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 major group exhibitions such as the 57th Venice Biennale *VIVA ARTE VIVA*, exhibiting at the Arsenale (2017), to which she was invited by curator Christine Macel; *Monstrous Beauty*, curated by Iris Moon, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2025); and *Whispers on the Horizon: The Taipei Biennial 2025* at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan (2025). She was honored with the 44th Sejong Culture Award in the Culture, Arts, and Humanities category in recognition of her contributions 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 (2024).

Her works are held in major international museum collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, USA), Asian Art Museum (San Francisco, USA), 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 Jeesun Park)

Translated Vase (2002-ongoing)

Using a labor-intensive approach, Yeesookyung 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, Yeesookyung 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 of *Monstrous Beauty*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA, 2025.



Translated Vase_Nine Dragons in Wonderland, 2017,
Ceramic shards, stainless steel, aluminum bars, epoxy, 24k gold leaf, 492(h)×200×190 cm.
Installation view at *VIVA ARTE VIVA*, 57th International Art Exhibition, Arsenale, Venice, Italy, 2017.





Translated Vase_Thousand_2012, 2012, Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24k gold leaf.
Installation View at *Constellation Gemini*, Korea Artist Prize, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, 2012.
ⓒNational Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea



Translated Vase_2007 TVW 11, 2007 (left),
Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24k gold leaf, 160(h)×90×90 cm,
Collection of Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea.
ⓒLeeum, Samsung Museum of Art

Translated Vase_2007 TVW 10, 2007 (right),
Ceramic shards, epoxy, 24k gold leaf, 122(h)×84×81 cm,
Collection of Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS, USA.
ⓒMuseum Schloß Oranienbaum, Dessau, Germany

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

Translated Vase – When Will I See You Again is a new iteration of my ongoing *Translated Vase* series, created for the 2025 Taipei Biennial. In this work, I embrace a Tang-dynasty pottery figure of a lady playing polo in sancai glaze, a replica made for burial. The starting point for this work goes back to 2015, when I held a solo exhibition at the Taipei City Museum and visited the National Palace Museum. Among the many exquisite objects I encountered there, the Tang-dynasty female burial figures left a particularly strong impression on me. Over time, that memory faded. Then one day, while reading the biennial's curatorial text, the image suddenly came back to life with vivid clarity. I decided to bring the figure into this work.

My *Translated Vase* series suggests an engagement with what remains after an original form is lost. For this work in the biennial, I fully embrace the replicas as replicas on their own terms. While working, I realized that my fascination with the female figure was sparked by my long-standing 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 multicultural 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. The back of the work, unlike the front, appears rough and unfinished. Through the small gaps, a strong beam of light leaks out. I hope this opens new ways of thinking and ignites the imagination of viewers.

To conclude, I would like to share my poem with you.

(Excerpt from the artist's notes)

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, lighting, 275(h)×387×155 cm.

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 of *Moonlight Crowns*, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea, 2021.





