



**Seoul Mediacity Biennale
Newsletter
July Issue, 2023**

CONTACT

Image/Text

Generally speaking, most contemporary artworks, exhibitions and biennales already draw their own maps. Many exhibitions held in recent years have centered around common interests such as revisiting of modernity, relationships between human civilizations and ecology, phenomena mediating invisible territories and beings, and premodern perspectives toward the future. For being organized in intrinsically 'global' contexts, biennales function as communal 'maps' that investigate the aforementioned subjects extensively and acutely. The process known as 'mapping' in English synchronizes with various social, philosophical, and political circumstances of the present, thereby facilitating new means of understanding the world. By acknowledging significant artworks, exhibitions, and biennales worldwide that utilize mapping to coincide with contemporary life, the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale *THIS TOO, IS A MAP* (SMB12) adopts a title that reflects the immanent character of biennales. This title is not necessarily concerned with maps as such, but rather proposes a starting point for inquiries into how and what ought to be 'mapped.' In this way, SMB12's title is a premise that says, "Therefore, this too, is a map."

A map may be broadly defined as an image/text comprising a series of symbols that convey various forms of condensed information. We synchronize ourselves with a particular space called Earth as we study each map's geographical, historical, and political boundaries; its representation of landmass, which appears reduced by a specific ratio of scale, and territorial ownership; and its coursing waterways such as rivers and the oceans that interconnect like blood vessels. Viewing an artwork is not so different from reading a map—we decipher elements of an artwork or an exhibition through the 'symbols' presented by the artist, writer, or curator. In turn, these artworks induce experiences through the relationships they disclose among their images

and texts. At the core of these works are the mechanisms revealed when images and texts are weaved, synthesized, intersected, or disassociated. As each piece unfolds, we achieve a simultaneity with the specific space created by the artist and see the world through their eyes. More importantly, this moment of bliss—an instantaneous illusion that the world in the art might belong to us—might be what connects the art to the realm of daily life and eventually to society at large. How does art reveal itself outside exhibition spaces? Is this even possible? And how does 'mapping' in artworks connect to the world?

SMB12 designer So-Hyun Bae participated in the Postcard Program by creating an image comprising nine pieces of land arranged in three rows, a layout that suggests sequence or transformation. What begins as a rounded expanse of land with uneven edges gradually becomes elongated and acquires curves, until it finally takes the shape of the Korean Peninsula—a form that is already very familiar to some of us. The progression of these images is reminiscent of the history of 'diaspora', itself a subtopic of SMB12 and the functional opposite of a non-territorial map drawing. One can argue that our identities may be conceived as those who recognize the Korean Peninsula and those who do not. Such an imaginary narrative expands in the context of Bae's background. She is a Korean designer who was raised in France and currently works in Germany; she belongs to the 'MZ generation' (a Korean term used to designate certain Millennials and Gen Z individuals as a single group); she speaks multiple languages, crosses various cultural boundaries, and instantly responds to and empathizes with her peers' expression rather than conventional values or ideology. However, the text that unfolds below each of the nine images on her postcard puts a damper on such an impression.

- So, your parents, where are they from?
- Basically, my father is from Nantes. And my

Jin Kwon

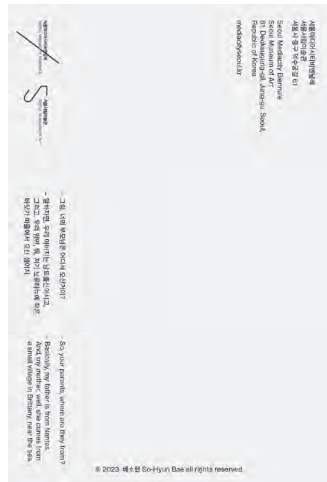
mother, well, she comes from a small village in Brittany, near the sea.

In this brief exchange, one person is asked where their parents come from, to which they respond by naming a region in France, unrelated to the Korean Peninsula. Although the parents discussed here are most likely not Bae's own, the text introduces a change or passage of time in general as the form of an event. The dialogue gently reveals an important aspect of contemporary notions of 'locality'—that one's geographical background does not guarantee their association with a particular culture. Still, the text evokes the social, political, and economic environments that inform one's identity. This indeterminate relationship between image and text after all, as well as the potential for their mutual disassociation, is what ultimately constitutes a symbol of this postcard image. No argument is made, yet rich possibilities concurrently emerge in multiple directions. Without prioritizing image or text, all these conceptual courses become an image-postcard-map, the likes of which are distributed online and via SMB12's Collaborating Spaces. Postcards, which are centered on human communication and exchange, thus become a starting point for media that yearns to travel elsewhere.

"If an image/montage is all your time-space, if the universe that they weave together occupies the core of your time in private, all your social relationships, the mainstream culture of political and economic activities, the history in the palm, and all the spaces of your imagination, if it is the realization of your curation itself, then will you be able to say that your life is not missing anything? If all the objects repeatedly whisper that you are dreaming now, if someone says softly that this is only an illusion and fiction like the lions in your dream that represent many things...."

