



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

**OPENING**

## Drawing *THIS TOO, IS A MAP* with Everyone

COVID-19 has induced rapid changes throughout the contemporary art world. As the pandemic transitions into an endemic phase, suppressed yearnings for art have broken open, forcing us to confront a new chapter characterized by digitalization and generational change among visual art consumers.

The pandemic also tremendously impacted the Seoul Mediacity Biennale (SMB). Following its beginnings with the 1st SEOUL in MEDIA 1988-2002 and the 1st Seoul International Media Art Biennale media\_city seoul 2000 city: between 0 and 1, SMB continued to take place every two years over the subsequent decades. In 2020, however, SMB was postponed for the first time in its history due to the pandemic, delaying the 11th Seoul Mediacity Biennale *One Escape at a Time* until 2021 and forcing much of its programming to be carried out virtually rather than on-site. When the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale opens on 21 September 2023, it will have been five years since the last time the Biennale welcomed audiences to experience the full spectrum of its exhibitions, programs, and events in person.

Adopting the theme *THIS TOO, IS A MAP*, the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale (SMB12) will be presented at six venues including the Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA). This special edition of the Biennale reveals an urgency of communication with its audience after an interval of five years. By bringing participating artists and audiences together, SMB12 reclaims its former mode of communication with the public by tracing its way back to a spirit of gathering that had been temporarily paused and producing a map that is not territory-centered. As opposed to a conventional map from cartographies, the map proposed by the Biennale operates as an “alternative map” blurring political, social, cultural, or geographical borders. In this respect, SMB12’s exhibition, events, and publications encourage a practical understanding of the Biennale’s theme and encompass various aspects of art and culture, constituting critical pathways for a

Biennale that is “co-produced by everyone.”

Prior to the official opening of SMB12, Preview Event will take its place on September 4 in the SeMA lobby and courtyard. One project to be unveiled during the Preview Event is *I Belong to the Distance 3, (Force Multiplier)* (2023) by Torkwase Dyson. This sculptural series, which makes its debut at SMB12, strategically uses space and movement to generate tension between repression and freedom. A majestic black structure situated in the SeMA lobby evokes the darkness of oppression and violence that attempts to silence voices. The artwork is completed by performers who move between its holes and free spaces. Kwon Lyoneun, a choreographer who participated in the pre-production of the piece, will premiere a performance by the same title as Dyson’s sculpture, featuring physical movements that reinterpret the structure. This performance will be a special treat to audiences.

Another project presented during the preview is *Earth Monument* (2023) by ikkibawikrrr, a Korean art collective that has been very active in the global contemporary art scene. This work is a monument created by compressing soil collected from the outskirts of Seoul’s satellite sites into molds. ikkibawikrrr’s monuments will eventually erode and break apart, representing a collapsed dream of community as well as mourning, even for an instant, the suffering and sadness endured by deported workers.

Not everyone who wanders and strives to find their way is lost. Upon examining the alternative map offered by *THIS TOO, IS A MAP*, viewers will find a topographical map in which the spaces and existences of diverse earthly beings are connected multidimensionally, thereby forming bilateral relationships. In this respect, SMB12 functions as a communal map created by artists and audiences, serving as a space for communication best suited to the changing times in which we live. It is hoped that everyone will take part in collectively completing the Biennale by drawing their own paths and maps.

## Jaehyun Jung



## The Sensory Amplifier

From the Pre-Biennale programs in 2022 and to the main Biennale project in 2023, SMB12 follows the historical trajectory of the Seoul Mediacity Biennale, producing reference points that connect the time and space of the “present” and “drifted now (or past).” By drawing a self-referential map, SMB12 expands across productions, exhibitions, publications, and events, which include talks, workshops, performances, podcasts, and live DJ performances.

This year’s Biennale looks into the unique movements of those who voluntarily migrate or are involuntarily transferred, focusing on the multiple possibilities that recognize differences rather than solidarities. Such an approach appears in the inevitable usage of two languages throughout the Biennale, as the disruptive arrangement of Korean and English texts necessitates a more active reading experience. Visitors’ eyes must wander back and forth between the two languages in order to find equivalent words in their mother tongues or translations of particular terms. By comparison, live communication is based on language that is simultaneously or sequentially produced through listening and speaking to others. It involves the acceptance of delays and ambiguous phrasings that occur in the rough, split-open space between languages. Intentional stoppages in communication stimulate the reconstruction of experience, and in so doing reflect the essential nature of SMB12’s events while also providing indirect guidance for how they ought to function.