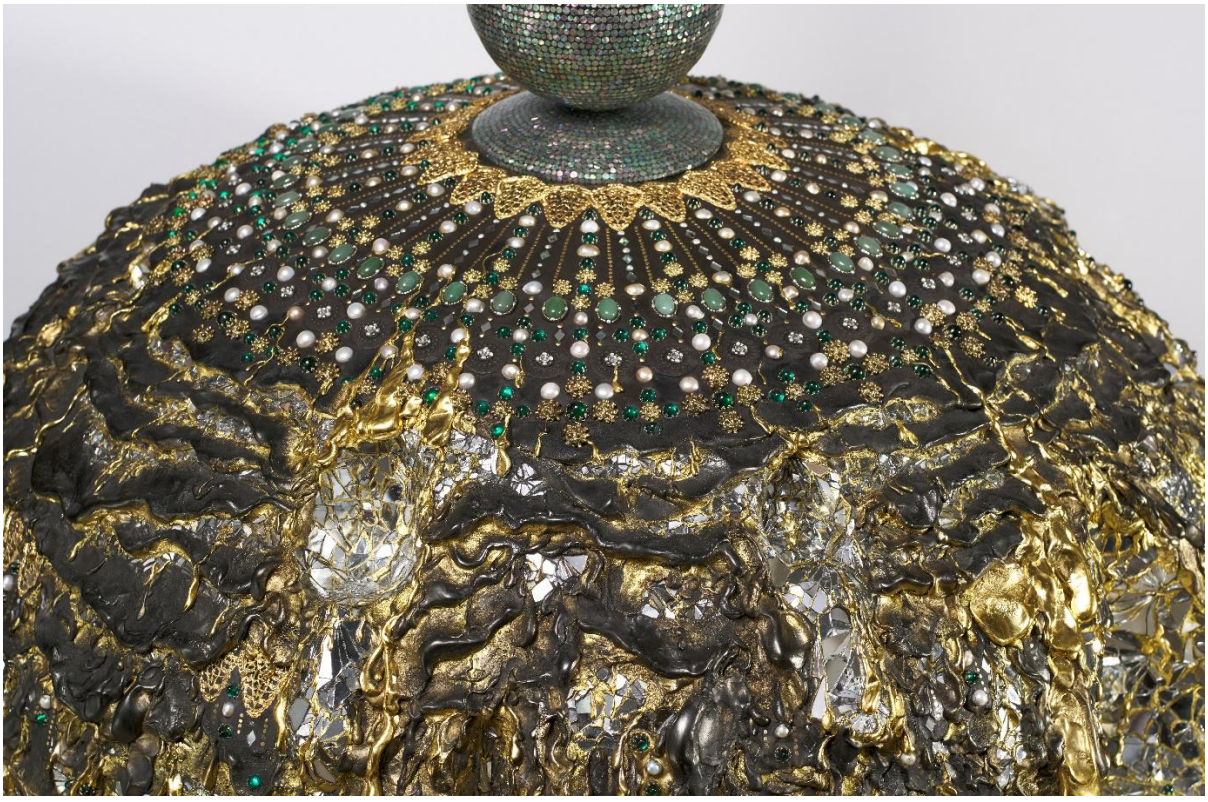
(Top) Installation view of *Moonlight Crowns*, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea, 2021.
(Bottom) *Moonlight Crown_Intimate Sisters_East Peak*, 2021, Brass, epoxy, iron, resin, 114(h)×73×74 cm.





(Left) *Moonlight Crown_Intimate Sisters_All Asleep Variation* 5-2, 2023, 61(h)×37×26 cm.

(Right) 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_2024 is a sculptural work in which Yeesookyung covers an AI-generated rock form with 24K gold leaf. Inspired by images of rocks found at the highest points on Earth, she gives physical form to a stone that does not exist in reality. The act of gilding transforms this imagined object into a presence meant to endure, elevating it into something eternal and unchanging.

Seventy percent of Korea is mountainous terrain shaped by rock, where stones still bear traces of ancient dolmen culture and ritual practices. Standing before large boulders, the artist has often described sensing a subtle vibration, as though an inner magnetic field were responding to the minerals within. The rock radiates an inexplicable energy, evoking a mysterious and sacred presence, as if holding time from the beginning of the universe to the present.

Upon sending the work from Korea to Abu Dhabi, Yeesookyung sought to carry a quiet intention with its journey. To honor its passage, she dedicated a song performed by a traditional Korean musician and asked that the following message be conveyed:

> "You are real. You are a being born from the alchemy of turning stone into gold.
> May you carry the spirit of peace and coexistence to your new home."

The message was delivered through a *gueum* chant, a form of traditional Korean vocal music that expresses emotion through melody rather than words. Upon the work's arrival in Abu Dhabi, a local musician welcomed the unfamiliar presence with a new song, commemorating its arrival and marking the beginning of a new life in a new land.





(Left) Installation view of *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 of *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 for *You Were There_Abu Dhabi 2024* in Korea.
Yeesookyung's storage, Oct. 10, 2024.
Performed by Taeyoung Kim



Performance for *You Were There_Abu Dhabi 2024* in Abu Dhabi.
Abu Dhabi, Heritage Park, Nov. 07, 2024.
Performed by Saif Al Ali

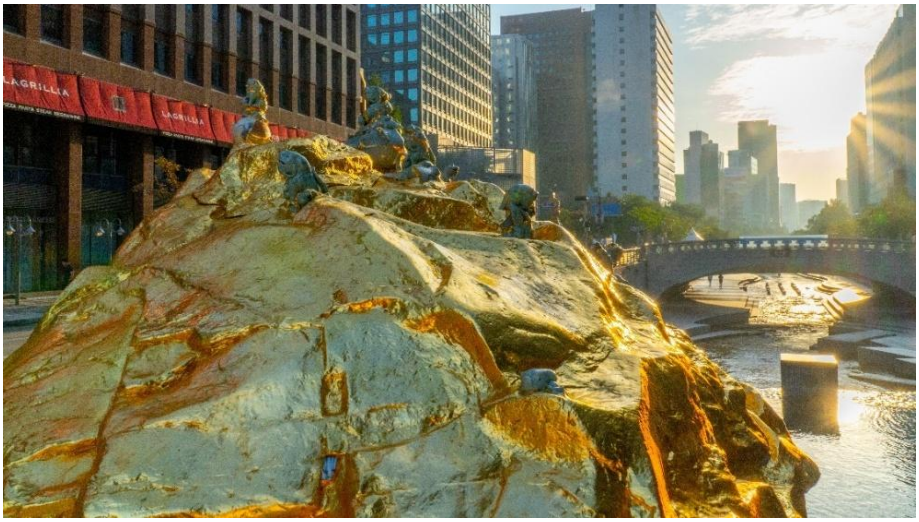
You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025 (2025)

