

KOREAN
WRITERS



LEE
CHEOLSUNG



40th Anniversary Arts Council Korea 1973-2013

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ARTIST PROFILE

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Lee Cheolsung is an artist who combines poetry, art and performance. He was born in Boeun-gun, Chungcheongbuk-do, Korea, in 1969. He received his B.A. in French literature from Seoul National University and completed his M.A. in French poetry from the same university in 1996. Around the same time, he also trained in theater directing at the Performing Arts Academy, from which he graduated in 1996, and then went on to study in the directing and performer's course of Visual Theater, a combination of visual arts and theater, at the School of Visual Theater in Jerusalem, Israel, from which he graduated in 2003.

As a poet, he began his career when he was published in the spring edition of the magazine *Literature and Society* in 1996, and has since had two collection of poems published by the Moonji Publishing Company, entitled *Faces Upon the Dining Table* (1998), and *The Street Where the Pipa Boy Disappeared* (2009).

As a director and performer, Lee is the president of CCOT, a visual theater troupe, and CCOTBBAT, a space for experiential art, and has showcased experimental performances that use the mediums of poetry, painting, installation art, and video art. Over the last decade, he has been invited as an official guest to numerous experimental art festivals, street theater festivals, and other theaters, and has won the Seoul Children's Theater Prize's Best Artwork Award, Best Acting Award, and Most Popular Award two times, not to mention the UNIMA Congress's Excellent Visual Effect Award.

On other fronts, he has trekked through the wilds of more than 30 different countries and written poems and essays based his experiences. He also is happily married with two lovely girls.

Key Works: Poetry Collection, *Faces Upon the Dining Table* (1998), and *The Street Where the Pipa Boy Disappeared* (2009), published by the Moonji Publishing Company, entitled.

Key Performances: Poetry performance *Clothes of a Wolf*, painting performance *Self-Portrait*, painting performance *Falling As I Lean Against the Wall!*, installation performance *Paper Human*, sculpture-shadow play *From the Shadows*, media performance *Paper Window* and an imaginative media performance called *The Giant's Table*

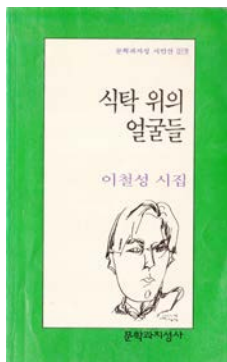
INTRODUCTION TO LEE'S WORKS

POETRY

Poetry Collection, *Faces Upon the Dining Table*

(Moonji Publishing Company, 1998)

Faces Upon the Dining Table is Lee's first poetry collection, and is a sincere examination of existence and its beginnings. Objects are portrayed as artifacts, freshly excavated from historical site both strange and unfamiliar. The language that reveals the beginning of being is fresh and free of preexisting connotations, and is richly suggestive of a visual landscape. All of this is followed by the kaleidoscopic facets of the poet's divisive ego, and this is a work of lyric poems that explores the roots of objects and identities, extraordinary in its ingenuity and experimental nature.



Poetry Collection, *The Street Where the Pipa Boy Disappeared* (Moonji Publishing Company, 2009)

A Healing Journey Through Which to Rejuvenate Sick Poetry Into a Fragrant One

The most prominent of this collection, which is made up of 77 poems, are the travel poems that make up Parts I and II of this book. In the casual and unselfconscious style that is characteristic of Lee, these poems

paint the landscapes of places such as India, Tibet, Egypt, Israel, Jerusalem, Jordan and Greece. Sung Kiwan, the poet who wrote the commentary to accompany this book, suggests the readers to “browse through these poems as if they were photographs,” for through the shadows of their imagery, the poet reveals himself. To truly appreciate them, one needs to delve beneath the surface of these multilayered poems. Part III consists of poems on love, and Parts IV and V are of poems on day-to-day life, which actually outnumber the travel poems in the whole of this book.




“The images of the travel destinations repeat themselves in the mundane, and it is as the self and its reflection in the mirror, different and the same. Lee's poetry is centered on the theme, images and verbs of repetition and reflection as manifested in dual identities, alter egos, mirrors and lakes.”

—Sung Kiwan's Commentary, “In the Magnificent Hour of Breath”

The poet repairs “tired poetry” through the healing powers of travel, to create “fragrant poetry.” Sung suggests that Lee's poetry is of the romantic ilk, with its free and solitary soul, and theme of roaming, in the likes of Byron, Keats and Nerval.