Some of SMB12’s events operate as extensions of artworks created by the Biennale’s participating artists, or otherwise focus on the words and sounds that confront and interact with such works. *Frequency Tropics (FT) Radio*, co-produced by artist Kent Chan and Seoul Community Radio (SCR), is a DJ event that acknowledges climate change by expanding the aural imagination that stems from the heat of tropical climates. Seoul-based DJs will activate

the SeMA rooftop to foster a celebratory mood and lead attendees toward a tropical future on SMB12’s opening night. This collaborative work will also be broadcast via the SMB12 Channel and recorded as a podcast available on Spotify, both of which will continuously operate during the Biennale—one format invites audiences to listen to a radio program at a specified time, while the other allows them to listen to pre-recorded audio at a time of their choosing. Both modes of dissemination immerse audiences in a non-visual world at different times of the day.

Jaye Rhee is currently putting the final touches on her project *Arizona Cowboy (as part of Far West, So Close)*. Consisting of a performance and sound installation, this work makes reference to “Arizona Cowboy,” a 1955 pop song characterized by a feeling of idyllic and foreign landscapes, which Korean audiences indirectly experienced via Western films. It repeats the words “Arizona Cowboy” using a catchy rhythm with awkwardly translated lyrics like “the village bar over the hill.” A choral performance of this song will be recorded in a gallery space at the Seoul Museum of History and later played on speakers in the SeMA courtyard at designated times. The song’s unusual lyrics and familiar rhythms will permeate the outdoor environment and alter its sonic ambience, interrupting visitor’s aural perception and capturing the moment when active “listening” takes over from passive awareness.

Korean artist Andeath led a workshop titled *Geologic Techno: Dance with the Earth Beat* as part of *Station*, SMB12’s Pre-Biennale program, in which she and her collaborators transposed the earth’s intangible seismic waves into sound waves. During the Biennale, Andeath will present a workshop in collaboration with geologist Seongjun Park and street dancer Juhye Ko as a means of better understanding the land. Here, audiences will learn to use their entire bodies to listen to the ground while a soundtrack comprising twelve techno music tracks produced

## Miji Lee

by Andeath in collaboration with DJs Xannex and ZEEMAN plays in the background. The workshop will take place in multiple sessions, beginning with basic sensory exercises that develop participants' ability to think through their bodies and engage in cognitive practices of utilizing their bodily organs. The final session will culminate as a live event in which participants wearing shapes of land come together and share

their sensory experiences.

These and other SMB12 events propose unconventional encounters that operate as springboards for recollecting and amplifying the words and ideas of the Biennale. By collectively sharing ephemeral experiences, participants are expected to gather soil of various grains, stomp their feet to understand each other, and lay the groundwork for their daily lives.



↑ Andeath, Concept image for Workshop  
*Geologic Techno: Dance with the Earth Beat*, 2023  
Courtesy of the artist

↑ Jaye Rhee, *Arizona Cowboy (as part of Far West, So Close)*, 2023  
Courtesy of the artist

## Belonging based on the Ruptures

Once a thriving Black community in the United States, Oscarville, Georgia became a ghost town after the rape of a white woman led to the town being razed and its residents killed. Years later, the town was submerged beneath the surface of Lake Lanier, which was created by the Buford Dam. Kowaliga, Alabama was a town developed by the self-made Benson family, who were former slaves. The Bensons built schools, banks, and railroads, all while advocating for Black people's rights. However, the town was wiped off the map when floodwaters were released from the Lake Martin Dam. In Oregon, the city of Vanport was once the second largest in the state and home to a burgeoning Black community. However, it was also flooded due to the government's racist measures.

Numerous ridge lines spread like veins from the *Baekdudaegan* mountain range, commonly called the backbone of the Tiger [a metaphor for the Korean Peninsula]. During Japan's occupation of Korea, metal spikes called *danhyulcheolju* were driven into the ground as an attempt to cut off the "blood vessels" and block vital energy from circulating throughout the land, thereby disrupting the national spirit. It is also said that the Japanese used these spikes for producing land surveys in their efforts to produce modern maps, while Korean citizens frequently traveled to these mountains to remove the spikes. In Seoul, the construction of *Jongmyogwantongdoro* [meaning a road that goes through *Jongmyo*] (now called Yulgok-ro) destroyed *Changgyungung* and *Jongmyo*, examples of symbolic architecture from the Joseon Dynasty, all while being ostensibly justified by the construction and expansion of modern roads.