Yeesookyung's *You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025* brings together sculpture and performance as a multi-sensory public artwork for Cheonggyechon stream in central Seoul. Selected as the winning proposal in an invited public art competition marking the 20th anniversary of the Cheonggyecheon restoration, the work consists of a rock-shaped sculpture inspired by Toad Rock at the summit of Bugaksan Mountain, overlaid with ceramic shards and gold leaf. It is accompanied by seven recorded performances that celebrate the birth of new beings.

Bugaksan, Seoul's main mountain and the former source of Cheonggyecheon, rises behind Gyeongbokgung Palace. At its summit stands Toad Rock, perhaps named to wish for abundance and prosperity. This imagination became the starting point of the project.

While preparing the work, Yeesookyung encountered reports that numerous unidentified ceramic fragments 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. Here, gold does not restore or heal. Instead, it accentuates the event of breakage itself, discovering beauty in destruction. It functions as an alchemical material that transforms incomplete, fractured beings into sacred entities. Viewers not only encounter 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, ceramic shards, epoxy, urethane paint, stainless steel, 254(h)×255×247 cm.



You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025, 2025, FRP, 24k gold leaf, ceramic shards, epoxy, 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.



Video stills from the performances for *You Were There_Cheonggyecheon 2025*, 2025.

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 of *Paradise Hormone*, Mongin Art Center, Seoul, Korea, 2008; Yeesookyung at work.

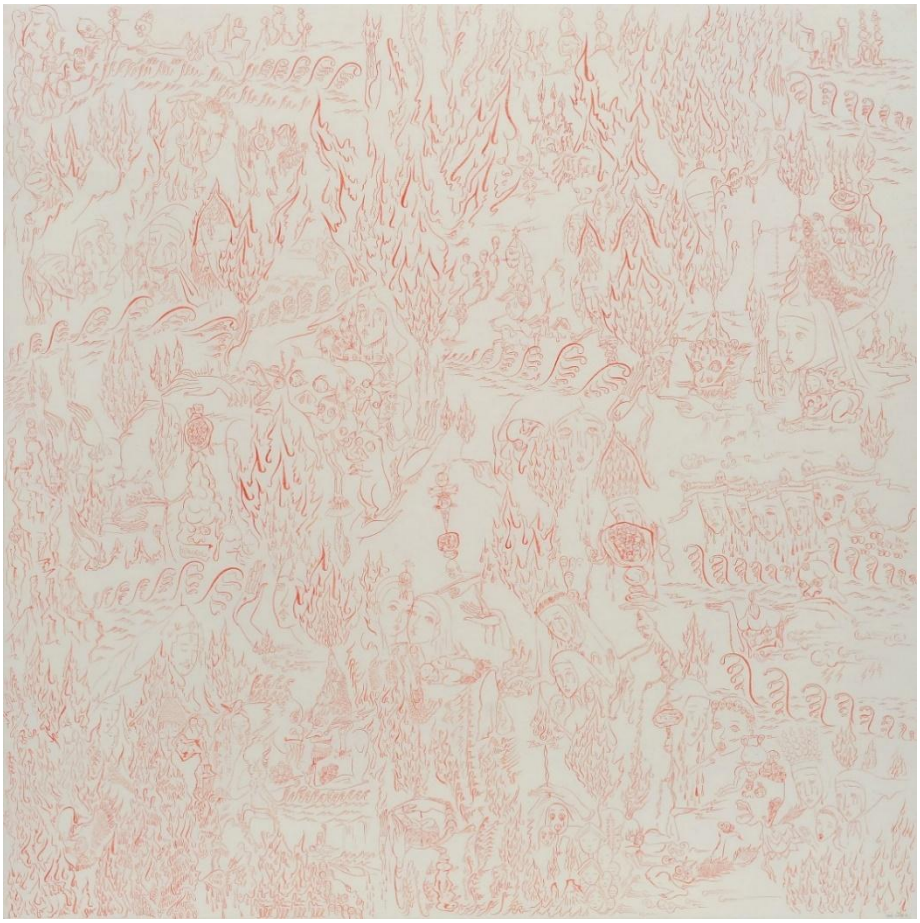


Detail of *Flame 2009-3*, 2009, Cinnabar on Korean paper, 196×260 cm.