PERFORMANCE PIECES

Poetry Performance, *Clothes of a Wolf*

Produced by the Visual Theater CCOT  / Written, directed, and performed by Lee Cheolsung / Music written and performed by Lee Junghoon

About the Work

A poetry performance that transforms underpasses, traditional markets, and pedestrian streets into art itself.

Five visual poems to be seen with the eyes and experienced with the body.

A new performance aesthetic! Poetry + Visual Art (installations and paintings) + performance art (body, objet and live music).



Is there a new way for everyone to experience poetry in its full resonance and sensuality? The poetry performance *Clothes of a Wolf* is a way to experience poetry in the whole of the body, as opposed to merely hearing it being recited. This was made possible through the marriage of the body, the voice, everyday space and objects, live music and poetry. Poet and creator, Lee Cheolsung utilizes performance and the poems of his most recent book, *The Street Where the Pipa Boy Disappeared*, to transform common spaces into artistic ones.


Major Performances

- 2013 Invited Performance, Sindang Creative Arcade (performed at Seoul Jungang Traditional Market)
- 2010 Selected Performance at Seoul Art Space _ Seogyo (performed at an outdoor car park in the Hongdae area)
- 2007, 2009 Selected Performance by the Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation for the Category of Interdisciplinary Art (performed at public squares and traditional markets)

2009 Invited Performance at the Korea Experimental Arts Festival and the Seoul International Performance Festival at Nowon

2008 Performed at the 40th Commemoration Ceremony of Poet, Kim Soo-young (hosted by the Minumsa Publishing Group)

Painting Performance, *Self-Portrait*

Produced by the Visual Theater CCOT  / Created, directed and performed by Lee Cheolsung / Music written and performed by Lee Junghoon and Park Jonggeun / Direction assistance provided by Han Yoonmi

About the Work

A Self-Portrait made up of painting, video, poetry, live music and performance art.



A journey of self-discovery through painting! Visual Theater as the culmination of painting, video, poetry, live music and performance art! Upon a white wall, the artist paints a self-portrait that was hidden from view until now, and on his own self, he paints past grievances and dashed hopes—all of which are washed out at the end to reveal a blank slate.

Synopsis

A self-portrait of society painted on a huge canvas.

The large white wall is rippling like a well, and the on-looking performer begins to draw a portrait of himself on this surface. The painting is a fight against fate, as the images clash against the wall, overlapping and erasing each other.

He who painted the images becomes trapped in them, as on to his image of himself he draws various uniforms of the military and other organizations. With his hands the painter opens wounds and releases social and personal baggage. At last, with the final injuries of spurned love, he finally gets down on his knees.

With pointed brush spears, he pierces his own eyes, drawing tears. This huge face is projected onto the white wall, whereupon he paints a crazed mural of hair growing at a fearsome pace. But just as soon as this image is shown, the picture is washed down with water, and the painting is gone to leave nothing behind but the blank wall. Again, the well ripples.

Major Performances

2011 Officially invited performance at the FiraTàrrrega (Spain)

2010 Special invited performance at the Gwacheon Hanmadang Festival and the Hi Seoul Festival

Joint Production with Theater Zero / Experimentalism and Diversity Promotion Award from the Arts Council Korea




2009 Joint Production with the Doosan Art Center / Selected performance for Stage Production Support and Interdisciplinary Art by the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture
Official invited performance for the Morlaix Street Theater Festival (France)
Official participant in the Chalon Dans la Rue (France)

Performance Review



2009. 7. 25. Newspaper for the Chalon Dans la Rue, France

Painting Performance, *Falling As I Lean Against the Wall!*

Produced by the Visual Theater CCOT  / Created, directed and performed by Lee Cheolsung / Music written by Lee Junghoon / Installation by Ha Sojung / Direction assistance provided by Han Yoonmi

About the Work

This is a site-specific performance that began with the rebirth of the walls of the Guei Intake Station as a space of art. The Guei Intake Station, which is responsible for turning the currents of the Han River into potable water, is set to shut down and become an abandoned industrial



property. The massive wall that stands at the entrance to this building is not merely a robust sculpture of large stones and cement, but exhibits the traces of time that have withstood the elements of the sun, wind and rain. And that is the narrative of this performance: of the delusions seen by the artist from a time ago.

