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Park Hyesoo is a visual artist from South Korea who works widely in a range of media based on sculpture and installation, but also including video and performance. She is renowned for her multidisciplinary participatory art projects.

Through exhibitions such as [What's Missing](#) (2008-), [Dream Dust](#) (2009-2017), [The Definition of Botong](#) (2011-2021), [Now Here is Nowhere](#) (2016), [Our Unknown Country](#) (2017-), and [Monophobia](#) (2022), the artist has focused on concepts found throughout our society: time, dreams, the ordinary, community, relationships, and more. Questions arising from specific scenes and moments drawn from her personal experience, such as the death of someone close, her sojourns through domestic and international residencies, or a conversation overheard at a nearby table, have led to her profound explorations on the themes of community and individuality, dreams and reality, life and death, and loss and mourning.

The process of development is a unique feature in Park's oeuvre that creates the foundation of the themes and forms of each work. It begins with surveys carried out both on and offline to collect social perceptions and individual experiences related to the pertinent theme. She conducts the surveys in collaboration with experts from various fields in accordance with the circumstances. The various conflicts and inconsistencies that arise in the gaps between perception and experience are then visualized in her installations and videos, which are in turn brought into the public discourse through lectures, experimental theater, open forums, and/or publications. Since there is room for audience participation and interaction with the work to some extent, they can explore their own personal issues within a societal context and derive existential solace that assuages some of the discord found in life.

Park studied sculpture at Ewha Womans University and holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from its graduate school. Since her first solo exhibition in 2000, she has held over twenty further solo exhibitions. She has also participated in a number of exhibitions in both domestic and international venues, including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), the Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA), and the Museum of 21st Century Arts (MAXXI) in Rome. She recently took part in the 15th Sharjah Biennial in 2023. She won the grand prize in the Songeun Art Award in 2014, and was selected as a finalist for the Korea Artist Prize 2019 organized by the MMCA.

Park Hyesoo's work stems from questions that can seem both ordinary and bold, such as "What is missing from your life?" *What's Missing*; "What dreams have you left behind?" *Dream Dust*; "Are you 'normal'?" *The Definition of Botong*; "What is the scope of the term 'we'?" *Our Unknown Country*; "What was your first romantic relationship like?" *Goodbye to Love*; "Shall we live together?" *Perfect Family Inc.*; and "How many friends do we need?" *Forum Theater: URI*. Each project has been evolving over a considerable period of time, some spanning more than a decade. Going through a number of phases and changes in form, the projects develop in ways that enrich the themes and expand their scope based on a methodology of mutual complement between different projects.

One of Park's early major works, *What's Missing* (2008-) consists of the two derivative efforts *Shadow Drawing* and the *Mourning project* series. Exploring themes of loss and of life and death along with the emotional reaction to loss from both personal and societal perspectives, the works shed light on places where mourning occurs — including through the death of her father and stories of family members of COVID-19 victims. *Project Dialogue* (2009-), which is composed of five affiliated works, holds major significance within Park's work. In *Dream Dust* (2009-2017), she peers into the lives of individual members of society, tracing dreams that were abandoned or eliminated in order to address the realities of a situation. Derived from this series, *the Ancient Pharmacy* (2011, 2021) deals with time and the emotions of individuals. A fortune teller, psychiatrist, perfumer, and others participate as performers. *Goodbye to Love* (2013-2023) collects individuals' memories of their first love— including from broken-hearted people, factory workers, and Dutch seniors — through objects, texts, interviews.

Definition of Botong (2011-2021) reexamines the contradiction inherent in the notion of 'average' that serves as social standard. It focuses on elements that have been taken away or deliberately left behind for the sake of an average life. *Our Unknown Country* (2019-) was conceived to explore personal experiences with collectivism in South Korea. Two projects spun off from *Our Unknown Country*, *Perfect Family Inc.* (2019-) and *Forum Theater: URI* (2019-), criticize the prospect of a transition toward a society of solitary death and emotional outsourcing. The projects feature participatory public forums in various formats such as 'lecture performances' and experimental theater in which discussions may take place. The other series

affiliated with *Project Dialogue* are *Surviving as an Artist* (2010-) and *Dialogue Archive* (2008-2011).

