

MISA SHIN GALLERY

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Press Release
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崔在銀 Jae Eun Choi *The Oldest Story of Today ...*

Friday, April 8 – Saturday, May 28, 2022

Tuesday-Saturday 12:00-19:00 (Closed on Mon, Sun, Public holidays)

MISA SHIN GALLERY is pleased to announce *The Oldest Story of Today ...*, a solo exhibition by Jae Eun Choi, from Friday, April 8 through Saturday, May 28, 2022.

The Oldest Story of Today can be considered a condensation of Jae-Eun Choi's world view. We live in a time of disaster and wars, and have to ask what we can call our time, other than 'today.' Today is simply what we have been given, but at the same time it will keep coming around, for ever. It is vivid like salt, and, like wind-scattered ashes, it leaves nothing behind. Such a 'today' is probably engraved in everyone's memory.

—Jinsang Yoo

Choi's practice has long addressed questions of the life-cycle and time. Her new installation consists of salt, ash, a deer, photographic works of the sky playing above them, and the sound of small drops of water falling. Its lyric composition quietly brings to mind the infinitely revolving story of time and life, a story continuing since time immemorial.

Salt piled up in a small heap on the floor is covered in parts by ash, and there is a sculpture of a deer with a gold colored leg. Salt is essential for human life, and in ancient civilizations it was sometimes traded for its weight in gold. Over history there have been disputes over the right to produce salt, and salt taxes have even triggered wars and revolutions. The history of salt is the history of humankind. In Japan, salt has a place in religious rituals, with piles of salt used to bring good luck, and salt used for purification. In contrast, the ash strewn over the salt recalls lost memories of great numbers of sacrifices, destroyed by fire and, unable to return to their original form, no longer retained. The deer appears in myths around the world, and Japan is no exception, with the deer depicted as a sacred presence or a spiritual medium. In Greek mythology, there is the story of Actaeon, transformed into a deer as punishment for peeping at an unclothed divine. The deer's leg is dyed gold, symbolizing the secrets of nature and of the world that were made manifest through the original-sin-like glance for which the Actaeon was sacrificed, punished for seeing something that should not be seen.

In April 2011, Choi conducted a project that involved taking a photograph of the sky once a minute for a full day—twenty-four hours—from an olive grove at the edge of the sea in Puglia,

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Italy. Called the Puglia Sky Project, it resulted in a series of 1,440 shots. Choi's installation incorporates eighteen shots from that project, showing the sky changing minute by minute during a nine-minute period at dusk, and a nine-minute period at dawn. Puglia is a region bordered by sea to both east and west, with a long history of being home to many different peoples and being controlled by many different rulers. Choi's series of photographs taken in a village in this Italian region brings into contrast between the unchanging cycle of the universe and the different time in which we live below the skies.

Her installation provides its own unique language to depict sharing and the time cycles of living things that live for minuscule periods of time. Experiencing it triggers thoughts about things such as the path walked by humankind, and the state of current society and the world.

This is Jae Eun Choi's first solo exhibition at MISA SHIN GALLERY since 2017.

Jae Eun Choi

In 1976, she moved to Japan where she studied the Sogetsu style of ikebana. She worked as an assistant to Hiroshi Teshigahara, the third generation master of the Sogetsu school on numerous installations and the film "Rikyu". From the 1980s onward, she has been producing artwork around the themes of life cycles and time. In 1986, she presented an installation "Earth" at "Heaven" designed by Isamu Noguchi, Sogetsu Plaza Garden, Tokyo. In 1993, Expo'93 (Taejon, Korea) she designed the Recycle Art Pavilion which was the Korean government pavillion. In the same year, she presented a tea house "Une Surrender Lune" at Grand Tea Ceremony in Paris, UNESCO, together with Tadao Ando, Charlotte Perriand, Ettore Sottsass and others. In 1996-2000, she designed stupa for Grand Master Sengcheol in Haeinsa Temple, Korea. In 2000, she directed a documentary film "On The Way". She has participated in a number of international art exhibitions such as the 1991 São Paulo Biennial, the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995 where she represented Japan, and the 2016 Venice Biennale of Architecture. Solo exhibitions include Lucy and Her Time at the Samsung Gallery (Seoul, 2007), Forests of Aśoka at the Hara Museum (Tokyo, 2010) The house that continuously circulates at the National Gallery (Prague, 2014) , and The Nature Rules: Dreaming of Erth Project at Hara Museum (Tokyo, 2019). Ongoing projects are "World Underground Project" in which paper is buried within the earth for a period of time started in 1986, and working on a plan to restore destroyed forests as an extension of the "Dreaming Earth Project" in the Demilitarized Sone (DMZ) on the Korean Peninsula which launched in 2014.

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Jae Eun Choi

The Oldest Story of Today

Jinsang Yoo (curator, art critic)

Time comes from the future. Time from the past flows back into the future along a narrow channel, lingers for a while in the well of the present, and then flows around the distant path again into the future. To believe that time flows into the past is like the illusion that it is disappearing into an unknown abyss never to be encountered again. There is only a desert, there is only a grassland. In the desert and the grassland, pebbles and sand, grass whose name we do not know, are carried from place to place, and only the direction of the wind that blows over them changes, and the water of the river that flows from them will pass again on the path it has taken. The world belongs to the future, and the past is merely an intersection leading to the future.