Synopsis

Falling As I Lean Against the Wall is the story of a drunken man's vision in the short time that he vomits and pisses himself. The results of his sickness return as murals, and into the illusion jumps in the drunkard, only to have the images be erased as he urinates on top of everything.


This is a performance that sheds light on the fantasy and disillusionment of a drunken middle aged man and his struggle with an urban wall. It looks at the aftermath of a life of intoxication, dreams and the lack thereof, and suggests a sincere look at the state of man today. What are dreams supposed to be made of, and what would the life of broken dreams be like? Why does this man fall during the middle of his fancy while leaning against the wall?

Major Performances

2013 Selected performance at the
Open Studio for the Guei
Intake Station, Seoul



Installation Performance, *Paper Human*

Produced by the Visual Theater CCOT  / Created and directed by Lee Cheolsung / Performed by Lee Cheolsung and audience members / Music composed and performed by Lee Junghoon / Installation by Ha Sojung / Direction assistance provided by Han Yoonmi

About the Work

A healing installation performance that is co-created by the audience.
An art therapy performance that is all the more beautiful for its transience.

A Heartwarming Hour for You, Who is As Fragile As Paper!

Paper Human is a healing performance. Through the audience's physical form, he gives birth to and destroys the new "paper human," to make the moment memorable and remind people of the value of this cycle in their own lives.

Paper Human demonstrates the fragility and vulnerability of human nature through the flimsy material of paper. The paper figures, which were created either in part or whole by modeling them after the audi-



ence members' bodies, come to life during the performance, drawing their original forms to the stage and including them in the act. They reveal the frailty of human desire and despair, and the figures themselves meet their end through the natural elements of wind, water and fire. This new form of performance, which blurs the lines between the divisions in art, allows the audience to participate and thus become emotionally involved in the show.

Director and performer of this show Lee Cheolsung functions as the masseur that leads the show, as the assistant that moves the figurines, and even as the guide that connects the dolls to their originals.

Major Performances

- 2013 Officially invited performance at the Gwacheon Festival
Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation's selection for the Byul Byul Art Project (site specific performance for Gwacheon's Ononsa)
Officially invited performance for the Uijeongbu International Music Theater Festival
- 2012 Officially invited guest of the Hi Seoul Festival (Selected by the 2012 New Art Trend Project as emerging artist / outdoor performance at the Gwanggyo Gallery)
Special Performance at the Korea Performing Arts Center (Selected Performance for category of Interdisciplinary Art) (performed at the Arko Arts Center's Small Theater)
- 2011 Arts Council Korea's selection for Experimental Art and Diversity Promotion (performed at Seoul Art Space_Seogyo)

Sculpture-Shadow Play, *From the Shadows*

Produced by the Visual Theater CCOT  / Created, directed and performed by Lee Cheolsung

About the Work

The Man Who Became a Shadow!

—shadow play made of pieces, flashlight and a large screen

The man throws the light and the pieces regurgitate the memories of his past...

Unlike conventional shadow plays, this one consists of the puppeteer, lights and puppets all coming before the curtains to engage each other



dynamically. The structure of “reality-inner world-memories-reality” is played out through the shadows, which are at times grotesque and exaggerated, and at others, beautiful and truthful.



The Dead Tree Flowered!

—The forgotten love story of the man who became the shadow

A piece that deals with how a man in pain may be saved through love

Synopsis

A man who was a victim to social violence, losing his life's meaning in the process, happens upon a shadow play performance. The shadow pieces take him on a journey into his past, whereupon he chances upon a woman who had loved him devotedly. Through her, he musters the courage and strength to face his new life again.

Major Performances

- 2008 Selected performance by the Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation for category of Stage Production Support and Interdisciplinary Art
- 2008 Selected performance for the 2008 Arko Challenge by the Arko Arts Center
- 2006 Officially invited performance by the Suwon Hwaseong Fortress Theater Festival
- 2005 PAMS Choice for the Seoul Performing Arts Market
- 2004 Officially invited performance for the Gwacheon Hanmadang Festival

Media Performance, *Paper Window*

Produced by CCOTBBAT; Space for Experiential Art 🍌 / Created and directed by Lee Cheolsung / Performed by Lee Cheolsung, Shim Eunjung (painter) / Art design by Shim Eunjung / Music composition and sound design by Shin Sookyung / Music directed by Han Yoonmi

About the Work

2009 Winner of the Most Popular Award at the 2009 Seoul Children's Theater Awards, and the 2012 UNIMA Congress China's Excellent Visual Effect Award

The man who jumped into his painting. Meet his brilliant wit and imagination.

