

Yeesookyung

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

www.yeesookyung.com

Yeesookyung's works is rooted in a richly imaginative approach to narrative and myth, and spans a wide range of media including installation, sculpture, performance, video, painting, and drawing. Her work explores essential questions about human existence, 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 steadily developed a unique and expansive artistic vision.

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 MADRE & Capodimonte Museum, Naples, Italy (2019); Saint Breeder at Atelier Hermès, Seoul (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 in 2017, and in Monstrous Beauty: A Feminist Revision of Chinoiserie, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA (2025). In recognition of her contribution as a Korean artist at the 1st Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennial—where she introduced Korean art and traditional music to audiences in the Middle East—she was awarded the 44th Sejong Culture Award in the field of Culture, Arts, and Humanities.

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 Jeusun 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*, 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)x20x190 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, 160x90x90 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, 122x84x81 cm
Collection of Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, USA
©Museum Schloß Oranienbaum, Dessau, Germany

***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 Jeessun 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)x73x74 cm



From left to right: *Moonlight Crown Intimate Sister All Asleep Variation 5-2*, 2023, 61(h)x37x26 cm;
 detail of *Moonlight Crown_Dragon's Bride*, 2018, 162(h)x90x90 cm



Detail of *Moonlight Crown_Lion Totem*, 2019, 225(h)x87x87 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)x187x182 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)x185x183 cm
Hili Archaeological Park, Al Ain, UAE, 2024



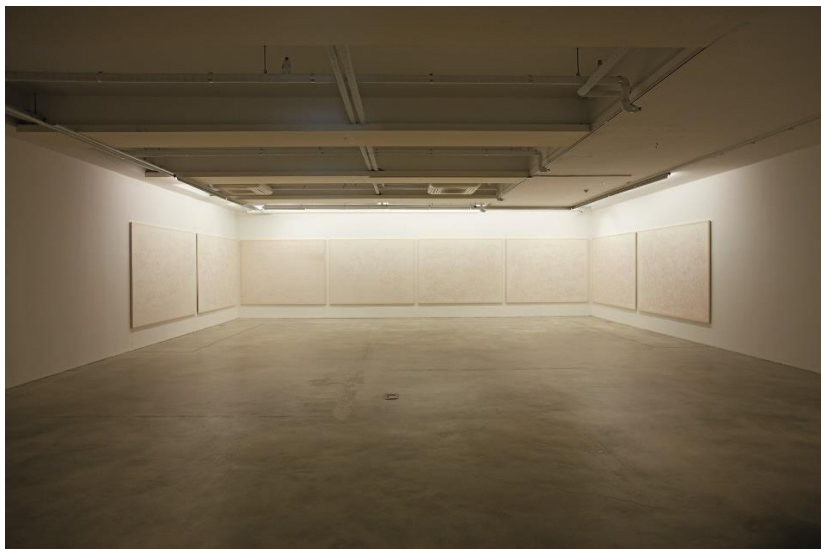
Performance, *You Were There_Abu Dhabi 2024* in Korea
2024. 10. 10, Yeesoookyung's storage
Performer: Taeyoung Kim



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

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)



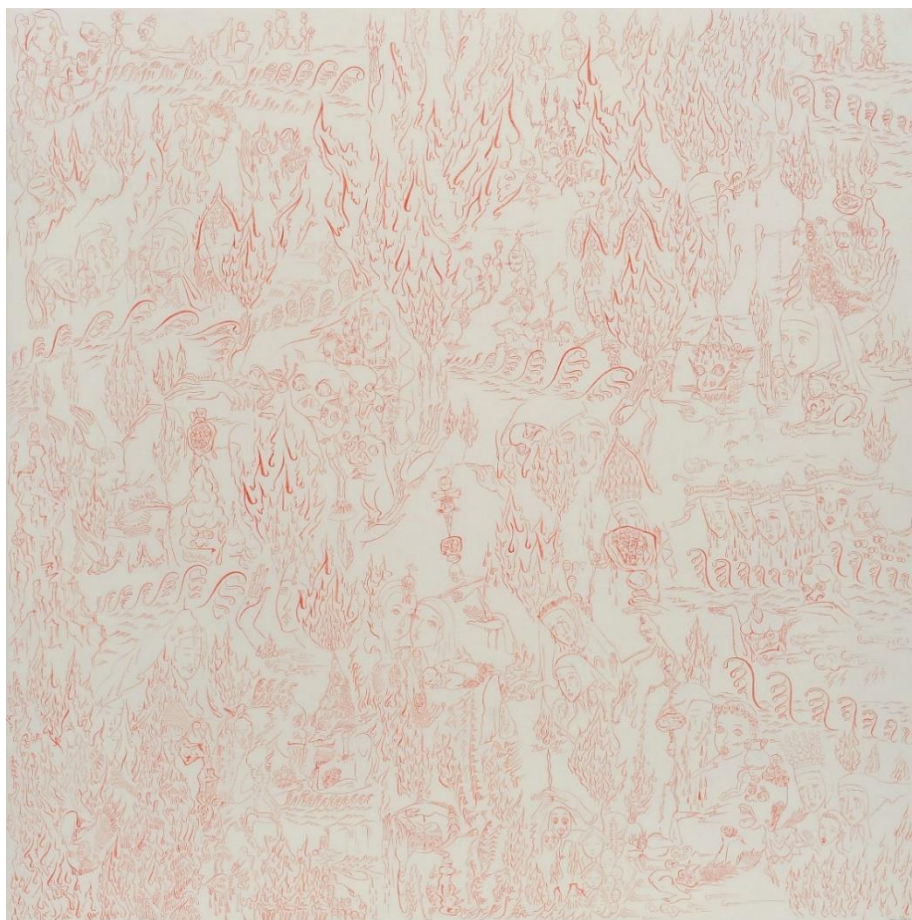
From left to right: Installation view, *Flame*, *Paradise Hormone*, Mongin Art Center, Seoul, Korea 2008; scene of working



