itself.

Interestingly, the connection between these two works emerges when we carefully consider how “the materiality of the abstract” and the “abstraction of the material” are circulated in a cultural biotope constructed by a system. As in Dawkin’s predictions of a *memescape* and the potential for a “memetika” that follows, the video ***You Are Not Paranoid; Observed Yourself Being Watched*** and the images in ***Savage Noble Series No. 6 and 7*** are appropriate analogies for understanding how our world has become part of a “non-concrete” nature, the existence of intangible issues that also circulate beyond material mobility, and that non-material threads (threads of concepts) also become a factor in the discursive discrepancies that the world experiences. These come in many forms. One can be seen from the ways that regions define other regions, through a practice of othering and labelling as well as colonialism, control and surveillance. The animated video that Elia made for the ***Früchtlinge*** project, displayed between the aforementioned works, is an illustration of these discrepant discourses: how commodities experience particular migrations and exoticisation by the dominant system, by modernism—which is in this work represented by the symbology of machines.

Meanwhile, Elia’s installation, which is constructed in the form of a fruit market complete with wooden boxes, is an extension of the articulation of global migration that this exhibition addresses. However, unlike the story told through the animated video or the digital appropriation in the ***Früchtlinge series***, which embeds in fruit the symbology of European power (the Renaissance and, subsequently, Modernism— “visual and machine symbology”) as a critique of Western standardisation, Elia’s new work ***Tropical Repertoire*** (2020) is more focused on what may be carried by this commodity (fruit) besides its biological characteristics. The commodity that migrates in fact carries textuality that is also, essentially, migrated as an abstraction: invisible, but culturally alive in people’s understanding or knowledge. Matters outside of the biological category that migrate from one location to another, from one object to another. “One narrative of fruit migrates and will be connected to another narrative of fruit.” Every object has a story, a context, data, which can be mutually connected to the story, context and data of another object. The illustrations of global migration in the fruit installation are also Elia’s unique metaphor for actual socio-political conditions, closely tied to humanism, which are inseparable from how



“textual problems are attached” by the system (producing forms of identity, figures and labels) which determine the narrative and status of the migrated subject/object.

This is also the case in the context of sound, such as music.

Youngho’s video ***SOUNDTRACK: Biotope - Temporary protectorate*** (2019) takes as background the situation of post-war Korea, when the “advanced development” of the West (in this case the United States of America) was transplanted into South Korea, and which aligned with how the country’s then political-economic powers introduced contemporary culture to citizens by emphasising the visual, and through adoption of technology. The video is a transfiguration of repurposed textual, visual and aural archives through the artist’s process of artistic interpretation and conservation of historical sources. This video was made in the context of long-term research which investigates and explores media sources (such as publications and film) that have been collected in Korea since the 1960s and 1970s. These videos represent how artefacts of “sound culture” (for instance, music) also undergo global migration and, in their progression, determine characteristics of development in the regions that they seize. This video speculates—through visual games based on found footage, of course, as characteristic of the sound exploration model that it complements—on the connection between Western and Korean culture that resulted from the distribution of cultural resources which, to paraphrase Youngho’s own statement, “is not only based on material matters, but also on the concept and structure of historical narratives and other institutionalised forms of politics.” As a visual mapping of experimental documentary approaches, this video is Youngho’s visualisation of the technical (and spatial) structure that characterises South Korean musical rhythms which, in all aspects (economic, political and cultural) is related to the “progress” of the USA. This visualisation is presented as a story of contemporary Korea, of how postcolonial appropriation is utilised in recent developments and connected as a way of challenging the structural definitions that have thus far been based on Western perspectives.

Youngho’s photography series ***Pencil of Nox*** (2008) complements efforts to trace how, and to what extent, Youngho attends to spatial and temporal developments of a city, like Seoul, with socio-cultural connections to the USA. The work plays with blurring the



boundaries of organic and geometrics aspects of the city. This series of photographic collages, in which the artist intends to experiment with merging visual landscapes from the layered synthetic environment into a polyphonic coexistence, also uniquely represents a visual impression of sound—the sound of the city. Apart from this, we can observe that Youngho consistently pays particular attention to the development of the digital media that influences his photographic practice. His video ***Photo Studio Project – Episode I*** (2010), which also complements the rest of the exhibition, shows traces of the artists' creative process. These two accompaniments are presented not only in order show why Youngho's attention was initially drawn to these issues, but also as an important element of exhibitions richness in looking at modernism's position (or the "migration of cultural artefacts", if we want to align with the curatorial context of the exhibition) as a determining factor in the changes and processes of future development in a region, which are always in tension with existing local interests.

