

**Drift(s)**  
from the  
**Temporary Present**  
to the  
**Distant Future**

**Eunyoung Chae**  
Director of Space  
Imsi

# Drift(s) from the Temporary Present to the Distant Future

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I have been hearing a half-joking question from some time ago: “Hasn’t this space called Space Imsi (literally meaning a temporary space)<sup>1</sup> been around for too long?” Come to think of it, that’s true. In the fall of 2016, I had my own concept, thinking of running this place until it becomes no more fun or I run out of money. But it has already been nearly six years. Although there were no commemorative events, writing this article gave me the opportunity to encounter moments of embarrassment and a sense of pride while looking back on the time. As the director a.k.a. artist and self-employed of a non-profit-oriented exhibition space, I was loaded with documents and projects that appear to have no end this fall.

It was back when I was one of the contributors to the three projects held in Songdo International City: *The Invisibles* 2009, *Other Residence: Community Research* 2020, and *Description of Bankruptcy* 2021. At a time when many plans and creative works for urban discourses and artistic practices focused on the placeness and history of old downtown areas, I questioned myself about art that would have relations with the temporality, placeness, and community within the present city built on reclaimed land that has no native people nor ghosts. This was the beginning of the curatorial that attempted to traverse the imaginative locality that we call a region or locality and recreate it in cultural arts. These were questions and doubts on whether a local area can have some imaginative thing like a country or nationality.

## Trans-locality and ecosystem-politics

The “Local Curating Forum” was the first project held after opening Space Imsi at a corner of the Open-Port Culture

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Space Imsi  
website: [www.sapceimsi.com](http://www.sapceimsi.com)  
social media: @spaceimsi

District in 2016. It served as a pillar that set the direction of various activities held at Imgong.<sup>2</sup> In the 2016 forum, the orbit and index of locality and planned medium were created by interviewing 12 researchers, planners, and researchers who have been or were active in a local area. In the following year, the forum shared that the locality of history and placeness in the relationship of the region and art that second and third-generation alternative space planners or independent planners in Jeju, Suncheon, Sokcho, Daegu, and Incheon pursued was the starting point for commonness in the same era. The 2018 forum was held under the theme of “Historic Event and Community” in Incheon, the city of labor, to discuss major historic incidents like the Jeju uprising (Apr. 3, 1948), the sinking of MV Sewol (Apr. 16, 2014), and the Yeosu-Suncheon rebellion (Oct. 19, 1948), as well as to reenact female labor. It also featured the Cort-Cortek strike and a short film about labor movements. During the 2019 forum themed “Local, Criticism, Archive”, planners from Gwangju, Suncheon, and Busan sympathized with the challenges, failures, and meaning of the continuous process of operating critical media and writings in a local area. In 2020, instead of local cultural planning oriented toward cultural arts education and living culture, the forum hosted theme brainstorming seminars for visual arts planning, exhibition planning workshop, self-research, and open critique. In the 2021 forum, female planners who conducted research and planning related to the local areas for over a decade provided the opportunity to reflect on their activities and outlooks. The Local Curating Forum was indefinitely suspended due to various situations after six forums.

*Trifocal Action* 2019 reappropriated the “West Sea Peace Art Project” that aims at the locality of a peace city that borders Incheon. “Affective Signal” and “Performative Perspective” were temporarily carried out to create the scenery between close-range, mid-range, and far-range focuses and distances of humans and non-humans on the island Yeongheung-do where

<sup>2</sup> Space Imsi is often shortened as “Imgong” in Korean.

South Korea's largest thermal power station is situated and functions as a power supplier for cities and humans, rather than the placeness and history of political and historical peace related to the Korean War. Furthermore, "String Figure", which investigates and maps the cultural art activities associated with Incheon's island and peace, was used to examine the discourse of "peaceful" cultural arts designed and reproduced as local cultural policies and public capital,<sup>3</sup> along with its re-creation and (local) artists that carry it out. When starting something, investigating and meta-analyzing the current state of the visual arts ecosystem of an existing local area, planning and executing projects or exhibitions in stages, and the methodologies for theories and formats are crucial factors for Imgong curatorials.