Hyundo Kim, "Toward a Reviving Flame—

In-between the Image/Text That Choi Min Left Behind," *Cheerful Learning, Delightful Knowledge, Joyful Knowing: The Choi Min Collection* (Seoul: Seoul Museum of Art, 2023).



The 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale *THIS TOO, IS A MAP* Postcard Program, 2023
So-Hyun Bae © all rights reserved

In Silence

Biennales do not simply exhibit artworks in a singular format within a given space. Their programs and exhibitions are often realized in spaces that are constantly shifting and fluid. Indeed, any site can be activated for the purposes of a biennale—YouTube, electronic displays in public places, alternative art spaces, and independent bookshops.

The Seoul Mediacity Biennale, as it is known today, has undergone numerous changes since its title. A project called *SEOUL in MEDIA* preceded the first edition of the Biennale, which was originally called *media_city seoul* and later became *SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul* before finally settling on its current name. A number of different spaces have also taken part in the Biennale's programs over the years—the Biennale's history began at Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA) Gyeonghuigung Palace branch (formerly known as the Seoul 600-Year Memorial Hall), which was demolished in 2016; the Korea Film Archive hosted screening programs and presented artworks during SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul 2014 *Ghosts, Spies and Grandmothers*; and the museum storage and the museum itself was fully utilized during SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul 2016 *NERIRI KIRURU HARARA*.

On September 21, 2023, the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale *THIS TOO, IS A MAP* (SMB12) opens at six venues: SeMA, Seoul Museum of History, SeMA Bunker, space mm, Sogong Space, and Seoulo Media Canvas. This new map of Seoul that encompasses spaces above and below ground was selected in order to situate art amid daily life and expand the physical reach of SeMA.

The Seoul Museum of History is a particularly notable venue. To get there from SeMA, one can simply walk along the adjacent Jeongdong-gil street until reaching a road leading to Gyeonghuigung Palace. The Seoul Museum of History lies just beyond, providing new viewpoints through which the city's past, present, and future may be considered. In 1996, the museum began receiving donated artifacts

from Seoul citizens that included a wide range of 'objects,' official documents, and pop culture-related products—not merely archaeological 'relics,' as might be expected. This approach to collecting demonstrates the Seoul Museum of History's understanding of the Korean capital as a geographical space and an integral facet of politics, cultures, and human histories. As such, this venue corresponds to SMB12's theme of drawing an alternative map(s).

Surprisingly, this is not the first time that the Seoul Museum of History has served as a venue for the Biennale. During the 1st Seoul International Media Art Biennale *media_city seoul 2000 city: between 0 and 1*, it presented one of five main projects entitled *Escape*, and it was again used for the 6th Seoul International Media Art Biennale *Media City Seoul 2010 Trust*, when it exhibited Kim Soun Gui's outdoor installation *Silence of the Well* (2010). Inside an old well—which is presumed to have provided water for Gyeonghuigung Palace 500 years ago and has since been restored—located in the museum's quiet backyard garden, the work incorporates sounds of chirping birds and blowing wind, which undoubtedly means not only for the speakers as equipment but also 'sound' could be part of media art. For Kim, who primarily works in France, it was meaningful to create a sound piece that confronts the complex, multilateral space of Seoul with silence: "Silence does not mean an absence of sound," she says, "It means an opportunity to listen to all kinds of noises."

This year, Seoul Museum of History presents works by Jesse Chun. Since she was a child, Chun has lived in many different countries and she converges with her own experience of living as a foreigner in her art practice exploring the possibility of translating things that are abstract or impossible to read and hear. In this way, Chun's oeuvre resonates with Kim's installation by similarly encouraging the audience to discover various legible/audible entities in a

Sinae Park

space of silence, one which is devoid of clear language or any perceptible sound.

Beginning in September, numerous spaces throughout Seoul will once again be activated by abstract images, cryptic instructions, and

spiritual and political projects that invoke silence, tranquility, and statics. Audiences and participants are invited to explore these venues independently and draw new maps that connect the past, present, and future.



Kim Soun Gui, *Silence of the Well*, 2010
Sound installation, Dimensions variable
The 6th Seoul International Media Art Biennale
Media City Seoul 2010 *Trust* exhibition view

Reading along the Interface

In parsing the theme of this year's Biennale, 'media' can be interpreted as a manifestation of hybrid forms—artworks installed in gallery spaces and on urban billboards, hung from street poles and across the exterior of Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA), printed on pages and screens that are transferred to walls, and distributed via exhibition literature used by museum visitors. Accordingly, the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale *THIS TOO, IS A MAP* (SMB12) is built upon various interfaces that encompass transnational solidarity from an alternative geographical perspective, 'underground commitments and coded data' and its related systems.

Varied distributions and experiences of SMB12 are planted in various locations and understood as part of the comprehensive Biennale experience, while also serving as temporary places for the audience (who repeatedly move back and forth between reality and digital space) to linger. They are fragmented visual clues operating as exhibition venues, circulating text and image data through limited spaces and selectively comparable languages. I would like to introduce two media projects launched prior to the Biennale: the website, which materializes the anatomy of the Biennale on the screen, and the Postcard Program, which comprises texts and images collected from diverse sources.