Jae Eun Choi has been working on the theme of the cycle of time. From "World Underground Project" to "Lucy and Her Time," "Dreaming of Earth Project" in the DMZ region of Korea, and "The Nature Rules," all of Choi's works share the same theme of the cycle of time around the world. It is an atmospheric time shared by all beings. Humans share a certain point in time in the name of generation. Only one generation belongs to a person at that point in time, and within a given generation one ruminates on the past and projects oneself into the future. As an artist, Choi projects her generation into time and she herself plays the role of projecting time onto her generation. For this purpose, Choi creates her own language system to visualize the structure of time in her works. For example, she transforms every existence, every action, into a language of metaphor, and interpret the relationship between them anew. For Choi, her language is those in nature and its environment, such as forests, trees, grass, stars, paths, drops of water, insects, and animals. Each object travels through different times. The time of an old cherry tree and the time of a human being walking under it are completely different. In the time of the universe and the world, the time of these existences is but a moment. Nevertheless, every living thing projects its own time onto the time of others.

Salt and ash, and deer. Stars in the sky, and the sound of small drops of water that divide time like a metronome echo in the space. *The Oldest Story of Today* makes us think about the epic structure that is created in the plot of the endless cycle of time. Salt and ash represent two aspects of the world. The deer is the subject that gazes at the world. The stars in the sky are symbols of the temporal cycles that sustain the world. The sound of water drops evokes the individual frames that divide each moment of the present.

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Life came from the sea. Salt, from the sea, is the oldest and most essential food and the most important resource for human beings. Saline solution optimized for the human body contains 0.9% salt. Lack of salt causes weakness and dehydration due to electrolyte deficiency, leading to death. In northern Europe, for example, trade and war, domination and monopoly, were fought over in order to obtain salt. Salt is not only essential for sustaining life, but also a source of financial resources. The Korean word for salt is interpreted as "white gold. The history of salt as financial resources can be traced back to the Latin word "salarium," from which today's word "salary" is derived, and the road connecting the salt-producing regions to Rome was also called a "salaria." Taxes on salt were one of the main causes of the French Revolution, and Gandhi's "Salt March" against the British salt monopoly was also a factor in the Indian independence movement. In China, the salt monopoly survived for 2,700 years, and salt was the most important source of taxation for successive Chinese dynasties. China's salt monopoly was abolished in 2017 due to a declining share of tax revenues and was abolished in Japan in 1997. Since the Middle Ages, the main source of revenue has given up its seat to spices, silver, gold, and reserve currency, but salt remains the preeminent value of life and purification. Catholics use salt water as holy water in their liturgy. In Matthew 5, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world" is an expression used to describe the purpose of human life in the world.

The present is covered in ashes. Whether it is passion or violence, sacrifice and stories of heroism, or memories of slaughter and fire, the present is covered with the ashes of the flames of the past. The ashes have been scattered by the wind, but their traces tell us that fire once existed there. Jacques Derrida said:

Jacques Derrida described ashes in his book "Feu la Cendre " as follows. We know nothing about cinders, only that they are irretrievably scattered. It is a lost memory that no one can preserve, that no one can leave, that no one can return to. The presence of ashes means there was fire. The ashes point to sacrifice and giving, and their traces become a place to honor the ashes themselves.

Derrida said, "there are cinders there," "cinders there are" (il y a là cendre). The reason is that there is no place left where the cinders were. The cinders are the traces of what cannot be remembered, of what is gone, of what does not remain, of what is forbidden; the cinders are themselves the traces of the cinders, of the fact that there was a fire there. All we know about cinders are the fact that they are cinders. It scatters and leaves nothing behind.

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Salt and ash each represent two sides of the world. Salt is life/purification, and ash is fire/residue. They are the calamities and wars we face today, the passions and penances, the sacrifices and memories.

In April 2011, Choi conducted a project that involved taking a photograph of the sky once a minute for a full day from an olive grove at the edge of the sea in Puglia, southeastern Italy. Called the "Puglia Sky Project", it resulted in a series of 1,440 shots. The project captured the sky and the sea, which still covers the land that has a long history of being home to many different peoples and being controlled by many different rulers. The installation incorporates eighteen shots from that project, showing the sky changing minute by minute during a nine-minute period at dusk, and a nine-minute period at dawn. Choi's interest in the sky dates back to 2012, the exhibition "Verse" held at Kukje Gallery in Seoul. Each star in the night sky is a symbol of a different time. The light of one star began at the origin of the universe that is 13.6 billion years ago, while the light of another reaches our retina after only a few light years. It is Choi's language that corresponds to the sky, with its vast expanse of light in different time zones, and to the world of those living under it in different generations of time.

The deer is a victim, a mediator, and a divine being. In the ancient civilizations of Northeast Asia, the deer appears as a symbol of kings and priests. The antlers of the deer are regarded as a medium's tool that reaches to the heavens. From Scythia to the Korean peninsula, crown designs are decorated with deer antlers, and shamans perform shamanic rituals wearing crowns made of deer antlers. The "Shishigami (Deer God)" of "Princess Mononoke" is an imaginary character, but you can picture it as a metaphor for nature. In Greek mythology, Actaeon transformed into a deer as punishment for peeping at Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and nature. He was shortly bitten to death by his own hounds. Actaeon was a victim of the gaze, punished for seeing that should not be seen. The secrets of the world and nature which were revealed through his original-sin-like gaze are relevant to us. The golden leg of the deer seems to symbolize a spirituality that is tainted by capitalism. Nevertheless, the gaze is still his own, and it speaks of a mythical and cyclical worldview that he must be responsible for with his own life.

The Oldest Story of Today can be considered a condensation of Jae Eun Choi's world view. We live in a time of disaster and wars and have to ask what we can call our time, other than 'today.' Today is simply what we have been given, but at the same time it will keep coming around, forever. It is vivid like salt, and, like wind-scattered ashes, it leaves nothing behind. Such a 'today' is probably engraved in everyone's memory.