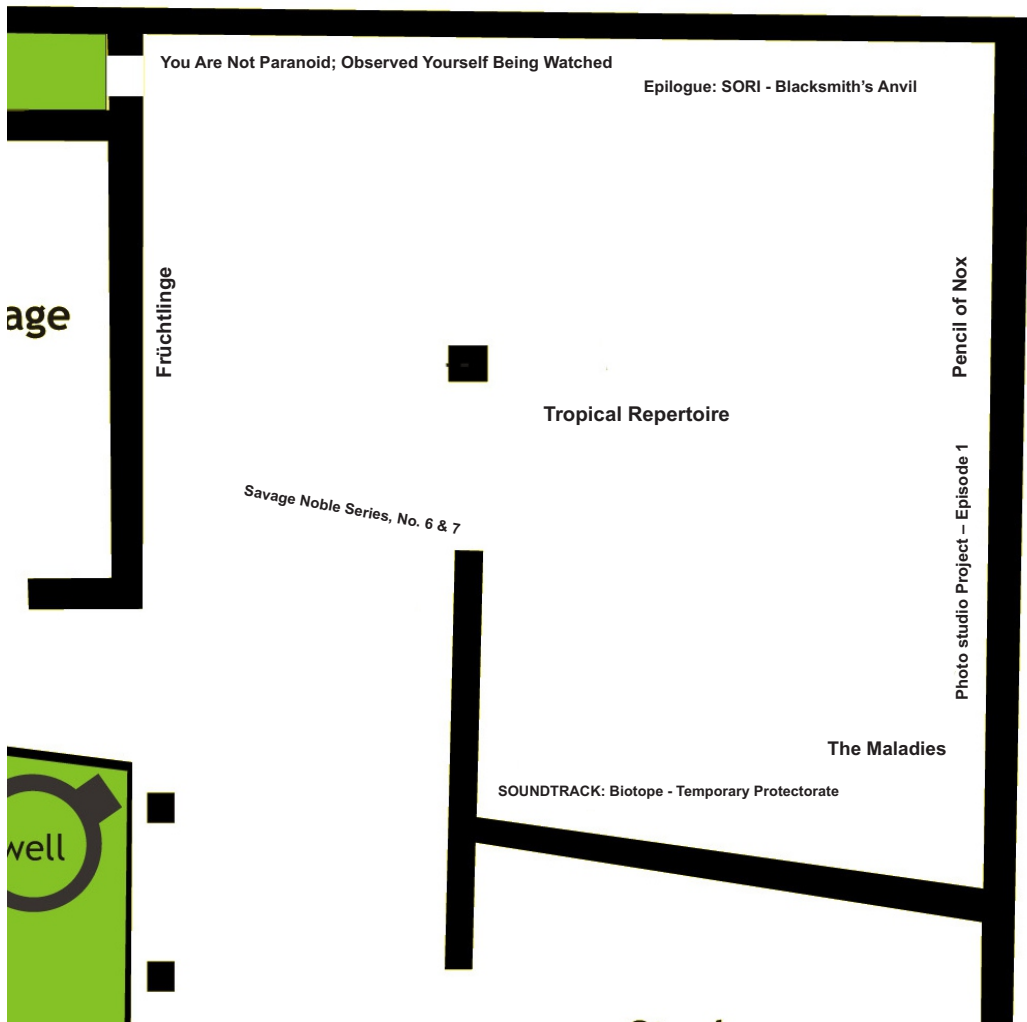
Youngho's practice in appropriating mediated data and material is also evident in his latest video work, titled Epilogue ***SORI Blacksmith's Anvil*** (2020). As a continuation of his efforts to rescue forgotten audio and visual recordings, this video is an audio-visual experiment that consciously applies multi-screen logic in cinematic articulations, even though it is presented in one frame (single channel video). This video is also made under the auspices of a long project to develop a new cultural ecosystem through digital archiving, and has been part of the online project Kino Music Project (<https://kinomusicproject.com/KINO>). Simultaneously, with a similar approach to appropriation, Elia has made a new video titled ***The Maladies*** (2020). This video seems to be a further development on the issue addressed in *Früchtlinge*, addressing the origins of food that has been historicised alongside the increasing institutionalisation of political-economic discourse in capitalist ideology; narratives that live in the realm of media and which mediate public understanding of the social and cultural functions of food consumption, are also legitimised by their global imaging. It appears that Elia's latest video operates on the same frequency as Youngho's projects when discussing the migrations of that which is not concrete alongside the mobility of that which is.