(Left) *Untitled*, 2005, Cinnabar on paper, 30×30 cm.
(Right) *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 tomb murals and incorporate the symmetrical spatial organization of Tibetian Buddhist altar paintings. Both meditative and energetic, these works evoke layered, allegorical meanings in a non-linear, contemplative manner. (Text by Jeesun Park)





(Top) Installation view of *Constellation Gemini*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Korea, 2012.
(Bottom) *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



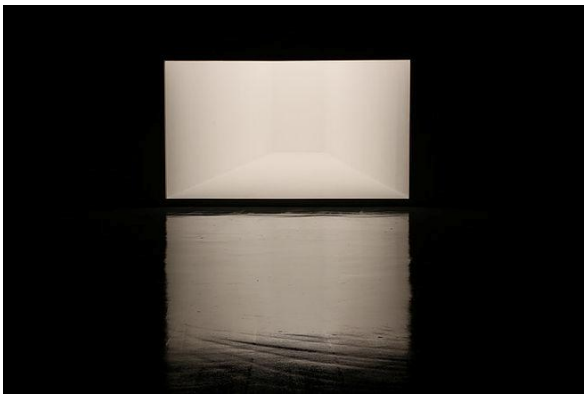


Twin Dance, 2012, Single-channel video & sound, 11 min. 52 sec.
Performance and video direction: Yeesookyung; Performers: Lee Jung Hwa, Chung Song Ii; Music: Jang Young Gyu; Costume: Kim Youngseok; Makeup: Soh In Gyeoung; Camera and video editing: Cha Eun Teak.

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 Jeesun Park)

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







Norae-While Our Tryst Has Been Delayed, 2010.
Stage design and performance direction: Yeesookyung; Producer: Kim Inseon (Willing N Dealing); Performer: Jung Marie; Stage plan: Gim Youngjin; Film editing: Kim Joonha; Costume: Yeesookyung.

Oh, Rose! (2026)

Oh, Rose! is a video work that takes as its point of departure the rose, a recurring motif in Yeesookyung's practice. By selecting, according to the viewer's preferences, AI-generated petals, stems, and backgrounds based on the roses Yeesookyung has painted, one can create a personalized rose—authenticated via blockchain—that blooms and fades endlessly within a personal digital garden on a digital device. Just as the act of "breeding" presupposes human intervention to produce desired traits, the process of selecting petals, stems, and backgrounds for one's digital garden likewise entails deliberate and personal intervention. The personalized rose—formed through technologically mediated choices—attains a kind of "immortality" in the digital realm, never withering. This moment of immortality is thus realized through cutting-edge technology.
(Text by Kim Yunkyoung)

Preview: https://vimeo.com/1207979417



Oh, Rose!, 2026, Single-channel video, 192 hr.

Moonlight Crown (2026)

Created using generative interactive technology, *Moonlight Crown* (2026) offers an experience that is never the same, unfolding within a larger cycle beyond human control or intervention. Real-time data from the viewer's location—solar and lunar cycles, along with weather data—drives the ceaseless unraveling and reassembling of the twenty-one visual elements that compose the seven crowns. Yeesookyung's effort to question and dismantle the human crown—which replaced the halo once shining above the heads of saints, feigning authority, power, dignity, and glory to conceal its own lack—has taken shape in the *Moonlight Crown* series (2019–present). This intention now unfolds before our eyes as a vivid sensory reality through generative interactive technology. Across the screen, crowns glittering with an unreal brilliance shift form with vast cosmic cycles, endlessly slipping in search of their original form—one that no longer exists.
(Text by Kim Yunkyoung)

Preview: https://vimeo.com/1207988537



Moonlight Crown, 2026, Single-channel video, Real-time interaction.

Mary Untier of Knots (2026)

Mary Untier of Knots (2026), which depicts the Virgin Mary smiling as she finds a rose while untangling a knot, is likewise a variation of its 2024 counterpart, reworked through digital technology. In the twenty-first century, where communication networks connect the entire globe just as divine omnipresence permeates every corner of the universe, does the divinity within us also manifest through synchronization with the sacred in a lucid digital space optimized for high-resolution displays? The image of the Virgin Mary—coexisting eternally with the divine presence, neither aging, falling ill, nor dying, just as she was two thousand years ago—functions through digital technology as a mechanism that continually updates the divinity within us. (Text by Kim Yunkyoung)

Preview: https://vimeo.com/1207987515



Mary Untier of Knots, 2026, Single-channel video, 3 min.