
Black Mat Oriole
with Suki Seokyeong Kang
at Rågsveds Nya Folkets Hus
and Lerkrogen, Brännkyrka hembygdsförenings hembygdsgård
as a part of Sites of the Future
22.9–4.11 2018

Norra Sidan

Tensta konsthall

**Rågsveds Nya Folkets Hus:
Black Mat Oriole (2017), video, 12 min
loop**

The film shows a solitary man in a dark room. Soon, he starts to move slowly, limberly, between two small black-and-white carpets. One hand reaches out; the other follows. A toe touches the ground, and the dancer takes a sweeping step. Suddenly, we hear a hollow sound from some kind of drum, perhaps a wooden percussive instrument. Then, again – silence. And it continues, a new series of restrained movements and suggestive sounds appear, like gravel being swept off a path. The dance is somewhat reminiscent of a ritual. And so, it is a ritual. At least it has its origin in a court dance, “Chunaengmu,” which was performed before the royal court of Korea in the 19th century.

The Korean artist Suki Seokyeong Kang has been working on her project Black Mat Oriole for an extended period of time. Taking her own artistic practise, which includes painting and sculpture, as a starting point, she has used this particular dance in different ways. One of these is as a means to provide another context for her paintings and sculptures, and another is as a way to investigate how we as individuals, relate to our given space on a physical level. Is it possible to expand the limitations of the spaces we move through? Can we transport ourselves, and enlarge our rooms by communicating with one another, using nothing but the spot we’re standing on? This traditional Korean dance allows us to test and play with these questions. It is possible to communicate, to expand your space, to vary your movements, despite being focused on yourself, despite the small surface allowed, and despite the fact that initial conditions seem prohibitive at first sight?

The take-off point, the platform from which the movements originate, is a small carpet. In the film, the carpets are designed by the artist herself. When the dance was originally performed in the royal court, special reed-woven carpets, or “hwamunseok”, were used.

Saturday 22.9, a workshop will be given jointly by the artist and the Tensta Women’s café. The Tensta Women’s café meets every week at Tensta konsthall to do handicrafts and socialise. They have each brought along their own carpets, and taking inspiration from the original court dance, they will improvise new movements and thus create new possibilities to be integrated into the ongoing project.

Kang about Black Mat Oriole

‘In my project, the concept of the hwamunseok is translated into the form of the “black mat”, which is interpreted as the minimal space each individual in this society is granted to stand upon and to sustain one’s weight. This minimal grid is infinitely expandable as the individual expands the range of her/his movements. The movements on the “mat” serve as the blueprint for other visual manifestations, including painting and installation. As the conceptual space expands, the materialised form of the visual objects that constitute this project is also infinitely transformed and diversified. As such, the project consists of a series of developments driven by the movements of each individual as s/he constantly pursues a state of further expansion.’

Rågsveds Nya Folkets Hus

Nya Rågsveds Folkets Hus is owned and operated by the local businesses in Rågsved and Vantör. The premises are lent to members of the organization, facilitating meetings and conferences. They arrange cultural events, run a local art gallery and own Andra Varvet Högdalen – southern Stockholm’s largest second-hand store.

Lerkrogen, Brännkyrka
hembygdsförenings hembygdsgård:
Cogwheel (chi-cha), 2016–2017,
FHD–video with sound 8 min, 2016–
2017

Warm Round for Round Cliff
2015–2017, thread, painted metal,
Warm Round for Black Mat 2015–2016
Three legs-short 2013, painted metal,
wood, wheel

Heavy Round 2013, painted metal

“Chi Cha” is an archaic Korean term for cog wheel. Although the word is no longer used, the meaning is still valid. Suki Seokyeong Kang chose “chi-cha” for two reasons: The first is her interest in how the word sounds, and the second is the dual meaning of the word, in that it refers to something that can only exist in eternal interaction with something else. The work Chi Cha consists of a video, an installation, and the movements that form this composition. The objects presented in the video meet and then depart. These objects and the repetitive movements express a will to reinforce the present and include impossible predictions of future relations that are based on the past. An extension of this will is reproduced through the repetitive movements of the individuals who act in the video. The components of this whole clockwork structure, which include the space, speed, and position, lock into one another like cog wheels in an ongoing movement. All the objects are meticulously executed using hand-dyed threads, metal, and wood.