A novel experience of multimedia performance, a show lauded by festivals and officially invited by theaters across the world! Upon a white wall, on a canvas so quiet as to resemble nothingness, stretches a massive sketchbook of fantastic imagination. The pictures painted by the artist on the spot are projected as images onto the white wall, and into this world of fantasies the performer and audiences jump, beginning a new journey. This fantastical trip and its sparkling wit make participants smile throughout, and through this fresh amalgamation of the digital and the analogue, theater and painting, stage and audiences, one can glimpse a precious chance for people to experience media performance art first hand.

Synopsis

Paper Window is composed of three independent parts, the Dot, the Line, and the Strange Staircase. A single dot drawn by the artist becomes the mosquito that irritates the actor, and a single line drawn on by the artist becomes the jail that cages the entire stage. Within this



world of drawings, one encounters a beautiful field of flowers but is also terrorized by the monstrously large hand of the artist.

Between each scene are short interludes, titled "Break Time," in which everyday foods, such as sweet potatoes and bananas, transform into thick thighs and parachutes in scenes resembling magic. In the latter half of the show, audiences jump into the images themselves, to interact with the imagery and create a live artwork.

Major Performances

2012 Winner of the 2012 UNIMA Congress China's Excellent Visual Effect Award

2009 Winner of the Most Popular Award at the 2009 Seoul Children's Theater Awards

2008–2012 Officially invited performance at International Theater Festivals held in



Singapore, China, Israel, Turkey, India and Romania

2011–2012 Invited performance at Seoul National University, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, and the Nam June Paik Art Center

2009–2012 Officially invited performance at the ASSITEJ Summer Festival, Gwacheon Hanmadang Festival, Ansan Street Art Festival, Uijeongbu International Music Theater Festival, and the Goyang Lake Park Arts Festival

Imaginative Media Performance, *The Giant's Table*

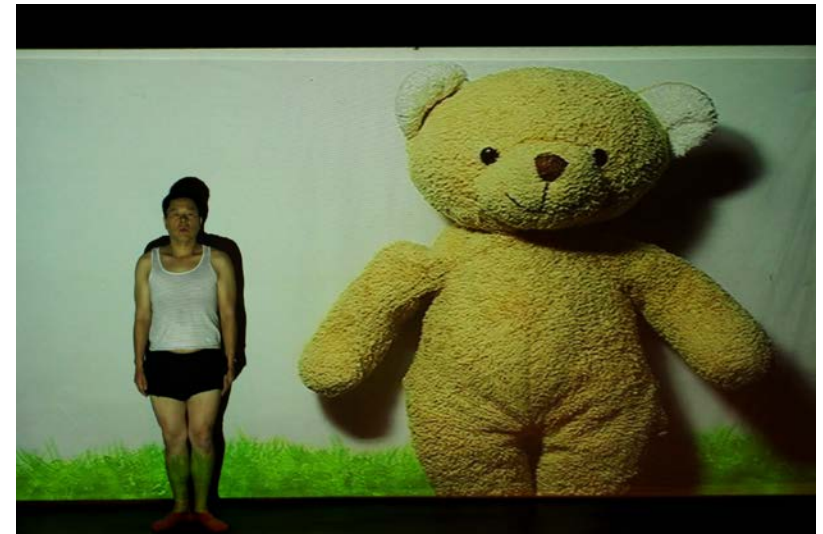
Produced by CCOTBBAT; Space for Experiential Art 🍌 / Created and directed by Lee Cheolsung / Performed by Lee Cheolsung, Shim Eunjung (painter) / Art design by Shim Eunjung / Music composition and sound design by Lee Junghoon / Music directed by Han Yoonmi

About the Work

2012 Winner of Best Performance Award, Best Acting Award and Most Popular Award at the Seoul Children's Theater Awards!

See everyday objects blown up supersize, and experience dazzling wit and imagination.

The Giant's Table uses media equipment to turn an average desk into a gargantuan one. Other things on the desk, such as hands, commonplace objects and the very act of drawing are hugely magnified, and onto the Giant's Desk, actors and audience members leap to participate in this bizarre imagery. As an experiential performance, wherein audiences may not only observe but become part of the artwork itself, imagination becomes reality, and allowing us to depart on a remarkable journey.