In her practice, Park applies four methodologies: surveys, research/collaboration, interpretation/expression, and publishing/education. Each represents a different stage of development, which is how her projects evolve. She serves as an artist, researcher, and curator all at once, and presents each phase of development as an exhibition or as some other type of project in an exhibition space.

Public surveys collecting stories and investigating related data and materials constitute the first stage of Park's work and are considered indispensable to its later progression. The findings from this stage often lead to collaboration with other artists in order to further analyze and deepen the research and then evolve into additional multidisciplinary artistic experiments. The project comes to completion when the artist produces a 'work' embodying her own interpretations. Finally, she creates platforms for public discourse in which she can interact with audiences at different types of events such as lectures, experimental theater, and publication. Taking the project *Goodbye to Love* as an example, the exhibition entitled *The Phenomenon of the Mind: Facing Yourself* (Museum of Contemporary Art Busan, 2019) was designed as a survey, *'Post-Breakup' Workshops* (Art Centre Art Moment, 2021) functioned as the research/collaboration, the solo exhibition *Monophobia* (Art Centre Art Moment, 2022) provided her interpretation/expression, and *Goodbye to Love* (Wishful Books, 2023), a collection of diverse writings produced in the course of the project, constitutes the publication/education stage.



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Park Hyesoo pulls knowledge from the swamp of 'same old-same old' life. She cuts away the calluses on her heart to reveal the torn and wounded flesh underneath. Healing begins once she starts to explore her state of mind. The theme of mourning in Park's work does not simply represent personal pain. It is an aesthetic experiment with an ethical focus that weaves the victims of disasters, audiences, and members of the broader public together into a community. The more we intertwine, the stronger and more resilient we become.

— Kim Dongll, "An Aesthetic Experiment with the Ethics of Looking into One's Heart and Weaving Together Community - On [Mourning Project](#)"

Park Hyesoo's inquiries fearlessly expose the vulnerable powerless beings in the lower strata of society, but they are not driven by a sense of justice in terms of unleashing stark truths nor do they pursue vague ideals. Instead, they seek communication with individuals and interconnections that can save the people of today from the unspoken agony of being left alone by ultimately developing solidarity.

— Kim Jiyeon, "The Art of the Sociological Attitude of Identifying Isolated Lives and Seeking Connection - On *Project Dialogue*"

She creates a sort of circuit of social boundaries by searching out people such as hikikomori, factory workers, North Korean defectors, the funeral directors and cleaners who specialize in managing the situation following the lonely deaths of individuals without family and friends, and family members of Covid-19 victims who were stigmatized and whose remains were quarantined even after death. The process of listening to their stories seeks to embrace and support people who have long been neglected by a society that only seeks what is considered valuable.

— Nam Woong, "In Support of the Efficacy of Useless Art that Draws People Together and Reconstitutes Society by Penetrating Subordination and Cynicism - An Essay on the Art of Park Hyesoo"

A refinedness can be observed in Park Hyesoo's work, a fundamental and intrinsic formal characteristic that immediately distinguishes the artwork from non-art and still persists in an era in which anything can be considered art. Park meticulously shapes, arranges, and records each of her works based on her aesthetic sense in order to ensure that her work does not evaporate into a mere fleeting moment of particular events. In Park's work, authorship is not reduced to a mere catalytic role, and aesthetic values are not downgraded to something secondary. Its density of concept and aesthetic considerations are not constrained by ethical judgments.

— Ahn Jinkook a.k.a. Lev AAN, "Centripetal Force and Centrifugal Force: The Aesthetic and Political Aspects of Art After the End of Art"

You are about to experience being your own agency by recognizing yourself as an important participant and gaining a glimpse of the oppressive social structures surrounding you. You will come to contemplate the relationship between the community and the individual in the course of collaboration with other participants. By adopting the format of participatory theater, *Forum Theater: URI*(2019) encourages the audience to learn and produce empirical knowledge from which they can draw for themselves existential solace that pacifies the discord in the world around us.

— Lee Mia Kyoungmi, "Art as Existential Solace That Pacifies the Discord in the World around Us: On [Forum Theater: URI](#)"