Flame 2009-3, 2009, Cinnabar on Korean paper, 196x260 cm (detail)



From left to right: *Untitled*, 2005, Cinnabar on paper, 30x30 cm;
Flame 2006-1, 2006, Cinnabar on Korean paper, 100x100 cm



Flame 2013-1, 2013, Cinnabar on Korean paper, 100x100 cm

Flame Variation (2012-ongoing)

Flame and *Flame Variation* evolve from Yeessookyung'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 Goguryeo 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 Jeesun 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 70x120 cm / Scroll 195x138 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

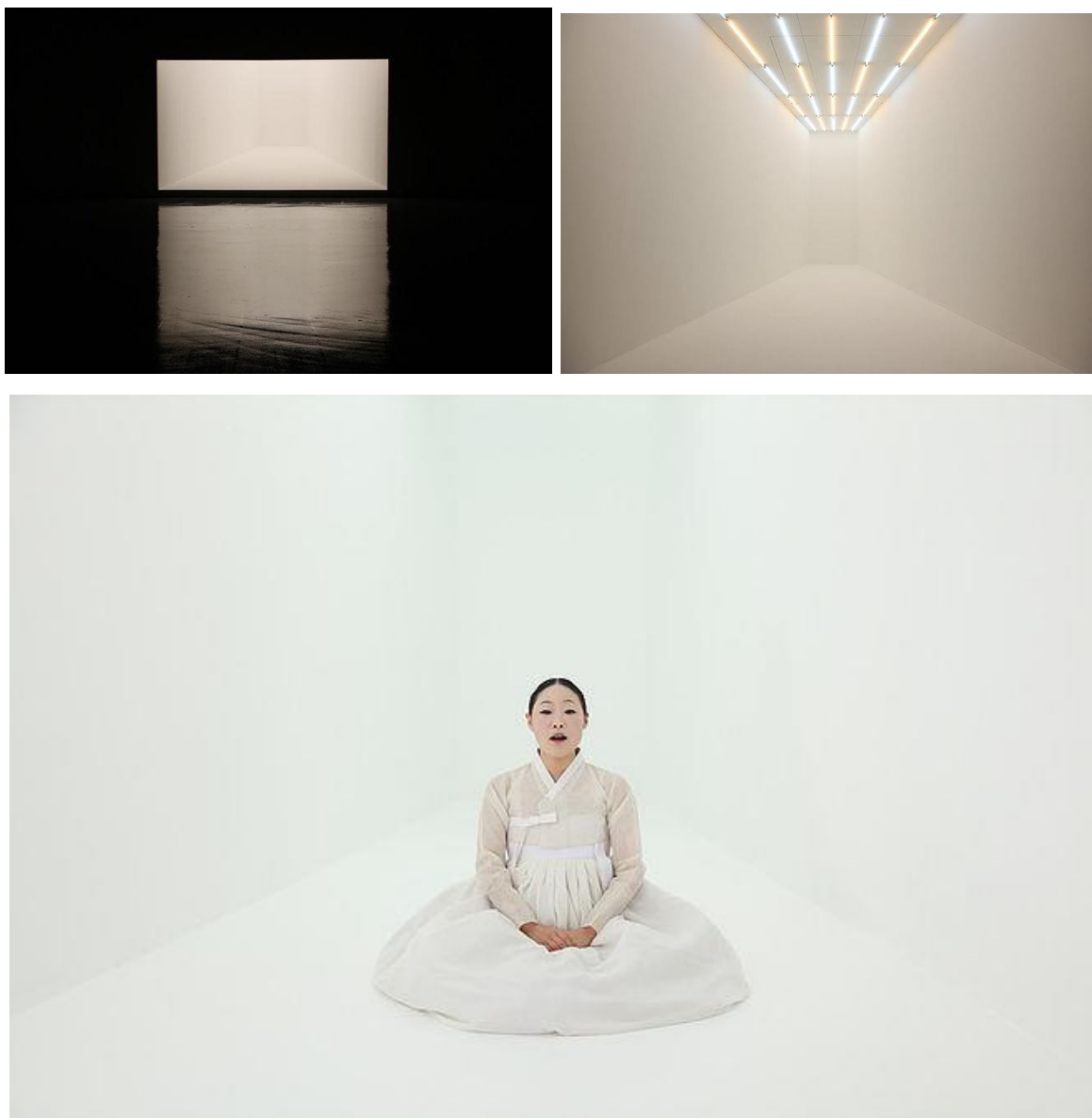
Performance and video directing: Yeesookyung; Performance: Lee Junghwa, Chung Song Ii; Music: Jang Young Gyu; Costume: Kim Youngseok; Makeup: Soh In Gyeong; Camera and video editing: Cha Eun Teak

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*). Yeesoookyung 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 Jeeseun Park)

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



Norae-While Our Tryst Has Been Delayed, 2010,
Stage design and performance directing: Yeesoookyung; Producer: Kim Inseon, Willing N Dealing; Performance: Jung Marie;
Stage Plan: Gim Youngjin; Design Firm; Film Editing: Kim Joonha; Costume: Yeesoookyung