Synopsis

This work is comprised of three independent scenes, and a final step in which the audiences may jump onto the desk and participate in the making of the storyline. Chapter 1. The Giant's Desk: A man climbs onto the desk of the giant, and frolics among the images of the Giant's hands and his drawings. Chapter 2. To Light a Fire: The fires rise into the night sky to become the stars, and fall to the ground to become the blossoms on the grass. The field is blooming with flowers, and all of this unravels in the divine hand of the giant. Chapter 3. Father's Desk: Through the image of the man trapped atop of the Giant's desk audiences are shown the fathers of this world, chained to their desks as gears of society.

Major Performances

- 2014 Official invited performance to the Children's Art Education Festival in Kaohsiung, Taiwan
- 2013 Official invited performance at Tact Fest, International Children's Art Festival in Osaka, Japan
- 2013 Official invited performance at the Hi Seoul Festival, Ansan Street Arts Festival, and the Uijeongbu International Music Theater Festival
- 2013 Official invited performance at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, the Daelim Museum, and the Seongnam Media Center
- 2012 Winner of Best Performance Award, Best Acting Award and Most Popular Award at the Seoul Children's Theater Awards
- 2012 Official invited guest at the Gwacheon Hanmadang Festival, the ASSITEJ Summer Festival, the ASSITEJ Winter Festival, and the Juan Media Festival, Incheon

EXCERPTS FROM WELL-KNOWN WORKS: POETRY

*The first poem was printed in the poetry collection *Faces Upon the Dining Table*. The rest appeared in *The Street Where the Pipa Boy Disappeared*.

You and Me

You and me sitting here on this bench and
 smelling the scent of winter
 you and me losing our words as the deep just keeps getting wider
 with this scent that swept past in an instant
 me unable to take your hand and
 you flowing into the deep part of me
 you bleak as the wind and
 clear as the air
 falling and halting and
 halted forever
 you as beautiful as a picture
 as awful as a memory
 wishing that I were your father and
 wishing that you were my mother
 sitting here on this bench where the cold trees stand
 hoping.
 Hoping a child doesn't become another child's friend
 hoping a girl doesn't become a boy's lover
 and so between the clear sky and the empty street
 the stopped bus and passing time
 your eyes are as beautiful as a picture
 giving off the scent of winter
 fading into the winter sky
 the well that I fell into
 becomes a mirror.

The Black Bird

The temple chimney
 puffs out the pitch-black smoke of cremation
 that bird there flying slowly above it
 does not fly away even when morning becomes noon
 does not fly away even when the day's sun hangs in the western hills
 but when a woman opens the big barred gates and comes out of the
 temple
 it follows behind her
 the black bird
 follows the black woman.
 The woman passes the garden of the temple as night falls
 along the road that runs straight through the forest
 across the wide fields and the low hills
 by the village that glows with dusky fires
 and stands beside the river

 the black bird

 goes inside the black woman

 the black woman

 cries.

 – Varanasi, India

A Piece of the Dream

Early in the morning I woke from sleep
and went out to the sea.
A dog followed through the thick darkness
limping on one leg,
the
dog crept up to the palm tree where I sat
its whole body oozing puss from some awful disease.
Our eyes met
its red fur, eyes,
flashing deep in its eyes
the darkness of desire!
when the sun flicked its tongue above the sea in the thirsty morning
the
red hair
frantically leapt over my head and
vanished into the bed
a piece of the dream

– Sinai, Egypt

Running into the White Cow

I was riding my bike and turning the corner on a busy street when I ran into a big white cow. For a moment I lost my balance and awkwardly fell. As the cow passed beside me, it rolled its big eyeballs and patiently gazed down upon me. The cow looked so large and majestic that I almost dropped to my knees to bow my head before it. The cow slowly turned its head and looked at the street with the severity of one uttering some grave prophecy. The street was bustling with peddlers and their goods and the vagrants who had gathered there. Their shouts and curses and laughter and cunning pooled in the street. I saw an unbelievably large hump moving on the cow's back. The cow lifted its horns, which were as big as its body, as if ready to say something. The bones protruding from its whole body wriggled terribly, seeming to show the cow had reached an extreme point of desperation.

