



Seoul Mediacity Biennale
Newsletter
October Issue, 2023

NEW MOONS

New Moons

I am thinking of a friend's friend working on his psychoanalysis dissertation many years ago. He surveyed those who voluntarily left home to live in a foreign culture and their psychological states. He interviewed and case-studied primarily international students and migrant workers in the UK from all over the world. Except for a few international students fully supported by their families, they constantly dealt with visa problems while going through many part-time jobs. For students who have left home to study abroad without family support, financial issues are inevitably at the center of their lives. The research aimed to discover and analyze the untold stories behind their decisions to leave home, as well as identify unexpected psychological effects such as elusive memories and traumas and provide a specific portrait of their sense of belonging.

In the art world, cultural or existential displacements are not rare. Many artists and curators participate in residencies in other regions, deciding to leave home to take jobs or find environments suitable for their artistic and everyday practices. Art projects such as biennales provide opportunities to encounter many different cultural moves. Artists invited to biennales come from around the world, often with multiple citizenships and cultural backgrounds. The local artists of the biennales also join this global network, introducing and exchanging their visual languages. This year's Seoul Mediacity Biennale presents contemporary values and gestures concerning displacement in post-Western-centered cartography in a myriad ways. The contemporary landscape of displacements and diasporas represented in the exhibition thus reveals associated aspects and experiences of colonialism and post-colonialism, economic exploitation and the exploited, political and economic hegemony regarding lives and natural resources, complex relationships around nationalism, and the presence of the others erased throughout the ongoing

modernization of Asia.

Disintegrated 93–96 (2017) by Miko Revereza is a short film directly addressing the sociopolitical backgrounds of this year's Biennale. It shows home video footage of a family who immigrated from Manila in the Philippines, to Los Angeles in the United States, in the mid-1990s. The family looks happy living in their materialistic and civilized environment, as if showing off the American dream come true. On the other hand, the superimposed voice of the present-day artist confesses how he now sees this past landscape. The narrative echoes adversities contrasting with the utopia of which the family once dreamed, each family member's loneliness, and the conflicts between the father—who has focused his lifetime on guarding the family—and his son, the artist himself.

Folds (2023) is another film by Revereza that focuses on his subconscious and memories of migration. During its running time of around twenty-six minutes, *Folds* constantly shows landscapes in motion against other moving landscapes, as well as portraits over other portraits. Both *Disintegrated 93–96* and *Folds* provide an undocumented family's personal and psychological experiences of migration. They also lead to acknowledgment of the historical events and sociopolitical situations surrounding everyone's life on this planet: the USA as a nation of immigrants and the contributions of diverse groups of newcomers; the 1992 LA Riots as a multi-ethnic incident; intergenerational rifts caused by the erratic changes of sociopolitical environments during the rapid modernization of Asia; the many people who died on September 11, 2001; and the collapse of Korean middle-class families after the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Traumas of loss and deprivation (of a sense of belonging) are based on memories. The psychological wounds of an experience can be summarized as one's present being overwhelmed by (a memory of) the past, not aligned with one's current self. In physics,

Jin Kwon

displacement is defined as the change in position of an object, and this notion might be useful to expand the idea of displacement-invoked traumas. Displacement in physics is a vector quantity encompassing the subject's geographical direction and magnitude, caused by relocation and movement. On the other hand, grid coordinates pinpoint a position and measure the distance of movements; these are used universally, just like units of time. *Orange Grid* (2013–2023) by the late American artist Channa Horwitz is an installation of a three-dimensional grid following the Sonakinatography system that she created. The system is formulated score for choreography or sounds, revealing the grids that declare the modernity of Western culture. However, the real world, which exists outside the binary system that uses only zeros and ones, is contrasted with the grid space in the exhibition. In Asian cities such as Seoul, grids are still foreign. However, if we could think of this grid room as different thoughts on time, it may lead to another insight to understand the current world.