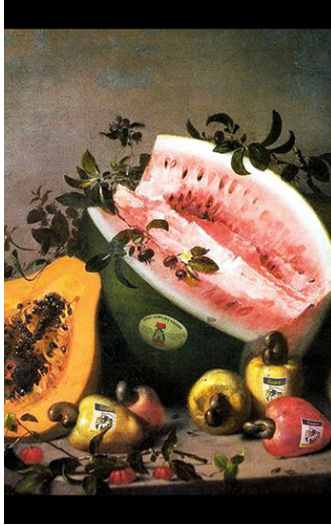
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In closing, it should also be noted that my efforts to curate a number

of works by these two artists in this exhibition is in fact motivated by a desire to open discussion on the position of an art exhibition that has a specific, minimalist scope, which results from stable and balanced conditions, and which offers a temporary abode for a collection of particular “lives”.

*Reconstructed Biotope* is a metaphor for the interpretation of products of art practice, displayed for the public within a certain curatorial framework as a culturally constructed “collection of lives”. The cultural ideas and objects that have been produced by this process of artistic interpretation are treated like living things that can interact with each other both dialectically and dialogically. The art exhibition, although presented as an “artificial biotope”, can become our main window into understanding what is actually alive in reality. \*



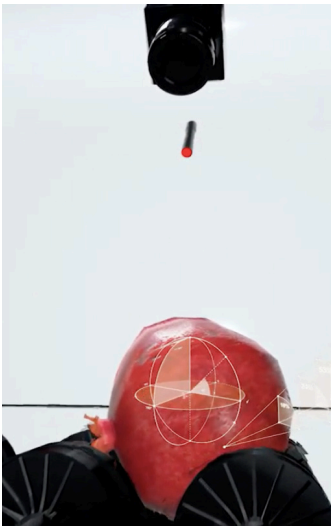


### Savage Noble Series, No. 6 & 7

2018 / 2019

Digital print on canvas

A reflection on the dissonance in the meaning of objects between Eastern and Western perspectives, between the exotic and the advanced. This work is a parody that critiques Western standards of knowledge that have until now been seen as established. Consciously satirising the symbology of the Renaissance, Elia adds layers of new meaning, in line with contemporary discourses that frequently reject the magical aura of masterpieces and focus on drawing out the context of relevant issues. This digital series is not a mockery, but rather an actual representation of how our world today remains under the power of the West.



### Früchtlinge

2018 / 2019

Single channel video  
animation, 12 mins 45 secs,  
color, sound, HD, 16:9

Departing from reflections on migrants and refugees, Elia arrives at the issue of perspective; of what is regarded as "foreign" and the characteristics of "exoticism" which follow. The animation illustrates a superpower system (which is born out of modernism; symbolised by machines) that applies signifying mechanisms, or labels, as well as protective systems, as part of a system of control and exclusion. Displaying a completely artificial nature, the nature of animation, and referring to the commodities believed to have migrated globally, Elia offers a subtle critique of Western discourses that enact social categorisation and international control mechanisms. The video critiques the issue of migrants and refugees, without presenting their attributes.



## The Maladies

2021

Single channel video, 12 mins,  
color, sound, HD, 16:9

The excesses of imperialism and colonialism are still felt in the traces of the systems that produce food as a commodity. In her searches through the internet wilderness, Elia found a video titled “About Banana,” an advertisement promoting banana’s as a healthy food, made by the banana corporation United Fruit (1935) to encourage Americans to consume more bananas. Elia addresses the issue of how monocultures change the landscapes of livelihoods and environments in many places, by imitating the style of speech in the original. By artificially changing an ecosystem through monoculture, this video presents as narrator an ordinary creature represented as a disease/epidemic resulting from these systems.