But at that instant, a sharp whip cracked against the cow's back, and it reared its head back with a bellow. After a while, the cow managed to draw in its long extended tongue and began to plod once more. The cow was pulling a cart laden with countless stacks of grain, farming implements, furniture, and a poor family. A newborn baby was crying, exhausted from the heat, and a blind old man stared at me for a long, long time until the cart vanished around a bend in the road.

– Agra, India

The Street Where the Pipa Boy Disappeared

On the street, a boy is playing a pipa
 and his young sister is beating a drum
 the boy's inspired singing and playing
 vanquished the street in an instant.
 The people lock up their mouths
 the street opens its secret ears
 an aged woman's legs dance like an ailing vagrant
 the coins in purses danced
 and went into the musician's bag.
 The singing had no end
 and the playing of the boy with his eyes closed had no end
 could the people who had opened the ears of their hearts
 not see the unfamiliar look made by the boy
 as he hurriedly shut the bag of money and disappeared?
 On the street where the music disappeared
 the people stand like empty plastic bags blowing in the wind.

– Kashgar, China

Moon, Breaking Face

Moon between the leaves
 all the ice in the sky
 face, peeled
 smiling
 up above my sleep
 dog-bitten
 lonely planet
 that all of us
 meet at the irresistible end
 breaking face,
 moon

– Western Desert, Egypt

The Fragrance of Poetry

The time is the bright morning
When the birds come down from the blue sky
I sit in the shade of a tree and write poetry.

Poetry resembles a picture,
drawing the low houses
window frames with beautiful patterns
and red roof tiles.

Poetry resembles music,
writing
the brief shout of a child running across the yard
and the red ball
the sound of the wind blowing across the wide fields
and the sour moment of the apple falling.

Poetry blooms inside all things
like the scent released from the center
it fills the wide sky
strokes my face and the tip of my nose.

Poetry is on the small journal
that the poor pencil scratched against.
When the journal is shut
poetry becomes the fragrance of fruit shut with a stopper
Poetry is the small dirty journal resting deep in my backpack
until my wife clandestinely opens it tomorrow morning.

– Meteora, Greece

It Came without Sound or Rumor

It came without sound or rumor.
People called it love.
Loneliness crouched in the deep place
loneliness drinks poison.
And then you pass out.
On the poor white field, the evening is stained by dripping blood.
And then when you come to
people say that love has gone away.
It came and went without sound or rumor.
An apple tree uprooted in the desolate field.
Love that swept in like a typhoon
loved like fertilizer
and became a patch of dug-up dirt
And then
love went away.
But the people who loved are putting fine makeup on their faces
as if nothing had happened.

Golden Fish

Ear infections take a while.

Today, I wrap myself in two heavy blankets
and groan.

Body ache and a cold

has my wife come down with a sickness of the mind lately

She sits as still as a statue after busily working
when I go to her, there are tears.

Today

Our two weary bodies lie next to each other
we discuss the meaningless of life
and living

and the frailty of it.

Our five-year-old daughter leaps on the bed and the floor,
swinging a toy golf club.

Glorious shrieks

mercilessly stepping on our frightened bodies

she is a golden fish that

leaps up, trampling on frail creatures.

My Daughter's Clock

On a long, long night

a deep, dark night

each time my eyes open half asleep

the direction of my daughter's head has changed.

All night long

in the darkness in which all eyes are closed

the child's head changes directions.

Like the hand of a clock

like a sailboat sailing on a black sea

like the rudder of a spaceship swimming through the universe of stars.

As I stroke her sweat-soaked head,

I feel pity for the constant effort

to set her clock to the clock of the universe

and I think.

The sound when life listens to the universe

the scent when a gull smells dry land

The blind male dog climbs up to its perch and gazes at

the clock of the universe.

On a long, long night

a deep, dark night

I press my nose to the child's wet forehead and look inside

the black sea

the shining water bottle floating on it

time of the universe.

**EXCERPTS FROM
WELL-KNOWN WORKS:
ESSAYS**

The Sea and the Moon

I don't know how it is I came to be here, but I find myself at the sea. In the dark of the night, outside this hut made of tree bark are the sounds of the crashing waters. I get up and walk outside of the structure, and there is sand everywhere. Sand licking at the sole of my feet, and in between my toes. It itches. There's also sand in the inky sky, a cluster of starry sand. On the ground, the black waters lap up the beach, and in the sky the darkness of the skies swallows the heavens. In the beginning of time, when god created the heavens and the earth, he split the waters to that of the sky and that of the ground. This is why night and day are two bodies of water of the same color and texture. In fact, the Hebrew word for sky, "shamayim," is the compound of sham, which means "there," and maxim, which means "waters."