Physicists have worked hard to establish a clear definition of time, though they have yet to achieve it. Isaac Newton distinguished absolute space and time in metaphysics from relative space and time, which is measured by humans as years, months, and seconds. His theory later served as the basis of quantum mechanics. However, these are all about concepts, not the proof of time. All analysis in physics is just logic to understand nature and the universe through mutually agreed symbols—grids and numbers—but not merely absolute truth about life. On the other hand, humans perceive time based on not numbers but memories. Humans' acknowledgment of time is in memorizing the past and not remembering the future that has not arrived yet.

A sense of belonging seems, then, to be associated with memories. Since many circumstances lead to losing this sense of

belonging, many ways must exist to regain it. One can have a sense of kinship in daily human relationships but also in utterances facing different memories, such as the silent resistance of rewriting an unwritten language, erasing the borders of a world atlas, or redrawing a map upside down. This year's Seoul Mediacity Biennale is a development of its past editions, which celebrated media's potential to shed light by calling the others erased by dominant historical narratives, and artistic imagination that transforms unwanted legacies such as disasters into various futures. However, this year's edition is taking a detour to read the world through individuals' inner worlds and ways of utterance, which are diverse compared to the past. The utterances are often abstract, constantly changing, involving the inheritance of an ancient future, traversable over genres and boundaries, and more than anything else, a sense of a new era that courageously reveals personal stories.



↑ Miko Revereza, *FOLDS*, 2023
Single channel video, HD, 26 min
Exhibition view of the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale
THIS TOO, IS A MAP, Seoul Museum of Art, 2023
Photo: GLIMWORKERS

The Hybrid of Media That Erases Boundaries

Seoul Mediacity Biennale has been building its history as it endures many changes in utilizing, expanding, and channeling of media. One's understanding of media becomes a measure in defining and evaluating the Biennale. The word "media," a plural form of "medium," referring to art materials, is interpreted as a mediator that connects multiple elements, a communicative tool, or a message itself. Based on that idea, I would like to introduce artists whose works utilize media as a medium, striving to connect media with their own messages and networks and connect themselves to these media. This text will help readers understand the media that transform and expand through this 12th Biennale.

Agustina Woodgate, Radio EE (<http://radioee.net>) co-producer, presented this project in the 12th Seoul Mediacity pre-Biennale *TERRAINFORMING*. An independent radio



↑ ARGO, a 24 hours marathon broadcast walking the streets of Istanbul, IV Design Biennial, 2018
Courtesy of the artist

station, Radio EE calls itself a transportable radio station, moving around different cities and regions to "connect" and "deliver." Their 24-hour live broadcast asks questions of those who have lived in various places, using multiple languages and transmitting their words worldwide. The radio, a traditional medium within human history, "mediates" the universal and diverse world via minimal editing and processing. Without locational limitations, the radio paves the way to marginalized and isolated places that are usually overlooked, allowing us to imagine a space with their undiluted voices. It is a map consisting of the sounds of transportation, migration, and environmental changes in a specific location, and stories of regional areas, presented in real time.

In *THIS TOO, IS A MAP*, Woodgate presents works inspired by maps. Incorporating an atlas and AI-generated digital maps, the artist raises questions about power and governance, which change with time. The map(s) where visual boundaries have been obliterated through sanding share the sense of the contemporary world of digital imperialism driven by the development of media technology and AI generation systems. Woodgate rejects the idea of Western-centered rationality, reflected in current information technology and communication methods, as well as books as a medium. While doing so, she creates a world map as a new chapter of the world based on artistic imagination, rather than another expanding toward a colonial idea. In *The New Times Atlas of the World* (2023), Woodgate's latest work, an extension of *The Times Atlas of the World* (2012), an automatic flipper turns the pages for map scanning. Scanned map images are processed by an AI program, which reads the codes and commands written by the artist and produces new pictures. As one map transforms into around thirty new images, audiences can have a real-time experience of how the original information is altered and reconstructed on the screen. Erasing a physical book has become "an act of intentionally destroying and disturbing

Hanul Cho

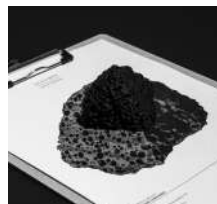
the algorithms systemized in the digital world.” The artificial dissolution of borders, where surfaces are scraped to dust and gradually undergo erosion, implies a possible approach effacing the firmly encoded governance to resist the new digital colonialism. Visualizing the deterioration in the digital world, Woodgate breaks down traditional map-making, national borders, and artistic boundaries.

