

Sadong 30  
Incheon, Korea 2006

**To encounter the house of Sa-dong, persisting in its own absolute time.**

Hyunjin Kim

This time, it was at an abandoned house in Sa-dong, Incheon city, where Haegue Yang's exhibition opened. Sa-dong is quite a dilapidated district even by Incheon's standards. Barely held together by its outer walls, the old wooden Japanese style house numbered 30-50 in Sa-dong has long been empty. Marred by holes in the roof and fallen wallpaper, the house is filled with the raw traces of desertion. Aside from its obvious loss of utility as a residence, it is already too far out of the way to be a functional and social establishment. In some ways the house has been slowly dissipating in its own absolute time. Out of time and out of history, the Sa-dong house presents a melancholic vision. In her video essay "Squandering Negative Space" (2006) the artist describes the house in the following way:

"...Perhaps this house lived against time and development. No, perhaps it has been, alone, squandering time and development because it wants to live in a different time zone, or to store time.

Time is neither lacking nor abundant. But, time surrounding this house has established its own time zone inside this place. That is really spooky but at the same time lovely, and very dirty and freaky but at the same time sympathetic.

There is much that is lacking here. Everyday life, social integration, common sense, etc.

The deficiency makes this house very finicky. In the black hole of such deprivation, the location of the house has no meaning in terms of urban demarcation and geography. The remoteness of this house cannot be measured in spatial distance. Temporal standards for measurement is also ambiguous. It is an old house, but it is in such a ruin that to say it is of such and such period, or to make any such judgment, interpretation, or analysis would be futile.

The only applicable standard of measurement is deficiency. The house seems suck everything into its vast chasm; it consumes and squanders everything. That is why much is lacking.

It seems that here perhaps it is possible to add an arbitrary composition to a non-visible place. It is a place where my antagonism toward what is known as "cultural-thinking" or "inter-cultural thinking" is perhaps not a problem. In other words, it is a place where a time for the estimation of the cultural-social-political chasm is allowed. This is usually not the case in reality."

The artist observed the house for a long time as an independent entity, and she now contemplates it as a singular being which lives in its own time. Not only is this particular state of being a large part of the exhibition, but it also makes up a critical part of the installations. The background concept of the entire installation, 'Light and reflection' and 'contemplation and accommodation' was drawn from aspects of the house. She installed works that flow from one room to another, as well as linking the interior and exterior, As if occupied by new residents, parts of the house-starting from the room by the entrance to the room across the hall, leading to the parlor and the private bedroom-accommodate small geometric origamis (Japanese style craft of folding paper into decorative



shapes and figures). The house is also equipped with various light sources including strobes. At times, the strobes freeze a room in the moment, starkly exposing the space, while the other rooms are lit subtly as if confronting the beauty of darkness and even death. Chrysanthemums and garden balsams are planted in the basin with the dried water faucet in the courtyard. In the Jangdokdae (a raised part of the courtyard traditionally meant for condiment jars), a lookout has been installed where visitors can take a break with prepared mineral water and viewing Sa-dong. In other words, while the outer mode and aura of the house are preserved, the objects are arranged to help the visitors contemplate the existing conditions and deepen their experience as they proceed into the house.

In this exhibition, visitors come to share moments with this strange, endangered and therefore vulnerable place. The shape and the current state of the house evolved apart from historical circumstances or changes in time of the neighbored area. In facing the time and absoluteness of this house which has endured endangered existence, we cannot help but to hold back rash assumptions and conventional theoretical approach molded by ordinary judgments and formalities. Hence the authenticity of this place is the most important aspect of the exhibition, which is accompanied with objects that illuminate that very quality of this place. At the same time, the work seems to appear out of an accumulation of thoughts about 'metaphorical homeless/a symbolic home,' a notion that derived from the artist's personal experience and perceptions. She conveys this sentiment in one chapter of "Squandering Negative Space," referring to a colleague Kim Beom's book "The Hometown." The artist Kim Beom created a manual of a hypothetical hometown so that people who grew up without a specific hometown can refer to it when they talk about the subject. In this manual, one finds 'Ungyelee,' a simple and appealing conceptual hometown, made out of imaginary but probable conditions, whose form was modeled after an archetypal rural hometown. But of course Ungyelee has emerged from a lack and deficiency in our lives. Yang Haegue's attention to Kim Beom's idea of hometown is in the end an artistic acknowledgement of the state of absence and then an embodiment of that very deficiency.