Each step towards the sea swallows a bit of the fear. It's dark, but the clashing noise is majestic and numbing at the same time. I am but a single speck of sand in this massive beach, and so I stop before I am swallowed by the waters, sit down and think to myself. I arrived here at Agonda beach yesterday afternoon, and discovered this spot when I borrowed a motorcycle to scout out the beaches that were less populous. This is a rather deserted area, with just a few huts and restaurants scattered here and there. The beach, which is several kilometers long, is simply water and sand. I don't know the reason for my arriving here, and it didn't need to be this place specifically either. But for no reason, I have been strolling this area for the last three days, as if being pulled by the sea.

In the sky high above, the pregnant belly of the moon is tugging at the waters, and the currents rise, responding to the seduction. It is this allure that is keeping me here. From the inner depths of the continent, I have been rushing here, in pursuit of the salty scent, and the crashing breaths of the sea. I realized that I had gotten near even before catching sight of the ocean, not because of the smell or the sounds, but perhaps

the magnetic appeal of this place.

So this makes me realize: it was the moon and the sea that awoke and brought me here. The seductive moon, pulling, stroking, quivering, and sprinkling pieces of itself onto the black waters, and the ocean, just as excited, rolling, rubbing itself ashore, with its heavy breaths and greedy mouth, spouting white foam and sea crabs, and trying to eat up even my feet and body—it was their desire.

In front of this natural spectacle charged with sensuality, I begin to think. Since the earth's conception, the moon has been pushing and pulling at the planet, all day, throughout the changing seasons. For as long as it has existed, the ocean has licked at the shore, rising and falling. It was through the moon's seeds that the waters became impregnated with the earliest forms of life, and it was from here that those things developed the ability to live on land and become the humans that inhabit this land today.

I do not remember what brought me here, but wake from this deep slumber of thought. Unbeknownst to me, the waves have reached me and rubbed themselves onto my body. I take off my clothes, leaving me nude because I had left my underwear at my hut earlier on. In this moment, the ocean is a beast, one that breathes heavily but gently steps back. Its tongue massages the sand and then myself, and I lay down on the beach, being caressed by the sands and currents. When the beast swallows, I am scattered into the sand as my mind that gets lost in the dark waters. I hear the sounds echoing from the source, deep and heavy within the ocean.

Breath

In Chennai, India, I met a *bansuri* (Indian traditional instrument) player named Sri Samer Lao, on the campus of Chennai's Kalakshetra Cultural Academy. At the time, a troupe of Korean actors was visiting the school for a collaboration project with Indian actors and performers. The campus is located in the remote forest off the outskirts of the city, and I had been traveling through India for the past month, tired to the bone. The practice session took place in a small hall, and I was lying with my eyes closed in a corner of the hall, when the low notes of the flute lifted me up, as gentle as a warm breeze in the afternoon sun, tickling my very cheeks with its fine whisper. I was awakened from my sleep, to exit the hall and walk in the forests, my feet already bare of shoes. I walked on, the bare soles of my feet ambling over the ground, grabbing and releasing the warm dirt with each step. The forest, lights and shadows meshed with each other, tickling my skin, and Chennai's February was filled with generous sunlight, numerous flora and countless flying life-forms. All were dancing to the mild rhythm of the zephyr, and swaying in their blessings.

A month later, Lao, the *bansuri* player, came to visit Korea. I went to his performance in Seoul, and saw the pamphlet for his show, which read, "Chosen a life of breathing through the *bansuri* at age 11." This blurb alone was enough to bring back memories of the forest in Chennai with a vengeance. This was the place that allowed me to walk barefooted and experience the natural breeze and divine breaths of God, all beginning with a *bansuri*. As he breathed his first breath of air through the *bansuri* its sounds entered my body and to breathe new life into it. It was thus how I was able to come alive, stand up, walk, dance, and welcome Mother Nature and God into my own self, and it was this breath of the *bansuri* that not only produced two different breaths, but also allowed Lao, the *bansuri*, and nature itself to synchronize into a single symphony. Music is magnificent. Likewise is the musician.

Lao's instrument came to include my own body, and it turned out this was not too shabby an instrument for the performer.