In another series of works, Kang has drawn on the spatial narrative from Chunaengmu, a solo Korean court dance developed in 1828 by Crown Prince Hyomyeong. Chunaengmu requires its performers to move with restraint on a square, traditional rush-woven mat. Kang’s scenography comprises an ensemble of sculptures, frames, fabrics, paintings: rotating frames on wheels, wheels on legs resting on a round wooden base, round cylinders of metal and wood atop one another, and paintings stacked on a black mat. Her works, which involve found objects and textile components crafted by the artist herself, often wander around the floor, rest

on walls, and even lean on each other. Visitors to her exhibitions are invited to compose their own choreographies for the works and engage with her abstractions in personal ways.

Suki Seokyeong Kang (b. 1977, Seoul) uses a variety of media, including painting, installation, and video, to seek a synaesthetic expansion of the methodology of painting. In her works, the conditions of painting mediate materiality, space, temporality, and narrative as they construct a visual (musical) score. The various movements that take place inside this rhythmic space guide the direction of her next painting. Her practice is situated between the abstract and the figurative, the organic and the geometric. She is interested in creating a visual language of balance and harmony, through which she seeks to portray the structure and order of various conditions that each individual faces in society. Kang studied oriental painting at Seoul’s Ewha Womans University, and painting at the Royal College of Art. She currently lives and works in Seoul. Recent exhibitions include *The 8th Climate (What does art do?)*, Gwangju Biennale (2016); *As the Moon Waxes and Wanes*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon (2016); *Groupe Mobile*, Villa Vassilieff, Paris (2016); *Foot and Moon*, Audio Visual Pavilion, Seoul (2015); and *Grandmother Tower*, Old House, Seoul (2013).

Lerkrogen

The building that houses local heritage centre Lerkrogen was originally built in the 1600s. The centre is run by Brännkyrka hembygdsförening and is situated close to Älvsjö Centrum in southern Stockholm. The upper floor is used for hosting study groups and meetings, or as a space for exhibiting art and handicrafts. The centre’s large archive of images and books about the area is available at certain times. On Sundays in spring and autumn, the centre is open to the public and serves coffee. On the main floor, there is a room showcasing historical images and objects from Brännkyrka.

The artist in conversation with Maria Lind, director of Tensta konsthall (excerpt)

ML: How would you describe **Black Mat Oriole** to someone who has never seen your work?

SK: **Black Mat Oriole** begins by encompassing one's weight and movement in a square grid. This work does not focus on generating limited meaning, but instead expresses the persistent possibility of systematizing "one" role through the body, the gaze, and positions within a given space. **Black Mat Oriole** standardizes the size of my paintings, articulating a minimum platform for the space they can stand in. I then begin to explore how paintings move and expand throughout the plane and also how I might convey the time that cross-passes throughout that plane.

The title, **Black Mat Oriole**, is a compound of the words, "Black Mat," and "Oriole." In this context, "oriole" is derived from Chunaengmu, which translates to "spring oriole dance" in English. This solo dance from the Joseon Dynasty of Korea is a slow dance performed on a square mat called hwamunseok. The black mat in my work represents an individual's territory and the movements that take place within it. Through this interpretation, I seek to gradually show the invisible domains and stances of the individual. In translating this court dance into an individual's gestures, I wanted to narrate the time employed by such slow movements and convey how an individual's voice and gestures might designate and extend certain domains. That is, I portray the oriole's movements on the black mat in order to provide a visible voice to the invisible domains and stances of an individual.

ML: I am intrigued by your focus on the individual, at a time when many artists would rather deal with collectives, groups, and other forms of people coming together. Can you elaborate on this interest of yours?

SK: The focus on the individual, in my work, is a precondition for finding out how we can protect our own hearts and rely on each other to walk forward together. When I think about painting, I consider how to face the visible and invisible square space and with which thoughts I could fill it. This is the background of the place I am standing in now, both my current thoughts and past traditions. Moreover, based upon those experiences of time, I wanted to show that the here and now make up the individual attitudes and movements that are balanced out by society.

ML: Would it be possible, as part of **Black Mat Oriole's** description, to speak about its materiality? How is it made? What are the materials?