For the past ten years, the artist has led a un-settled existence moving from city to city. However, she censures the illusion of 'nomadism,'[sic] an expression that seems to follow her. Rather, what interests her is not the migratory lifestyle itself but a notion of the homeless creatures in constant search of their metaphorical homes, hence, the fundamental reflections on those souls, who have no choice but to embrace this deficiency, and their place. Therefore the Sa-dong exhibition serves as an intense moment for Yang to reflect upon herself in this personally meaningful place.

From getting to the location to viewing the place, there is nothing friendly or convenient about the exhibition's conditions-the visitors themselves even have to undo the padlock at the main entrance-except the supply of mineral water and a place to sit. It might force the visitors to "face the strangeness," in other words, to experience a confrontation with the Other. The exhibition also draws people to a desolate part of Incheon. As a matter of fact, the exhibition began in the shadow of life, consequently leading us to confront ourselves as we go even deeper along this beaten path. With that, in the process of seeking and then exploring the site, the visitor will share the moments of a similarly meaningful experience and time. Furthermore, we will all take in the moment as a symbolic journey through someone's metaphorical home; to feel the moment come to life as we re-recognize the undiscovered yet shared meanings of co-existing with the Other.



무역길  
사동 30-53

사동 30번지





















## **“Squandering Negative Spaces”**

Single Channel Video Projection

Brazil, DVD, ca. 28 min., 7 chapters, Sound, Colour, English, 2006

Voice-over: David Michael DiGregorio

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This production was supported by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht , Netherlands

-excerpt-

### Chapter 6.

Incheon is neither Seoul nor a rural village; it is a small city. They built a new international airport by land-filling islands in Incheon. Now we read and hear about Incheon frequently, in previously unheard of, and thus very unfamiliar, situations and contexts. Despite this phenomenon, it does not seem that Incheon’s urban reputation has changed much through it. If there has been any change at all, it is the wave of development that Incheon experienced and continues to experience as Seoul’s fringe city.

Sa-dong, which is where the house I want to focus on is located, seems to be a neighborhood that even this development wave, which is what is allotted to a fringe city, has forgotten.

There are several small, what I think of as Japanese-style, houses clustered on one side, and the other side is blocked by the pier. They are mostly run-down private houses, but there are a few very strange business operations. There is the dollar dealer—it’s hard to imagine, who comes here to exchange dollar? Then there is the parts store, and it’s impossible to tell what its specialty is. There is also an import/export merchant whose line of business is hard to tell.

Anyway, the houses in this neighborhood are so small. I think that when these houses were built, people must have been much smaller than nowadays.

One does not feel the idyllic warmth of the proverbial small town village from Sadong. There are some storage containers, a telling sign of a port city. But they do not give off an industrial-zone bleakness; it’s a different kind of emptiness that the place gives. It feels like that this place was abandoned because it cannot be explained. There was no particular reason to remember, and perhaps that is why the place did not receive any attention. The neighborhood alleys can barely let hand-pulled cargo carts pass; they are much too narrow for cars. Walking down these alleys, I feel a spookiness that comes from the sense that time has stopped here. There is also a strongly nostalgic sense of familiarity that is hard to describe. I think this familiarity can appeal to anybody.

There is a cul-de-sac. The second house from the end has its door closed and





nails are driven into it—I don't know if people can see that from outside. The houses are built very close to each other, and thus from the alley only one wall of the house can be seen, and the wall with the front door looks like a fence, so that one cannot see anything special about it. Behind the front door, which has no human traffic and is nail-shut, there is a small house, much like the other houses in Sa-dong.

This house is now in such a ruin that it's hard to make out its original shape. There is a gaping hole in the ceiling, windows are broken, and wallpapers have come off, hanging in mid-air like tree limbs in a jungle.

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