

HOŠEK CONTEMPORARY

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KYOUNGHWA LEE - DEATH + LIFE = HELLTASIA

Opening reception: 24th June 2022, 7 - 10 pm

Exhibition period: 24th - 30th June 2022

Crossing rivers to reach the underworld. Imagining a utopia along the boundary between life and death. Traversing a memorial, where loss and mourning are omnipresent.

In *Helltasia*, Kyoungwha Lee is recounting a tale of life and death through an interpretation of the imaginary frontier between the world of the living and those on the other side. Transmitted into an installation, paintings and a video work, the evoked feelings appear outlandish, as our inner world consistently hides elements which might be misunderstood when revealed. In an effort to unite abstract and figurative fantasy with reality, Kyoungwha is drawing on colourful cloths, made of fabric used for making traditional Korean clothing. In her video piece, she advances cautiously through the Holocaust Memorial in the city centre of Berlin, imagining proceeding through the river of three crossings post-death. Blending her own reality and one's imagination, her past with another's, she is merging Eastern and Western images into one.

In South Korea, Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity are practiced in a peaceful coexistence with shamanism or Korean folk religion. Deriving from a branch of Buddhism, the river of three crossings represents the line a person is set to cross on the seventh day after their death. In parallel, this tradition carries many folk beliefs and customs relating to the dead person's spirit roaming around, searching for a path back to the spiritual dimension. Samdocheon (三途川) is a river marking the boundary between the afterlife and our material world. To reach the underworld, the river has three possible crossing points: a treasure-covered bridge, a shallow ford or a deep, snake-infested abyss. One's earthly sins determine the crossing area, allowing the ones with a light karmic weight to take the bridge, while leaving those prone to evil deeds to struggle in deep waters.

This mythological river of the dead and its three crossings were echoing in the emotions and subconscious images Kyoungwha acknowledged while walking through the Holocaust Memorial for the first time. In traditional Korean beliefs, life is thought to continue after death as there is no definite boundary or separation between life and death. For the artist, this supposed boundary is the space between reality and imagination, another world where emotions coexist alongside the fear of death and the circle of life. She came to name that space Hell + Fantasy = Helltasia. As a Korean artist encountering the Memorial, her experience seems distinctively different in comparison to a Western visitor, who might have grown up in a culture of remembrance or with vivid recollections of the Holocaust and the Nazi regime. Kyoungwha's work conveys a personal narrative of experiencing a popular monument in a unique manner, while solemnly honouring the Memorial and the Jewish victims.

As the relationship to death in South Korea differs from the common Christian-based view in the West, the traditional funeral ceremonies might be accompanied by shamanistic practices and particular songs, assisting the deceased spirit into the next life. These

funeral songs acknowledge the continuation of life after death, reminding us that a departure from this world is not the end. The musical improvisations, which are often associated to a cleansing ritual, help the mourners to move on. The soundscape chosen by Kyoungwha is composed of such traditional Korean funeral songs, evoking an eerie sonic space and the unearthliness of the shamanistic spirit realm. Here again, she is bringing an Eastern tradition into a seemingly peculiar context within *Helltasia*.

Scattered in the space, the colourful paintings strike aesthetically through their pseudo-naïve attributes. The artist recalls the city, following her aimless wonders in the streets of Berlin. A banal stroll becomes a nauseating bad trip, with goblins climbing on building walls and semi-human creatures courteously greeting each other. Anonymous hands wave desperately by the window, seeking attention or perhaps salvation, which never comes. In this horrifying fantasy, opens up a nature's-cape; that utopia with water, mountains and Korean wild fruits, a relief from the chaos of nocturnal urban life. In the space between dreams and reality, life and death, Kyoungwha borrows the ornaments from the royal banquets of the Joseon Dynasty, the last dynastic kingdom of Korea. The exhibition is thus meant as an "oriental fantasy", a lucid dream on the spectrum of abstract horror and mundane memories.

Text © Ragna Ragnarsdottir

Hošek Contemporary

Established by Petr Hošek in 2016, Hošek Contemporary is a gallery and art residency located on a historical cargo ship next to Fischerinsel in Mitte, Berlin. The gallery focuses primarily on site-specific pieces, performing arts and experimental sound works. During the spring and summer months, the gallery is hosting weekly improvised and experimental music installations, with local and international musicians.

MS Heimatland

Built in 1910 in Fürstenberg an der Oder, MS Heimatland was initially operating under the name Ida and used for transporting coal to Charlottenburg. After the Second World War, the 58-meter long cargo ship was renamed Heimatland, meaning "homeland". Until the 90s, the ship was sailing on Elbe and Havel, moving sand and chippings. It served for artistic and cultural purposes for the first time in 2002, when German sculptor Christiane Möbus chose it for her Nackte Tatsache Tatsache project. Finally, in March 2018, Heimatland became the main exhibition space and artist residency of Hošek Contemporary. The boat is permanently anchored in the historic port of Berlin.

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