SK: **Black Mat Oriole** is composed of varied media, which have emerged during a long process of thought and experimentation with structure and form. As mentioned earlier, **Black Mat Oriole** suggests the minimum space on which an individual can stand. More formally, this space represents the square by which I perceive painting, and here this (in)visible space connects with my search for gravity and balance. The structural grid and construction methods of modules that emerged in perception of painting as a spatial concept have been expanded in the form of movements that I call activations, via gravity, the body, colors, and textures.

Inside **Black Mat Oriole**, materials are condensed and thoroughly concentrated as they repeatedly bump and rub into one another through sensitive friction. The materials employed in this process included thread, steel, wood, and discarded leather scraps—tactile materials—as well as documentation and language, a range of movements by the body, and weight.

ML: Rather than thinking about what art is, I am interested in what art "does." What does **Black Mat Oriole** "do," according to you?

SK: I first thought of myself standing on a black mat. As I have said before, the black mat is the size of my painting and represents the minimum space one can stand in. I believe it simultaneously becomes a point of departure and point of arrival, after which, we decide where we want to go, where to look, and which direction we want to go in.

When I approach my art-making process, I consider looking and thinking as two starting points. Expressing how these two aspects “do” and “act” through a work is the least I can do as an artist in our society.

Also, “doing”—for me—does not end with finishing one work, but includes the process of continued research and efforts to extend that work. Though some of my works convey the time put into my process, there are instances in which it remains unseen. Even if the process is obscured by the finished product, I hope my viewers engage with their own thoughts to find out what they want and need to do to interpret the work. As they walk throughout the installation, I also hope they will, in turn, question both the artist and work: why I used such material, this shape or that form. They contribute to the “doing” part of the work by answering these questions based on how they move throughout the piece and then sharing their thoughts as a manifestation of the present.

ML: There is often a sense of a grammar in your work, expressed through shapes and movements. There is a system as to how things are combined, which is neither narrative nor verbal. What do you think about this “linguistic trait?”

SK: This can be answered in relation to the prior question. My concerns with how to see and think, as well as how to “do,” are continued in my art. The way I encountered painting for the first time was through traditional painterly contemplations on how to think and connect the artist’s breath to

a line. During this process, painting—especially Oriental painting—shaped my attitude toward confronting the world. Expressing what it means to look and also what I am thinking at that moment is, to me, what I can “do” through my works.

My thoughts are a chunk of very short syllables that are expanded to larger units comprised of these chunks. These units make up a grammar, or a visual sentence containing my thoughts and attitudes. I want to expand on the “linguistic trait” you mentioned in the question in terms of my previous works.

ML: I sometimes think of the 1920s avant garde and their abstraction adventures in relation to your work. On the one hand, they were often engaged with universal categories, and on the other hand, with rather concrete social and political utopias. If anything universal from that era’s artistic experiments is part of your work, I might suggest “the poetic.” Does that resonate with you, and if yes, how?

SK: The thoughts I hold in the present, the previously mentioned personal narratives and processes in my work, and historical moments all aim to arrive from the past into the present. They represent the ideal of aspiring to merge a moment in the past with the present to then step forward from that present state. I believe that attitude is poetic.

If the avant-garde experiments of the 1920s can be read as an illustration of how social beginnings and historical movements are marshalled under a single idealized form, my works—though starting from a different perspective and location—also express perpetually evolving thoughts and emotions to manifest a singular aim—how to represent the essence of time via simple structures and forms (such as Jeong, Constellation on the Black Mat).

I hope that these structures and forms, accompanied with direction and movement mediated through and activated by people, find a role

in the present, as well as the future. Ancient texts, contemporary social and historical circumstances that I studied and took consider into creating the works, and the relationship between form and activation are not fully visualized. This is because the structures left behind from the production of time are rather simple and universal, or so I hope. Therefore, I use the term, “evaporated narrative,” to describe moments when I explain how language, research, and materials existed throughout the process of making. This is similar to the aforementioned, “poetic moment”

ML: The phenomenon of balance appears regularly in your work, and the size and movements of the human body tend not to be so gendered. Occasionally the performative parts of your videos appear to be movements borrowed from physical labor, and yet they are elegant, choreographed like dance performances. What are your thoughts on the relationship between bodily work and choreography?

