

Yeesookyung

Born in 1963, Seoul, Korea / Lives and works in Seoul

www.yeesookyung.com

Yeesookyung has steadily expanded the scope of her practice across a wide range of media – including installation, sculpture, performance, video, painting, and drawing – guided by a richly imaginative narrative sensibility. Her work explores fundamental human questions, navigating themes such as the past and present, life and death, reality and illusion, the sacred and the secular, the individual and the collective, and the interplay between systems and societies, as well as between different cultures. Drawing from personal experience and inspired by ancient mythologies and traditional stories, she has established a distinct and expansive artistic universe.

Yeesookyung's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at major institutions worldwide, including *Yeesookyung: Temple portatif* at Musée Cernuschi, Paris, France (2023); *Moonlight Crowns* at Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea (2021); *The Story of a Girl Named Long Journey* at Buk-Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea (2021); *Whisper Only to You* at MDRE & Capodimonte Museum, Naples, Italy (2019); *Saint Breeder* at Atelier Hermès, Seoul, Korea (2015); and *When I Become You: Yeesookyung in Taipei* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, Taiwan (2015). She also participated in the 57th Venice Biennale *VIVA ARTE VIVA*, exhibiting at the Arsenale (2017); *Monstrous Beauty*, curated by Iris Moon, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2025); *Whisper on the Horizon* at Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taipei, Taiwan (2025). She was honored with the 44th Sejong Culture Award in the Culture, Arts, and Humanities category for her contribution to promoting Korean art and traditional music in the Middle East by participating as a Korean artist in the 1st Abu Dhabi Public Art Biennale.

Her works are held in major international museum collections, including the British Museum (London, UK); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, USA); Seoul Museum of Art (Seoul, Korea); Salama Bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation (Abu Dhabi, UAE); M+ Museum (Hong Kong); Mystetskyi Arsenal (Kyiv, Ukraine); Museum of Fine Arts (Boston, USA); National Museum of Contemporary Art (Gwacheon, Korea); Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art (Seoul, Korea); ARCO Collection, IFEMA (Madrid, Spain); Bristol Museum (Bristol, UK); and the Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago, USA). (Text by Jeeseun Park)

Translated Vase (2002-ongoing)

Using a labor-intensive approach, Yeessookyung reconstructs organic, intricate sculptures from discarded ceramic fragments—pieces initially crafted by master ceramists who destroy any vases with even the slightest imperfections. By filling the cracks in 24K gold, playing on the Korean homonym, *geum* (which means both “crack” and “gold”), she revitalizes traditional ceramics with a modern sensibility. Her hands-on process follows the body’s natural movement rather than a pre-structured form, allowing each sculpture to evolve organically and take on its own unique shape.

This series was inspired by a 2001 project in Albisola, Italy, where the artist commissioned a local potter unfamiliar with East Asian pottery to create twelve porcelains based on a poem about Joseon-dynasty ceramics. Through this act of translation and cross-cultural exchange, the *Translated Vases* emerged as hybrid forms, each embodying a unique narrative. Since 2010, Yeessookyung has incorporated not only Korean white vases and celadon but also fragmented North Korean and European ceramics, blending materials and traditions across cultures. (Text by Jeesun Park)



Installation view, *Monstrous Beauty*, Metropolitan Museum, New York, NY, USA, 2025



Translated Vase_Nine Dragons in Wonderland, 2017,
Ceramic shards, stainless steel, aluminum bars, epoxy, 24K gold leaf, 492(h)×20×190 cm
Installation view, *VIVA ARTE VIVA*, 57th International Art Exhibition, Arsenale, Venice, Italy, 2017



Translated Vase_Thousand 2012, 2012, Ceramic shards, 24K gold leaf.
 Installation View, *Constellation Gemini*, Korea Artist Prize, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, 2012
 ©National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea



(Left) *Translated Vase_2007 TVW 11*, 2007, Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24K gold leaf, 160×90×90 cm
 Collection of Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
 ©Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art

(Right) *Translated Vase_2007 TVW 10*, 2007, Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24K gold leaf, 122×84×81 cm
 Collection of Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, USA
 ©Museum Schloß Oranienbaum, Dessau, Germany



Translated Vase_The Other Side of the Moon_2014 TVB 2, 2014
 Ceramic shards from North Korea, epoxy, 24K gold leaf, 138×143×141 cm
 Collection of Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
 ©Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art



Detail

Translated Vase – When Will I See You Again (2025)

I'm presenting one of my *Translated Vase* series, specially produced for this biennale, entitled *Translated Vase – When Will I See You Again*. In this work, I am embracing replicas of a ceramic female figure playing polo from the Tang dynasty. In 2015, I had an exhibition at the Taipei City Museum. During my visit, I also went to the Taipei Palace Museum. Among the exquisite relics, the female burial figures from the Tang Dynasty there left a strong impression on me. Soon, they faded into memory. But one day, while reading a paper for this biennale, these figures suddenly came to life. I immediately decided to include the figure in this work.