## Tropical Repertoire

2021

Fruits and wood boxes installation,  
barcode (digital print on paper)

Elia’s obsession/interest in fruit also raises self-criticism around how issues of exoticisation emerge, not only in the dichotomy of the West looking to the East. By selecting several links about fruit on the internet, based on her interest in them—from issues around agricultural labour to the use of fruit as an object, this installation seems to criticise global food production systems as well as her own obsessions with fruit as subject matter. This fruit is arranged as labelled with stickers of the kind that usually contain codes that are difficult for consumers to understand, except that these stickers actually provide consumers with access to information about the fruit, as if to configure the fruit in such a way that it can speak for itself.

## Youngho Lee



### You Are Not Paranoid; Observed Yourself Being Watched

2018

Single channel video, 2 mins  
23 secs, 16:9, HD, colour, sound

This video work, which is a single-channel version of a larger previous project of a spatial installation titled Clinamen - Matter Misprision, shows Youngho Lee's efforts to investigate how we can understand the role of social media, technology, data and surveillance systems in our daily lives. It also shows how nowadays people who are attached to media have allowed their activities to be marked, followed, monitored and traced. This illustration implies that the imagined masses (in virtual reality) and populism in real life are, in fact, closely related to the practice of manipulating opinions and possibilities for surveillance from the state or the ruling party, which pose risks in limiting democracy. Ironically, the possibilities of the control society can manifest dysfunction in the development of the media itself. This video also represents how Youngho responds to the relativity of technology and human progress by utilizing the point of view of an Eastern-oriented sensibility. The Eastern perspective sees technique and nature as two things that are mutually integrated into a holistic ideal, while the Western world sees technology and science as humans' means to control nature.



### Photo studio Project – Episode 1

2010

Single channel video, 4 mins 19 secs, HD, colour, sound

Lee shows special interest in photo studios, as they begin to be pushed into oblivion with the rapid development of digital media. In the process of Korea's modernization, the family pictures that hung in photo studios served as the ideal family model, and the photographers affiliated with photo studios carried out their role as a medium that realized the happy family image prescribed by Korean society. Lee is still in the process of carrying out this Photo Studio Projects by visiting photo studios and interviewing photographers. Her first project involved the reconstruction of an old photo studio named "Yoonoo"—it is still in existence—through photomontage and interviews with the owner of the studio. She hopes to shed new light on photo shops, in general, as a medium that spreads family ideology in Korean society. (Description was retrieved from Arkomedia Distribution Catalogue 2010 – 2011, pp. 60-61).



### Pencil of Nox

2008

5 pannels, print on inkjet paper, 80 x 56 cm (each)

A new set of collaged photographs suggest strata of various time and space, enabling multi-scalar variations of the imaginations. Heterogeneous visual materials of CG and Chromakey shot montage of objects, as well we merge into a polyphonic coexistence with the multi-layered synthetic environment. As soon as a viewer realizes that these photographs are not depicting reality, one starts to search for the intension of the artist and the viewer tries to find an answer to the question. A set of collaged photographs that evoke the more fanciful proposals of Wolf Wostell, but with none of the bombast, typify the artists' understanding and responses to their environment. The cities depicted here are, like the great megalopolises of South Korea and Germany, energetic, provisional, organic places, so fluid in fact that they appear to evolve before your very eyes. It's a fluidity that affords the artists' roughly sketched proposals for "an-architectural" interventions huge freedom—a flaccid balloon clings hopefully to an apartment block, a frantic geometric form proposes a Matta-Clark like incision in a shabby gable end. This is a world where anything is possible, a frenetic, sometimes trippy world, a place located somewhere at some time between now and then.



## Epilogue: SORI - Blacksmith's Anvil

2020

Single channel video, 9 mins  
41secs, 16:9, HD, colour,  
sound

In the history of Western music, they tried to reduce noises in the process of improvement of musical instruments. But it was a particular case in the world, mostly folk instruments of the world had the opposite process. They made all kinds of efforts to add noises to instruments, though it's not necessary to perform with a musical note. The concept of noise has changed depending on time. The overtone, which makes harmonic resonance, was considered a kind of noise and has been assumed to be a problem until being theorized