Steffani Jemison, who conveys her artistic visions through drawing, painting, performance, and writing, presents a way to decipher messages behind encoded languages and drawings. *Untitled (Rough Projection)* (2023), a set of five new AI-generated pieces, finds inspiration in letters carved on a rock. Jemison painted a piece of found glass in silver, scraped some parts, and added patterns using a brush. Between language and translation, the history of Aboriginal people, drawing, and movement, Jemison’s artistic realm is expanded in her visual essay in the Biennale anthology. Her writing uses language to weave through the smoothness and roughness of the rock resolving trivial anecdotes, personal memories, ancient history, the sense of physical and geological time, and material. The essence of reading and writing that deviates from the systemic grammar of linguistics is no different from her drawing.

Nolan Oswald Dennis deals with the decolonization of Africa from geographical and geological perspectives. They explore the medium in an atlas made of diagrams and 3D prints of rocks at a geological museum. The title of *Isivivane* (2023), means “a mound of rocks” in the Zulu language and refers to signposts that mark places of geographical significance. Dennis overlays and reconnects the interactions between contradictory and complementary systems as between natural and fake rocks. In geology, depth measures continuous time, and strata (accumulated soil mixed with various materials) movement transforms space into vertical time. Along with a map virtualizing an imaginary

African continent, Dennis’s pseudo-rocks represent history without land, questioning the political aspects of space and time. *Atopia Field* (2021), another piece inspired by the liberation of the African continent and its migration history, invites audiences to freely enter the imaginary space, which is also an alternative territory. In a new world where ideas from science fiction, ancient history, mythology, and literature are linked, Dennis tears down the boundaries in the real world, such as a sense of belonging, alienation, discrimination, and classification.

The hybridity of media questions cultural, social, and political hierarchies through paradoxes and tensions generated by diverse ideas while connecting isolated and marginalized entities. It creates ruptures and gaps between firmly rooted systems, allowing the waves of autonomous bodies and autogenous voices to penetrate anywhere.



↑ Nolan Oswald Dennis, *Isivivane*, 2023
Exhibition view of the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale
THIS TOO, IS A MAP, Seoul Museum of Art, 2023
Photo: GLIMWORKERS

Maps Leading to Other Maps

Preparing an exhibition takes longer than the exhibition itself. Similarly, the sum of the spaces used for producing and transporting works, and the traveling distance, is larger than the exhibition space. We can create many new maps when we weave all the different spaces involved: artists' studios dispersed all over the world; production studios and transportation paths; museums, galleries, and private collectors waiting for artworks; customs offices; and the Media Canvas, which will present artworks in the center of the city. Movement paths and bases are maps already. These maps were drawn by everyone involved before the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale's opening and are still in progress. Discussing every map produced would be impossible; however, I would like to introduce two places that function as significant signposts for this year's Biennale.

One is the SeMA Nanji Art Residency. Converted from a leachate treatment facility around Nanji Hangang Park, Nanji Residency was established in 2006. Managed by the Seoul Museum of Art, the Residency houses studios and exhibition spaces for artist residents. The studios are mainly used by Nanji Residency artists selected through a review; however, a few artists participating in this year's Biennale have found a temporary studio at Nanji Residency to produce works.

Christine Howard Sandoval, who is also a Canadian indigenous community member, discovered traces of colonization in the styles of architecture built in the 18th and 19th centuries by Spanish missionaries. Her drawing series created with mud, soil, and sand explores this subject. Adobe mud, mainly used in Sandoval's work, is a construction material found in desert environments, presenting us with this missionary culture's origin. Conversely, the soil in Sandoval's new work *Surface of Emergence (diptych)* (2023) contains North American colonial and other stories. With her on-site assistant, Gyuri Kim, Sandoval took soil samples from the land surrounding the Nanji Residency to

produce this piece, adding the cultural context of Korean pottery. The new work overlaps the two regions' soil.