SK: There are slow movements created from physical motion and repeated actions of construction and dissolution. These are inspired by Grandmother Tower, the series I discussed earlier, as it pertains to the narrative of how the dismantled units are stacked and separated. Moreover, the potential of movement in this work is enhanced by the moving images of video.

I created a video that animates the art and extends it to the next page of the story. I hope this operates as a platform for the work, or that it creates a space of possibility to embody personal thoughts and voices. This is to point my work to where it stands now, its past and present, and its potential to head to another place in the future.

I am not trying to show premeditated movement. I wanted to convey the unchoreographed through the limited movements encountered by the body's physical weight, and how with repeated motions, the art and movement are

constructed together. Thus, with the slow and refined actions of the body and art's resonance with that movement, we can reflect on our own place and produce the spatial choreography necessary for us to step into the future.

Kang's exhibition is part of the project Sites of the Future, which focuses on the parallels existing between the suburbs and rural communities in present-day Sweden. Despite what seem to be huge differences, rural communities and urban suburbs share many common denominators today: the closure of schools and other social services, the disappearance of job opportunities, and the fact that structural subordination is in the process of becoming entrenched. The parallel conditions between the suburbs and the countryside may be seen in a concentrated form in the county of Stockholm.

The project presents context-sensitive art in Hallstavik, Rågsved, Sorunda and Tensta. In addition to Kang, the participating artists are Christian Nyampeta (Kigali/Amsterdam/New York), Hallstavik and the Ethnographic Museum in October; Anne Low (Vancouver), Sorunda and Tensta konsthall throughout October, and Joar Nango (Tromsö), Tensta and Nälsta gård (Spånga Local History and Folklore Society) in February 2018. Sites of the Future is a cooperation between People's Houses and Parks, the Stockholm County Museum and Tensta konsthall.

Dates:

Saturday 22.9 13:00–15:00

Opening and performance featuring
Suki Seokyeong Kang and the Women's
Café in Tensta. At Rågsveds Nya Folkets
Hus

Sunday 23.9 13:00–15:00

Opening at Lerkrogen, Brännkyrka
hembygdsförenings hembygdsgård

Monday 24.9 13:00–15:00

The Work of Hands (Händernas arbete),
workshop at
Lerkrogen, Brännkyrka
hembygdsförenings hembygdsgård

Staff at Tensta konsthall

Ailin Moaf Mirlashari

host

Didem Yildirim

production coordinator

Fahyma Alnablsi

reception, economy and teaching

Fredda Berg

host

Hanna Nordell

producer

Henny Josefsson

host

Isabella Tjäder

communicator

Makda Embaie

assistant

Maria Lind

director

Muna Al Yaqoobi

assistant The Women's Cafe

Nawroz Zakholy

assistant

Nina Svensson

mediation

Paulina Sokolow

communicator

Rasmus Sjöbeck

host

Installation

Didem Yildirim

Interns

Ockie Bagül Dogan

Aya Urhammer

Special thanks to

Ewa Egerbladh

Inga-Lill Persson

With support from Swedish Arts Council

Sites of the Future is a joint project carried out by Folkets Hus och Parker (people's houses and parks), Stockholms läns museum/Stockholm County Museum and Tensta konsthall. The project also includes Hallstavik Folkets Hus (people's house in Hallstavik) and Häverödal hembygdsförening (local heritage association in Hälveröd; Rågsveds Folkets Hus (people's house in Rågsved) and Brännkyrka hembygdsförening (local heritage association in Brännkyrka); Sorunda Folkets Hus (people's house in Sorunda), Sorunda hembygdsförening (local heritage association in Sorunda) and Sorunda Hemslojdsvänner (friend of handicraft in Sorunda); as well as Spånga Fornminnes och Hembygdsgille (Spånga local history and folklore society) and Etnografiska museet/ Museum of Ethnography.

Stockholm County Museum
www.stockholmslansmuseum.se
08-586 194 10

Folkets Hus och Parker
www.folketshusochparker.se
08-452 25 00

Tensta konsthall
www.tenstakonsthall.se/en
08-36 07 63



**STOCKHOLMS
LÄNS
MUSEUM**