My *Translated Vase* series is made from discarded ceramic fragments connected like a 3D jigsaw puzzle, with the gaps filled with 24K gold leaf. Most fragments come from Korean ceramic masters who reproduce old Korean vases using traditional methods. After carefully inspecting each piece, they smash many of those that don't meet their standards of a masterpiece. This is how they maintain the quality, rarity, and value of their works. And this is how I acquire the fragments to rebirth.

For this work in the biennale, I fully embrace the replicas as literal replicas. While working, I realized that my fascination with the female figure was sparked by my long-term attraction to the Silk Road. As a person from an ideologically divided country where overland routes are completely blocked, my yearning and fantasies about the Silk Road are inevitably growing. This includes the auspicious relics and the multi-cultural vitality of the ancient Korean Peninsula along the route to the Silk Road. I can say that my journey with this female figure is still ongoing. To conclude I'd like to share my poem with you.

Where are all your twin sisters?

Each time you are molded and multiplied, worry, regret, and toil grow blunt.

Where is your eldest sister, your original?

They say an ancient king had the woman he loved buried alive beside him upon his death.

The ginger breath lingering from the blue-eyed merchant from a faraway land,

And the dances, ripened through the night by a crimson-chested musician's melody

- your sisters share the stories among yourselves like puzzle pieces.

You, who were never buried in a tomb nor had a single bone broken,

You, a faint replica of your eldest sister,

bear witness to the story's ending through an endless resurrection.

Perhaps I am also a replica like you,

descended from Mitochondrial Eve in Africa.

Perhaps all these are illusions.

In my dreams, the air is filled with star anise and sandstorms with camel cries,

And I dance a dance I have never learned, warming my core.

The hot-blooded men who once caught the eyes of your eldest sister,

Solemnly rode here to the eastern end of the Silk Road,

And at this sea they stopped, struck speechless.

Too precious, too dazzling—thus useless, thus vain—

they set down their treasures and put their old tales aside.



Translated Vase – When Will I See You Again (2025) Ceramic shards, steel, epoxy, 24k gold leaf, 275×387×155cm

Moonlight Crown (2019-ongoing)

“For a long time, I thought of crowns as substitutes for the haloes depicted over the heads of Buddha, Jesus, and other saints.”

Questioning the meaning of a lustrous crown—a symbol of absolute power, opulence, and glory—Yeesookyung creates crowns that have transformed into body-like forms, too large and heavy to be worn on the head. Adorned with an array of shiny, ornamental materials such as crystal, glass, and mirrors, they are intertwined with tiny sculptures of angels, girls' faces, praying hands, limbs, plants, and animals, all recurring motifs from the artist's *Daily Drawing* and *Flame* series. Radiating an exaggerated energy with their maximalist aesthetic, these crowns are so resplendent they verge on grotesque, embodying a duality between desire and despair, fascination and horror. By inventing new mystical feminine figures inspired by Korean folklore, Yeesookyung imbues the works with complex identities and dualities. (Text by Jeesun Park)