The Sea Trilogy was devised from emphasizing the identity and placeness of Incheon as a seaside city. The majority of the exhibitions were an attempt toward common senses and awareness rather than special features—regions, places, and targets—that would break free from the past histories and patriarchal myths, seas and non-human beings that exist through the objectification of industries and fishers, and symbols of consumption gathered from nostalgic and romantic communities and tourism. It's true that there were some misunderstandings because exhibitions on the climate crisis and marine ecosystems began to flood out with the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, *Paralleled Space 2020* focused on the narrow Sorae Strait between Incheon and Siheung, *How The Sea Thinks 2021* on porpoises inhabiting the West Sea to the seas of Southeast Asia, and *Bird Does Not Exist 2022* on the allegory of trans-locality in the small island of Soya-do that is part of the Deokjeok Archipelago, while anticipating another possibility of locality and art that would be discovered when keeping a distance from re-creation and reproduction.

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I use the term public capital not as using public funds for support but as institutional power.

## Reorganization and Rearrangement of Absence and Deficiency

The public residency called the Incheon Art Platform functions as Incheon's municipal art museum since the city is the only metropolitan city without one. The *Fake Museum Project: Incheon Museum of Art*<sup>4</sup> conveyed the delay of a municipal art museum that symbolizes public systems and capital—the black hole of the local cultural art ecosystem—in an overthrowing manner, breaking away from simply talking about the absence of a municipal museum. It displayed works, research, and public projects of local areas, the public, and art museums that one could imagine. The opening exhibition *Second City, Third Community* depicted fantasies about having the same desire to become the second city under homogeneity while all cities other than Seoul emphasized locality and history in the Korean compressed-neoliberalism. It also portrayed imagination that if the first community is based on hometown and alma maters, the second community would be a community objectified in public art, and the third a community based on relationships and horizontal solidarity. The exhibition was held simultaneously at the old downtown area of Incheon main hall and in Songdo International City new hall and Yeongdeungpo-gu, Seoul branch. *Other Map: Open Port, Cat, Culture-Ecology* was a public project of developing a tourist map with different temporality and locality through a series of recompositions. It employed elements like plants, neighborhood cats, masked cases, and places to revamp attractions that symbolize and are consumed like a huge showcase through tourism and buildings based on humans and capital, like the Open Port Culture District's historical opening of the Incheon Port, modern buildings during the Japanese rule, China Town, and jjajangmyeon noodles in black bean sauce.

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While the Incheon municipal art museum puts emphasis as an art “structure” created through local systems and capital, the “Fake Museum Project: Incheon Museum of Art” exhibition represents a worldview of creating beauty where diverse existences will spring up.

If local art continues to repeat the absence of a municipal museum as a problem like a funnel, then it will be the same for the absence of criticism and research. History of art, Incheon, which was published based on the study of *Fake Museum Project: Incheon Museum of Art 2017*, focuses on the “rough and baseless” research of planning mediators who recently began direct and indirect activities in the region to study the lack of existing local art research data, relative local art talks and criticism, and the impossibility of applying general art history research methods. Following the 2017 research for the chronology of female artists and the 2018–2019 research for local art chronology, “another history of art: space of space” 2020–2021 investigated about 700 Incheon exhibition spaces and writings related to art spaces from the opening of the port until 2021. In 2022, “another history of art: trace of trace” gathered incidents overshadowed by representative local historical and cultural incidents in the 2000s, as well as visual art culture activities in a newspaper format. “Incheon Art Archive: A Study on Exhibitions in 2000s” 2021–2022 and “Incheon Art Archive Toolkit” 2022 are study findings on the construction and public use of local visual art planners and space operators in the 2000s and on the archives of post-modern and present local arts. Such local art research is not written as “Incheon Art History” in uppercase letters which imply making history in existing relationships; rather, it is written “history of art, Incheon” in lowercase letters, conveying the message of “not seen nor heard.”

