



Sangmin Lee

How to Unfold a Home

Somewhere to Settle In

Memory

It is the mid 1990s in Toronto's east end. A Korean immigrant and single mother comes home from a long day's work. Too tired to do much else, she settles onto the couch beside her young son as the cartoon *The Simpsons* plays on TV, the evening's interlude in living rooms across North America.

Arrival

On the afternoon of August 13, 2021, a large wooden crate is delivered to the steps of OOD Gallery in Dawson City. It has surmounted a vast 5900 kilometers of terrain from Toronto to Canada's Yukon Territory. It sits on the sidewalk, innocuous and mute. Two gallery staff laboriously move the crate indoors. They begin, methodically, to disassemble the crate, unpack its contents, and reconfigure its charges within the gallery.

Unfolding

Without having met Korean-Canadian artist Sang Min Lee in person, they follow a series of meticulously prepared instructions from a four page manual titled 'How To Unfold A Home'. It includes diagrams for assembling each component and where the objects are to be placed. It reads as part blueprint, part architectural rendering, part inventory list, part Ikea furniture assembling manual, and part proposition for something more evanescent- could it be an aspiration of sorts, a desire? A hope?

In the gallery, the crate is disassembled and reconfigured into a structural frame the size of a small room. Rectangular tiles of packing foam are unpacked to reveal sculptures nestled inside. The foam is neatly piled up like stacks of books, and the sculptures are dispersed within the frame.

Recollection

As part of his practice, Lee has actively perused and collected images from various visual archives. The sculptures reference some of these images, in particular, a serene 1902 folding screen titled "Cranes and Peaches" depicting red-crowned cranes amidst a waterscape framed by peach trees. Lee translates this into sculptures of cranes, several peaches, and a peach tree branch made of construction materials and paint. Images related to personal memories are referenced too. The graphic designs on sacks of rice have been appropriated and reprinted onto pillowcases. The TV show character Bart Simpson is carved from insulation foam and painted. Banana sculptures whose skins reveal varying degrees of decay are lined up in a row, and cloud forms float gently within the frame.

The result creates a sort of apparition. An assemblage of simulacrum have gathered in one place, conflating time and relieving themselves of contextual bearings. The effect is surreal- the sculptures gently settling into a configuration from which the scene might eventually dissipate, perhaps elsewhere, perhaps forming anew.

History

In another art historical archive, Lee references Korean Chaekgeori (책거리) paintings. Translated roughly as 'books and things', it is a form of still life painting popularized in 18th century Korea characterized by representations of personal belongings arranged on bookshelves (including books, trinkets, writing materials, food, bronzes and references to nature). The paintings were executed on large panels and often functioned as room dividers, acting as movable parts of the architecture. This division and compartmentalization generated a sort of intimacy by framing people and creating malleable contexts. An assemblage of entities can serendipitously resolve and re-resolve in a multitude of configurations and reconfigurations.

Like Chaekgeori, the artist's display of motifs have been arranged according to the logic of personal yet nebulous intentions, perhaps being corralled in an attempt to make sense of notions of personal memory, identity, and belonging. They are predicated by questions that the artist has attempted to grapple with throughout his practice- is it possible to recover a sense of home amidst displacing populations and a globalizing world? Can an individual hold multiple histories simultaneously, and to carry them forward into the future?

Flight

Perhaps there is knowledge elsewhere, outside the boundaries of language where answers can be intuited. While every winter in Korea, like clockwork, red-crowned cranes arrive after a migratory journey traversing south east Russia, China, and Mongolia. They have undertaken this passage for millenia and have become a symbol of immortality and an evocation of the continuation of life, a reminder of the deep motivations driving migratory journeys.

And in time, the gallerists will gather the sculptures and nestle them back into cradles of packing foam, reassemble the frame into a shipping crate, refold each element into itself like a collapsing wing, and label the crate with a new address. Having fulfilled the purpose which predicated its arrival, it embarks once more on a migratory path toward wide, open vistas, toward chartered lands but a yet to be known future, home bound.

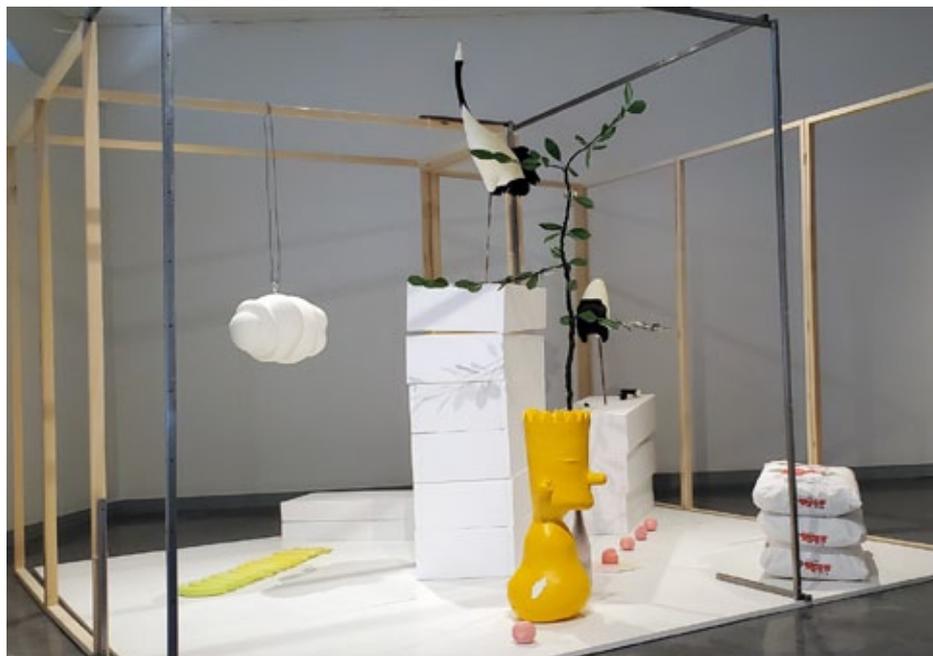
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Mary Ma is a writer, artist, and educator. She has written essays and art criticism for various magazines, literary publications, and peer reviewed journals. She currently lives and works in Mississauga Canada.

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HOW TO UNFOLD A HOME

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A single shipping crate unfolds out to temporarily make this place home. Every part of the shipping crate, including its packing materials and enveloped art objects, are specifically composed, then repacked, to make a new home wherever the next “here” may be.

Sangmin Lee is a mixed-media artist born and raised in Toronto, ON, Canada. Lee has shown nationally and internationally from Toronto, Montreal, Osaka (Japan), Jeongseong (Korea), and Paris (France). Currently, a member of the Red Head Gallery Collective and incoming MFA Sculpture Candidate at Columbia University.

www.sangminl.com

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KLONDIKE INSTITUTE OF ART & CULTURE

Box 8000 | Dawson City, Yukon
(867) 993-5005 | www.kiac.ca

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