These aforementioned stories are fragments that were collaboratively shared and discussed by American artist Torkwase Dyson and Korean choreographer Lyoneun Kwon throughout a period of six months, beginning in February 2023. In the contemporary era, there are

constant separations, displacements, and movements that fluidly occur across the globe. In such a world, SMB12 navigates approaches of "non-territorial mapping" and is set to open to the public with *I Belong to the Distance 3*, (*Force Multiplier*), a collaboration between Dyson and Kwon.

Dyson calls herself a "painter" who deals with the persistent traits of the environment, geography, culture, infrastructure, and architecture. Using abstract visual languages that cross two-dimensional and three-dimensional spaces, Dyson explores African American perspectives and relationships formed between Black bodies and natural and architectural environments, as well as the ways in which they relate to geography and notions of belonging. In her past projects, she has visualized the history of the pearl-gathering industry in the Gulf and its influence on the African slave trade; relations between aquatic geological elements or infrastructure such as oceans, waterways, and dams; and histories of race, global capitalism, and trade.

Kwon creates choreography that considers how one's body is physically and conceptually altered by social and cultural systems and policies. She captures changing aspects of how bodies have been treated within the field of dance since the introduction of South Korea's military exemption policy. Her work also borrows from pop culture entertainment such as K-pop random play dance and tour bus dance in order to investigate the processes of "momentary entertainment culture" that are created in public space.

This collaboration between Torkwase Dyson and Lyoneun Kwon can be understood as a co-practice based on "a sort of translation upon translation." Put simply, it proposes a sculptural movement to which collaborators respond based on their own interpretations. In keeping with this translation system, the collaboration between Dyson and Kwon presented at SMB12 manifests their common desire to facilitate a



# Hyewon Lee

more active space of exchange between the US and South Korea.

Despite originating from each artist's respective creative practice, these works are tethered by a homonymous title and jointly engage linkages between the environment and the body, overcoming violence and isolation and asserting a new sense of belonging generated by their temporarily formed community. Such conceptual layers are simultaneously translated into geometric abstraction via the languages of sculpture and movement. Dyson's sculpture, which functions as a performance environment as well as a monument, consists of three distinctive elements: inside and outside, highs and lows of its vertical lines, and repeated horizontal lines that appear throughout the structure. The frequent penetrations and intersections that occur throughout the sculpture are then reinterpreted by dancers

through their physical mediations.

Dyson and Kwon ask whether a new, alternative, singular kinship and a corresponding sense of belonging are possible. Considering histories of normalized violence and fragmented lifestyles, how can we build a community, achieve a sense of belonging, and share intimacy again? It is hard to say. However, what these collaborators strive to present is fundamentally different from the nostalgia of being rooted in one place and constructing an identity that is wholly connected to history and a particular view of the world. In other words, they aim for intimacies "based on absence, distance, and ruptures of time and space," which are removed from the traditional ideas that suffuse the intimacies generated by homogeneous identities, physical proximities, and continuities of time and space.\*

\* Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 9.



↑ Buford Dam on the Chattahoochee River in northern Georgia, USA. The dam impounds Lake Lanier, 1999  
Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Digital Visual Library  
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons



↑ The highlighted area shows Seneca Village in 1856. The area shown as the "Receiving Reservoir" is now the Great Lawn. Detail from *Map of the Lands Included in The Central Park, from a Topographical Survey, June 17th, 1856* by Egbert Viele  
Courtesy of The New York Public Library Digital collection



↑ This is a schematic diagram of *Sankyungpyo*, a mountain range chart from the Joseon Dynasty compiled by Yeom Shin Kyung Jun during the reign of King Yeongjo (1724–1776). *Sankyungpyo* organizes the Korean mountains according to their distinct mountain ranges and riverine systems, which propagate into smaller *jeonggan* and *jeongmaek* that connect to *Baekdudaegan*. It sorts these mountain ranges through a methodology similar to that of a family genealogy, indicating the alterations and formations of the mountains and how these processes are related to their accompanying basins in detail. This diagram thus reflects the traditional worldview at the time—understanding the nation as an extension of the body.

서울미디어시티비엔날레  
SEOUL MEDIACITY BIENNALE

**Published by** Seoul Museum of Art  
**Publisher** Eunju Choi  
**Editor** Seoul Mediacity Biennale  
**Contributor** Jaehyun Jung, Miji Lee,  
Hyewon Lee  
**Translation** Sujin Lee  
**English proofreading** Andy St. Louis  
**Design** Mabasa  
(An Mano, Kim Jeseop)  
**Printing and Binding** Seguleum

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↑ ikkibawikrrr, *Earth Monument*, 2023  
Preview of the 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale  
Photo: GLIMWORKERS