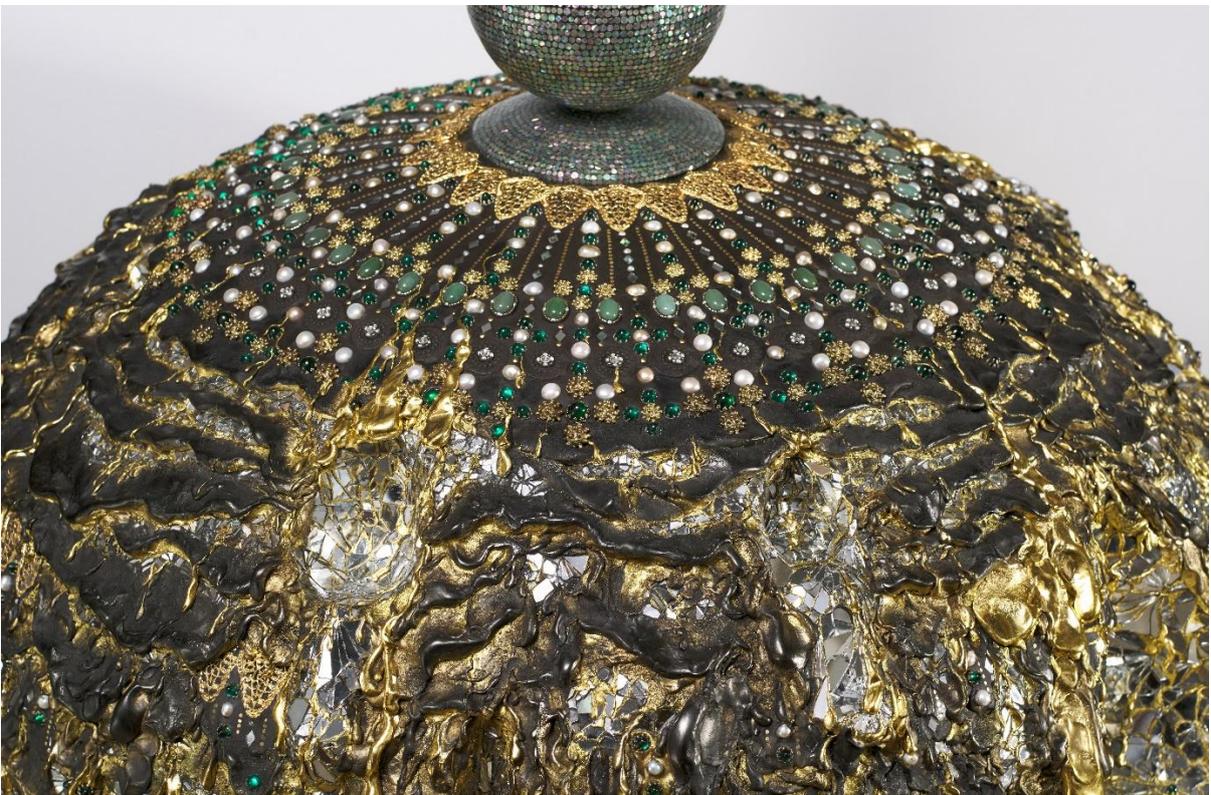
Installation view, *Moonlight Crowns*, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea, 2021



Installation view, *Moonlight Crowns*, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea, 2021
 Below: *Moonlight Crown_Intimate Sisters East Peak*, 2021, Brass, epoxy, iron, resin, 114(h)×73×74 cm



From left to right: *Moonlight Crown Intimate Sister All Asleep Variation 5-2*, 2023, 61(h)×37×26 cm;
 detail of *Moonlight Crown_Dragon's Bride*, 2018, 162(h)×90×90 cm



Detail of *Moonlight Crown_Lion Totem*, 2019, 225(h)×87×87 cm



Moonlight Crown_Guseul Halmang 2, 2021, 134.7(h)×56.4×41.9 cm

You Were There_Abu Dhabi 2024, You Were There_Al Ain 2024 (2024)

You Were There_Abu Dhabi is a sculpture formed from an AI-generated rock, covered in 24k gold leaf. Inspired by images of stones found at the highest points on Earth, this is a rock that does not exist in reality. Rather it is a form born from anonymous imagination. Gilding it with gold transforms this imagined object into something eternal and unchanging. Seventy percent of Korea is covered in rocky mountains, where stones still bear the traces of ancient dolmen culture and ritual practices. When I stand before a large rock, I often feel a subtle vibration—perhaps my own magnetic field responding to the minerals within. These stones seem to radiate an inexplicable energy, embodying time from the beginning of the universe to the present. They evoke a mysterious, almost sacred presence. Sending this imagined rock from Korea to Abu Dhabi carries with it a quiet sense of nostalgia. To honor its journey, I dedicated a song to the rock, performed by a traditional Korean musician. I asked the singer to convey this message: “You are real; you are born from the alchemy of turning stone into gold. May you carry the spirit of peace and coexistence to your new home.” This message was delivered through a Gueum chant—a form of traditional Korean vocal music that expresses emotion through melody rather than words. That sentiment lies at the heart of this work. Upon the rock’s arrival in Abu Dhabi, an Emirati musician welcomed this unfamiliar creation with a new song—celebrating its arrival and marking the beginning of its new life in a new land.