scientifically. On the other hand, it was called "angel voice", and considered to be sacred. Metallic music instruments that contained a lot of overtones are used in the church and the temple. Futurist painter Luigi Russolo had a large interest to produce original music with metal and machine. Interestingly, his music called the first noise music featured some imitated metallic sound. Metallic sound is made by a human, and sounds beyond various boundaries - also this material is used as traffic, money and arms. It is different from the noises of thunder, wind, cascades, rivers, streams and leaves - natural sounds. Metallic noise effects on the mind very strongly - and it is ominous and sacred - in the movie "Oedipus Rex" of Pasolini, the sound of messenger's bell is sounded with evil information. And in the poem "The Bells" of Edgar Allan Poe, the bell has the sound of the anxiety and sadness. When we think about our circumstances of listening to music, digital technology made possible noiseless music. In a theoretical sense, we can make all sounds to data on digital and cut the redundant noises. It means, now we listen to the artificial sound. It's not any longer the same kind of music as it a decade ago. To put it the other way around, now we can first realize how important noises play a part in a piece of music because of the development of digital technology. If we try to decrease further noise, the noise will influence the mind further. The sound is not lost as long as there is air. As Luigi Russolo wrote, we are in noises life now. But our ears rejoice in it which the ear of an eighteenth-century man never could have withstood, for they are attuned to modern life, rich in all sorts of noises. We'll be listening to and making music as Pythagoras found the sounds of their anvils were beautiful and harmonious and discovered Pythagorean tuning in the blacksmith at war. (Description was retrieved from <https://kinomusicproject.com/>).



## SOUNDTRACK: Biotope - Temporary Protectorate

2019

Single channel video, 8 mins 9  
secs, 16:9, HD, colour, sound

Framing the development of the musical rhythms of Seoul and South Korea, this video seeks to question how appropriation and postcolonial transition processes are enrolled to contemporary rhythms. It is motivated by the historical growth of the entertainment industry since the Korean War, the times when traditional culture and Korean style are reinterpreted, as well as the fusion of folk songs or the nation's traditional instruments blending with Western pop music, and the history of how the Korean government

uses popular culture for propaganda purposes through the development of mass media (television and radio stations). This video is part of a research, excavation and appropriation of images and texts from various archives, recorded sources from various collections, as well as an exploration of the rich history that exists in various publications, artefacts, and music products and films made and collected from the 1960s to 1970s in South Korea. Through this video, the artist also wants to protect and revive the audio-visual recordings like a biotope in which authentic Korean tones refer to busy big cities.



# RECONSTRUCTED

**ELIA NURVISTA** was born in Yogyakarta and attained a Bachelor of Fine Art from the Indonesian Institute of Art in 2010. She is interested in exploring various art mediums with interdisciplinary approaches and foci on discourses of food. Through food she attempts to examine issues of power, social inequity and global economies. Elia has participated in several artist residencies, including the Koganecho Bazaar Artist in Residence, Yokohama (2012), "Politics of Food" di Delfina Foundation, London (2014), Taipei Artist Village, Taipei (2014), Choreographer's LAB di Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt am Main (2016), and a one year residency at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2018-19). In 2015 she initiated a study group focused on food, Bakudapan, with colleagues from various disciplines, especially anthropology and philosophy. Bakudapan is conducted with the principle of mutual sharing based on friendship amongst its members. Along with Bakudapan, Elia researches food in socio-political and cultural contexts. Elia currently lives and works in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

**YOUNGHO LEE** was born in Seoul, Korea Selatan, dan attained his Master's of Fine Arts from Hochschule für Bildende Künste in 2006. His artistic practice explores the relative advancement of technology and people, whereby the idea of relativity is rooted in a particularly oriental sensibility and perspective. His work takes the form of film installations or multi-screen videos. In his installations, he investigates socio-historical motifs in visual apparatus and restructures critical concepts around phenomena of contemporary media, and the city as a theatre for fantasies that stimulate the senses and play with time and space. His work also tries to identify the connections between (digital and analogue) media and human senses, by manifesting models of synthetic environments. As an artist, he has participated in residency programs at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany (2018-2019), Seoul Art Space Geumcheon Residency, South Korea (2016-2017), Asia Culture Center/ACT Creator Residency, South Korea (2015-2016) and Kuenstlerdorf Schoeppingen, NRW, Germany (2011), and participated in several exhibitions including at Kunstforum Floesheim, Anita Becker Galerie, Stadelmuseum, Arko Art Center, Daegu Museum, and the Asia Culture Center. Several of his works are in the permanent collection of the Kunstforum Mainturm, Germany, and the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea.



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