The nature of any website guarantees visitors unrestricted on-screen mobility as swift as their cursor, but lurking behind each click are cracks leading to possible exits and errors. SMB12's website focuses on plainly realizing its primary function—to convey information—and incorporates constellations of dispersed circles that move and hover above different on-screen elements that denote geographical details of the Biennale's venues. The Biennale's design team of So-Hyun Bae, Laura Richard, and Florian Fromager imagined individual movements as correlations of the performative act of 'mapping' by illustrating them as multiple graphic symbols. Clusters of circles thus

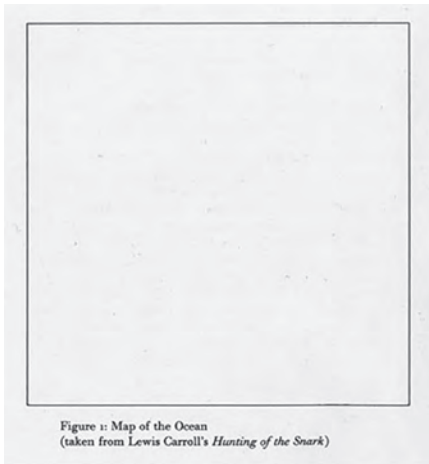
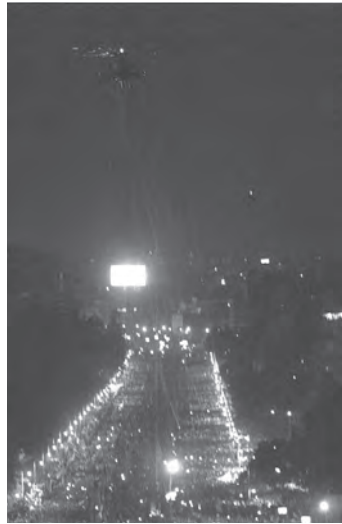
sporadically appear throughout the SMB12 website, representing the Biennale's six Venues, fourteen Collaborating Spaces, and ten SeMA Branches that each become graphic codes signifying geographical coordinates, depending upon the contexts of the images and texts visible on screen. Two circles appear in the upper right corner of the browser window—the one on the left is a button that scatters the graphic codes to the peripheral areas and resets them, while the one on the right resembles a slanted compass when it is clicked and displays different pages that comprise the Biennale's structure and points different directions. Visitors can utilize both interfaces for enhanced mobility as they explore the topography of SMB12.

When looking at documentation of past editions of the Seoul Mediacity Biennale, one can see how printed media such as posters, invitations, postcards, stickers, flyers, and brochures have refined the interfaces of the Biennale. These lightweight materials serve as pre-mediators that greet viewers, introduce the Biennale, and stimulate curiosity. Postcards produced and used as invitations and souvenirs functioned to instigate sources of rumors during SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul 2014 *Ghosts, Spies and Grandmothers*, in which they constituted a unique space unto themselves within the context of the Biennale. From September to December 2013, postcards by four artists—Sylbee Kim, Kim Young-gle, Rho Jae Oon, and Park Chang Hyun—were produced and distributed as a pre-Biennale program for the following year's exhibition. These postcards contained quotes and images that were intended to operate as 'psychological' passageways capable of starting rumors by asserting online and offline media environments as the netherworld.

Aiming to "reinterpret contemporary era," the SMB12 Postcard Program invites various individuals involved in the Biennale—artists, writers, participants, the Biennale team, and Museum staff—to contribute images that fit

Miji Lee

within a standard postcard size of 100 × 150 mm. The drawings, photographs, quotations, texts, and collages visualized on these postcards undergo processes of contribution, collecting, editing, and distribution to form a communal map. In turn, the horizontal contact enabled by the postcard images and their unique interpretations generates other interfaces that represent the Biennale, multiplying as they move from hand to hand. Such postcard-maps have been distributed since June 2023, leaving behind future traces of SMB12, which is set to open some 100 days from now. They are freely available at Collaborating Spaces as well as on the SMB12 website.



The Ocean Chart from Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876)

An image posted to the contributors of the Postcard Program by Rachael Rakes, the artistic director of the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale *THIS TOO, IS A MAP*



SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul 2014
Ghosts, Spies and Grandmothers Postcard Program, 2013
Sylbee Kim © all rights reserved

Has corners but does not jab, Extends himself but not at the expense of others, Shines but does not dazzle. Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 58

서울미디어시티비엔날레
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SEOUL MUSEUM
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Jesse Chun, *O dust still*, 2022
3 channel video installation, 3 mirrors. 7 min 6 sec video);
dimensions variable (installation)
Courtesy of the artist

Image/Text

In Silence

Reading along the Interface

Jesse Chun, *O dist*, 2022
3 channel video installation, 3 mirrors
7 min 8 sec video, dimensions variable (variable)
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