Left: Installation view, *You Were There_Abu Dhabi 2024*, 2024, FRP, 24k gold leaf, urethane paint, stainless steel, 172(h)×187×182 cm
Heritage Park, Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2024



Right: Installation view, *You Were There_Al Ain 2024*, 2024, FRP, 24k gold leaf, urethane paint, stainless steel, 160(h)×185×183 cm
Hili Archaeological Park, Al Ain, UAE, 2024



Performance, *You Were There_Abu Dhabi 2024* in Korea
2024. 10. 10, Yeesookyung's storage
Performer: Taeyoung Kim



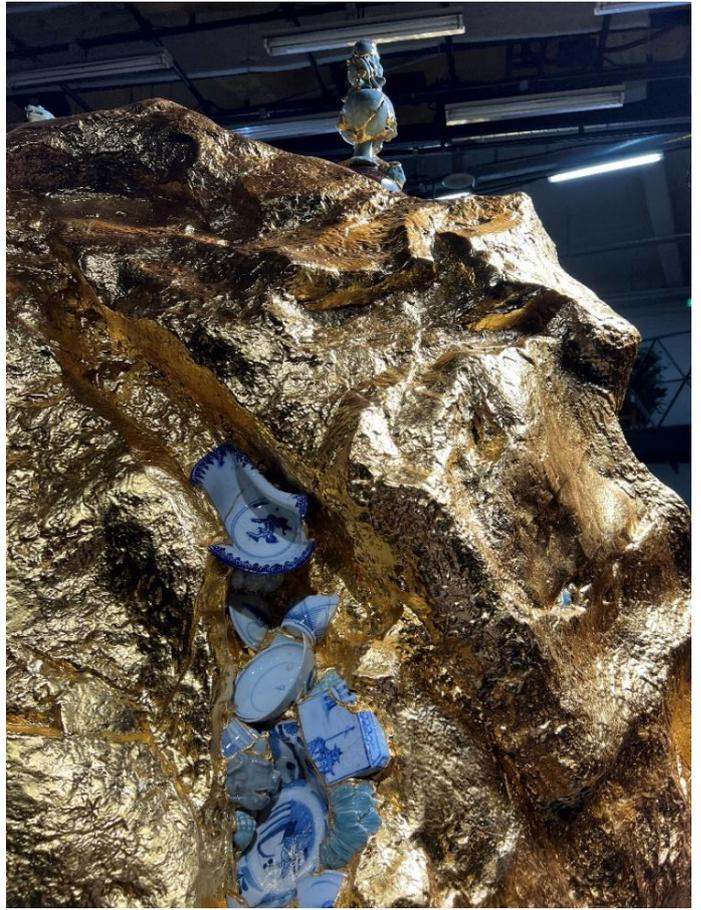
Performance, *You Were There_Abu Dhabi 2024* in Abu Dhabi
2024. 11. 07, Abu Dhabi, Heritage Park
Performer: Saif Al Ali

You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025 (2025)

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Cheonggyecheon Restoration, the Seoul Metropolitan Government held an invitational public art competition, organized in partnership with the Seoul Facilities Corporation and implemented by theallim Co., Ltd. The winning artist is Yeesoookyung, with the work *You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025*. *You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025* consists of a rock-shaped sculpture inspired by Toad Rock at the summit of Bugaksan Mountain, overlaid with ceramic shards and gold leaf, accompanied by performance videos and sound that celebrate the birth of new beings. From Cheonggyecheon, looking toward Gyeongbokgung Palace, visitors can see Bugaksan, Seoul's main mountain and the former source of Cheonggyecheon, with Toad Rock at its summit. One might imagine that the person who named the rock did so in the hope of invoking the toad's symbolism of abundance and prosperity—this imagination became the starting point of the project. While preparing this project, Yeesoookyung came across reports that unidentified ceramics were unearthed during the Cheonggyecheon restoration. Originating from earth, shaped by water, and born as distinct beings through fire, ceramics embody traces of everyday lives. This inspired her to merge the *You Were There* series with her representative work *Translated Vases*. In *Translated Vases*, discarded ceramic shards are reassembled, their "cracks" filled with "gold," creating new forms of organic and unpredictable coexistence. Gold is not used to restore or heal but rather to highlight the event of breakage itself, discovering beauty in destruction. It becomes an alchemical material that transforms incomplete, fractured beings into sacred entities. Viewers of *You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025* will not only appreciate the sculptural beauty but also engage in a multi-sensory experience through performance videos accessible via QR codes.