Jesse Chun was born in South Korea and spent many years in Hong Kong, Canada, and the USA. Her art revolves around the dynamics between her life and the other side of language. A New York-based artist, Chun needed a place to collect and edit part of her family history for a new body of work in the Biennale. One of her artworks in the Biennale, with a long title—*notes on new moons / oak / sun (new moons are often invisible to the naked eye; notes by my grandmother Lee Oak Sun-buddhist name Jeong Gak Haeng; other notes on history; my offerings-on speaking together)* (2023)—is an installation incorporating documentation left by Chun's grandmother Lee Oak Sun, who significantly influenced her artistic practice. While staying in Korea, Chun tried to find traces of Lee, a folk dancer and monk. However, she found only a handful of records of Lee as an artist or family member. She is documented in handwritten letters and photographs on music stands only in the exhibition. Still, the Nanji Residency served as a space for the two women artist, Chun and Lee, to meet across time and space.

The other place I would like to introduce is Seoulllo Media Canvas. The large screen installed at the building in Malli-dong Square, adjacent to Seoul Station, captures the attention of passersby, including Seoul residents and tourists. In the case of this Biennale venue, the place itself is the medium. Some participating artists represent the experiences of the cities they are based in and their interest of media. This screen thus fulfills the theme pursued by the Seoul Mediacity Biennale for many years: city and media.

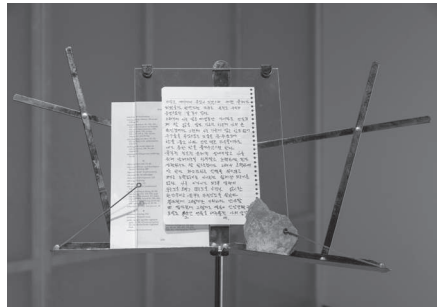
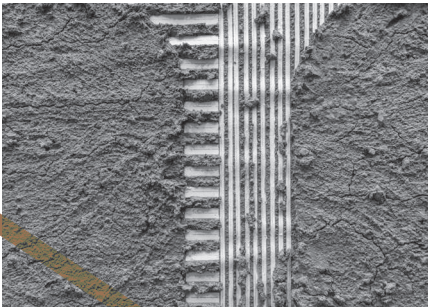
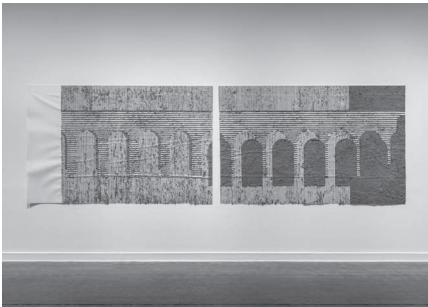
YOUR COMPANY NAME, a graphic designer and cultural practitioner collective consisting of Clara Balaguer and Cengiz Mengüç, presents a video approximately five minutes long. *WORKING Title Title HERE* (2023) weaves daily

Moon-Seok Yi

aesthetics—familiar designs and interiors—from immigrant-run stores and advertisements in Rotterdam. High-end equipment and production and editing programs are often needed in video production. However, YOUR COMPANY NAME has produced a PowerPoint-style video featuring diasporic landscapes shot on a smartphone during long walks in the cities they are visiting and conversation collections shared via Etherpad, an open-source text editor on the web. Their project, which captures multicultural

daily life using everyday technologies, will be playing every day around sunset.

All three artworks produce cultural topographies following their own compasses. Nanji Residency and Seoulo Media Canvas, where these maps are prepared and presented, are the bases that make up this Biennale's map. They form another map leading to *THIS TOO, IS A MAP*. I hope audiences can read the process of preparing and producing the final map, which is the Biennale.



↑ Christine Howard Sandoval, *Surface of Emergence (diptych)*, 2023
Exhibition view of the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale
THIS TOO, IS A MAP, Seoul Museum of Art, 2023
Photo: GLIMWORKERS

↑ Jesse Chun, *XJ, language for new moons*,
Exhibition view of the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale
THIS TOO, IS A MAP, Seoul Museum of History, 2023
Photo: GLIMWORKERS

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↑ Channa Horwitz, *Orange Grid*, 2013–2023
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