Review34<sup>5</sup> started independently as a local art venue for seminars and reviews between 2018 and 2019. The platform has become an inter-local webzine since 2020. It got its name from Kim Young-min's *Comrade Trilogy*<sup>6</sup>; 34 *Munhak*, a surrealism coterie magazine that published its first issue in 1934; and the library *Samsajae* that represents the attitude that Jeong Yak-yong said had to be observed when studying. In a situation where criticism cannot be expected in the

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Website: [review34.kr](http://review34.kr)

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*Comrade and Lover* (2008), *The Comrade Theory* (2008), and *Critique Forest and Comrade Community* (2011)

so-called “Hanyang Contemporary”<sup>7</sup>, I found writers who began or intend to build local relationships to create present records, breaking away from repetitive, typical, or abstruse officiant speeches; newspaper articles that only feature a portion of press releases; and fragmented and flat social media. Furthermore, together we look into activities taking place not just in Incheon but also nationwide and abroad—activities that are similar yet different and different yet similar, such as “Public Art Project in Our Neighborhood”, “Peace”, “Archive”, and “Diaspora”.

### Vibrating Slowly Yet Extensively

Upon shortly examining the time that Imgong spent as a 2.5-generation non-profit-oriented visual art space in Incheon, I could explain Imgong in three aspects: “trans-locality” and “ecosystem-politics” theme, “reorganization and rearrangement of absence and deficiency” method, and “the courage to drift while vibrating slowly yet meticulously” attitude. In reality, it is crucial to avoid getting sucked into the perpetual problems of capital and people, as well as to avoid matching the identity of artists and reality in the tracks and phases of being collected as public systems and capital. I attempted to analyze the customs and systems of existing visual art circles that limited local areas to local areas for reproduction. I searched for ways that could add something with different speeds and directions. I tried to vibrate the locality in a meticulous manner, keeping myself away from limiting the role of simply being a space for exhibitions. This flow also includes projects like *Cabinet Art Fair 2017, Incheon Open University 2020–2022, 2022 Songdo Art Week 2022, and The Hyperobject Invasion 2022*.

People still ask whether Space Imsi has no interest in the local area or if the operator’s hometown is in Incheon (since local artists are not invited to any of the exhibitions and the exhibitions do not target the local area). Visual art activities

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It is normally referred to as contemporary Korean art or Seoul art, but I prefer calling it “Hanyang Contemporary” due to its temporal and spatial difference with Seoul.

in local areas are still called and evaluated within a scope, such as place of birth, education level, typical family structure, identity, sincerity, and placeness. In spite of this, Space Imsi underwent an ongoing process of chaos, trial-and-error, and change to build a counter-platform<sup>8</sup> that will function as a medium in search of possibilities to gain a healthy and tense relationship between the existing local area and visual arts and capital and systems. This is what “imsi [ ]” represents, just like the parameters in the C++ programming language.

As I enter my seventh year as the director, I face in detail my shortcomings in various drifting in my past times and activities, and take out the assignments that I put off. Is it possible for a “temporary” space aimed at the temporary present to transform into a “permanent” space for the distant future? Or does it necessarily have to be? If the latter must be taken into account, I hope that Incheon will function as a welcoming place where artists can lean on to practice and spread their wings of imagination for the sake of building other relations for visual art and local areas. If this happens, artists would not romanticize Incheon as a hometown, criticize it as an evil city of crime, or try to transform all times and existences of a local area as a mere spectacle.

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In the Open Port Culture District and inner port regions where Space Imsi is situated, several public institutions make use of diverse “platforms”, such as the Incheon Art Platform, Noodle Platform, and Sangsang Platform.

### Eunyoung Chae

Eunyoung Chae is an interlocal curator highly interested in the coexistence and practice of visual arts with a relationship of healthy tension between capital and systems in urban spaces. She operates “Space Imsi” and the inter-local webzine “Comrade Critique Samsa” which both aim toward curatorial based on researching the themes of trans-locality, ecosystem, and politics.