You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025, 2025, FRP, 24k gold leaf, urethane paint, stainless steel, 254(h)×255×247 cm



You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025, 2025, FRP, 24k gold leaf, urethane paint, stainless steel, 254(h)×255×247 cm

This project integrates musical performances, vocal works, and live acts by various participants with Yeesookyung's work, celebrating the birth of new beings and welcoming the artwork to Cheonggyecheon. Contrasting elements—the steadfast rock and the flowing water, the visual of art and the sound of music—come together in harmony. Since ancient times, humans have offered music as a blessing for new life. The performance greeting the newly installed work at Cheonggyecheon reaches out to its ecosystem, offering peace and harmony to the artwork, the stream, and all visitors.



Performance Images

Flame (2005-ongoing)

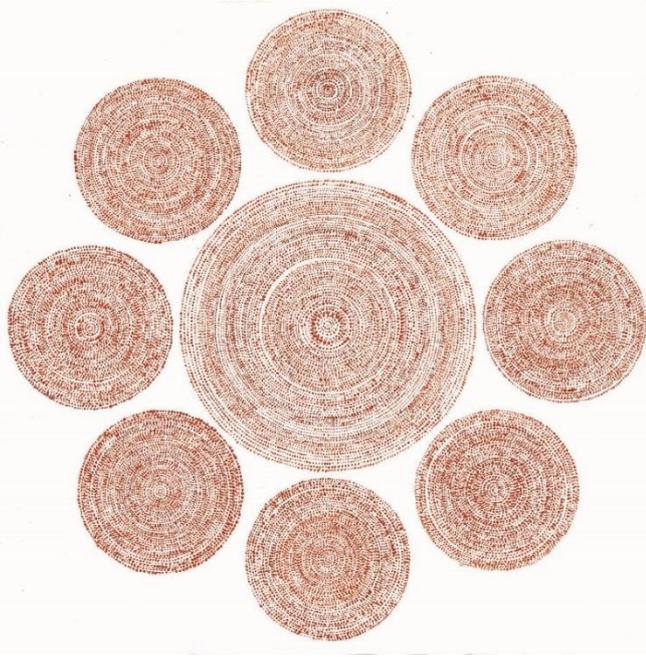
Yeesookyung's *Flame* paintings evoke therapeutic and mystical allusions, rendered with exquisite detail using deep red cinnabar on traditional Korean paper – a material commonly associated with talismans and Buddhist paintings. Created instinctively and spontaneously, much like the Surrealists' automatic drawings, Yeesookyung views flame as a symbol of life and death, sin and healing. Through this intensely laborious process, she seeks enlightenment within the self-propagating painterly chaos, searching for meaning and insight in the organic flow of each work. (Text by Jeesun Park)



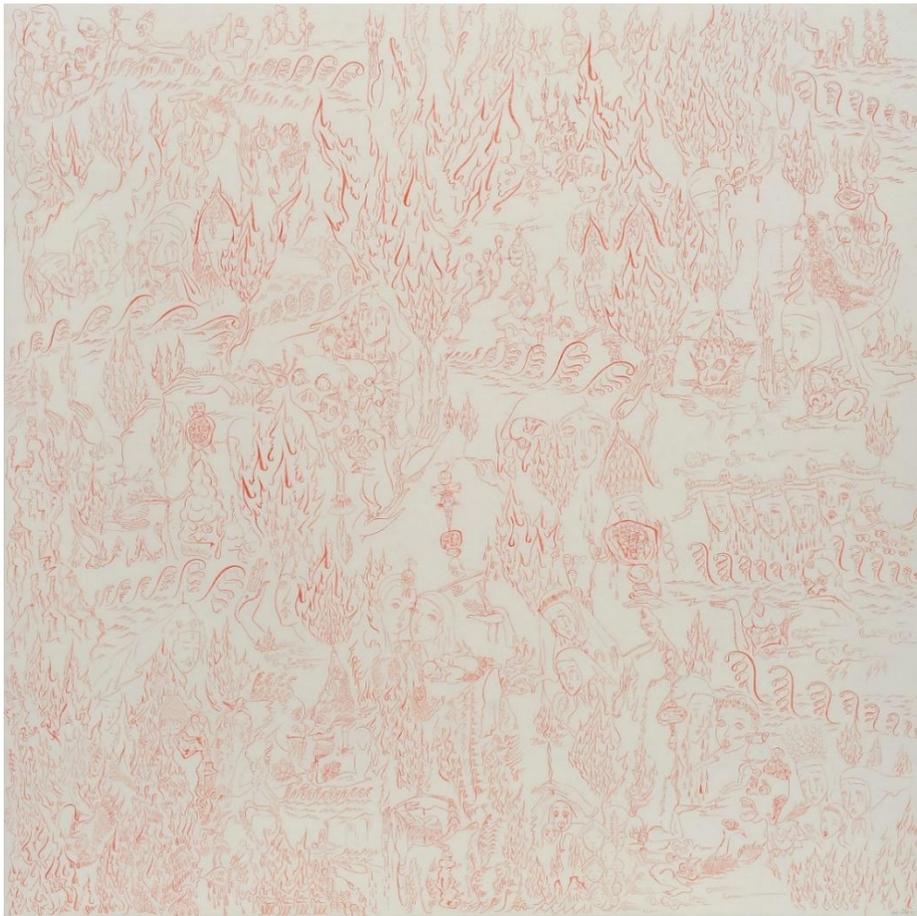
From left to right: Installation view, *Flame, Paradise Hormone*, Mongin Art Center, Seoul, Korea 2008; scene of working



Flame 2009-3, 2009, Cinnabar on Korean paper, 196×260 cm (detail)



From left to right: *Untitled*, 2005, Cinnabar on paper, 30×30 cm;
Flame 2006-1, 2006, Cinnabar on Korean paper, 100×100 cm



Flame 2013-1, 2013, Cinnabar on Korean paper, 100×100 cm

Flame Variation (2012-ongoing)

Flame and *Flame Variation* evolve from Yeesookyung's *Daily Drawings*, a series she began in 2004 as a daily practice of self-reflection and exploration of her identity as a woman. These early drawings, reminiscent of mandalas, are as meditative as they are awakening. Building on motifs from *Daily Drawings* and *Flame* paintings, *Flame Variation* is digitally mirrored and then meticulously hand-painted, resulting in uncanny yet sublime images that duplicate the sacred and secular, the conscious and subconscious. Rendered on silk scrolls, the paintings echo the iconography of Gorguryeo tombs murals and incorporate the symmetrical spatial organization of Tibetan Buddhist altar paintings. Both meditative and energetic, these works evoke layered, allegorical meanings in a non-linear, contemplative manner. (Text by Jeusun Park)



From top to bottom: Installation view, *Constellation Gemini*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Korea, 2012;
Flame Variation 1-1, 2012, Pigment on silk, Painting 70×120 cm / Scroll 195×138 cm

Twin Dance (2012)

In this performance and single-channel video work, two dancers, styled to resemble identical souvenir dolls, perform in mirrored synchrony. They enact Gyobang-chum, a courtesan dance from the Joseon dynasty, floating dreamily as if enveloped in a halo within a timeless, ethereal space. With precise, mesmerizing movements, the dancers bring to life a traditional dance that emphasizes fertility and inner strength of the female form, embodying an idealized vision of womanhood in traditional Korean society. (Text by Jeesun Park)

Preview: <https://vimeo.com/151764725>



Twin Dance, 2012, Single-channel video & sound, 11 min. 52 sec

Performance and video directing: Yeesookyung; Performance: Lee Junghwa, Chung Song Ii; Music: Jang Young Gyu; Costume: Kim Youngseok; Makeup: Soh In Gyeong; Camera and video editing: Cha Eun Teak

Norae (2010, 2012)

Norae encompasses both performance and stage design for *Gagok*, a form of traditional Korean vocal music that harmonizes female and male voices accompanied by a small ensemble of Korean instruments. *Gagok* is regarded as one of the most sophisticated styles among traditional "proper songs" (*jeongga*). Yeesookyung designed a unique stage to faithfully convey *yeochang* – songs for women characterized by their delicate, high-pitched, and refined vocal quality – without the use of any electronic devices or amplification, preserving the purity of the original sound. The music carries a serene, elegant melody that is neither lively nor somber; it is meditative, seeking a cleansing experience for the body and soul. (Text by Jeusun Park)

Exhibition video: <https://vimeo.com/31987004>



Norae-While Our Tryst Has Been Delayed, 2010,

Stage design and performance directing: Yeesookyung; Producer: Kim Inseon, Willing N Dealing; Performance: Jung Marie;
Stage Plan: Gim Youngjin; Design Firm; Film Editing: Kim Joonha; Costume: Yeesookyung