What is a breath, and what is to breathe? Genesis described man as being created from dirt, which God brought to life by breathing into it. Through God and his breath, humans gained life and the soul itself. Breath is therefore sacred. Though it cannot be seen with the eyes, it can be felt. The sweet breath of a child, the hot breath of a young person, the tragic breath of a crying woman, and the smelly breath of an old man—the mere word itself suggests great significance. A key illustration of this can be seen in the body that has already taken its final breath. How miraculous and amazing is breath itself? Listening to the steady breathing of a sleeping child proves just how it carries the very essence of life itself—breath. In fact, the body without breath is no different from a piece of wood, stone, dirt, or even waste that is infested with maggots. It is through the breath of air that the body clears itself of toxins and may find energy again. The body wakes and finds things to eat, fruits to pick, streams to drink and cool winds to breathe, because the world is full of God's scared breath and its fruits. Thus, the body sits and hums in a relaxed manner, as this is God's manner of playing the instrument of our bodies through breath.

I learned to truly breathe late in life. When I was much younger, I didn't even realize that this would become a problem for me. As a child, I breathed as I climbed on trees, on the hilly graves upon where I sat, in the arms of my father and mother, and those of neighboring men and women who picked my tired form up to give me shelter in my sleep, after which, upon awakening, I would have no clue as to my whereabouts. On warm days, I breathed warmly, during the monsoon season I breathed heavily like the rain, in the streams I would breathe naked and under water, and in the winters, after eating the raw snow, I would take ragged breaths, between my coughing and crying. Even earlier, when I used to grab and spray chunks of dirt into the air, I would breathe the earthy aromas of the dusty air. But as I became older, this

simple activity became more difficult for me, through middle school, high school, college, the military, the working life of my late twenties, and into my early thirties... In my early twenties, I could breathe through the occasional poetry that found its way to the surface, and during the few romantic relationships I had, I took explosive breaths as my body felt it was about the pop. But these were the rare exceptions, and the majority of my time in the military or in the workplace stole my breath away, to which my body, deprived of air, rebelled. I became angry and violent, and one time I even attacked a close college senior of mine during an argument. I remember he could only stare back at me in surprise, the poor soul...

My breath had left me to be somewhere else: in the trees, on the moon, and amidst the mountains and forests. So I could not breathe with those things, for I didn't know how. I needed the breath that could give my life new meaning, to unblock the passageways for my breathing and allow my breath to mingle with those of others.

I do not know how I regained the ability to breathe, when my body became receptive to the breaths of God and Mother Nature. When, or what is probably the more important question, but in that moment, as I enjoy the warm breeze of an April day, I have naught but guesses. Writing poetry allowed my heart to breathe the air of nature, and to be able to detect the hidden breaths in between people. In this day and age, where poetry has lost its audiences, it was rare for my work as a poet to deliver breath to my readership. But then I performed, in all sort of spaces, meeting all types of people. From newborn babies to the elderly, from under bridges to the main halls of famous theaters, it was hard to take in all the breath of those all around me. At the end of performances, my body would be warm and red, as if cooked by the warm air expelled by the hundreds of people watching. Breathing is no longer an act of playing, but cooking! The performer or artist simmers nicely as the audiences eat the aftermath of the performance.

I have been breathing again with the help of humans, though I do

not remember specifically who. In my mid-twenties, I became psychologically ill, and so I turned my back on society and kept to myself. It was then I remembered the presence of my mother, something I had been ignoring for a long time, and so I re-entered society and spent my breathless days there, taking the occasional breath as I met women. Even so, at times the both of us would take labored breaths, unable to inhale and exhale as our hearts felt congested, and we cried and cried. It wasn't until years later, when I married, and the last decade passed, that I learned to share breathing with those around me. I learned to breathe again through a young child, which was easy. I felt it in the times when I held my two children for the first time. The first cry after birth, it reverberates through the whole body, and this is the first breath of a child. With my first child, I was speechless, and in my second try, I laughed along, my own breaths heaving along with the baby's. Awake, the baby cries, taking deep sobbing breaths, and asleep, it breaths calmly but steadily. Put your ear to the child's chest, and its quick and noisy heart can be heard beating its regular beat. This is not just a breath, but the shouting breath of the call, "I am alive, and so is my breath!" It's important to pay close attention to the breath of a child, as it is often give indications of a bigger condition or disease. I hold the child in my arms, and learn to breathe along, in tandem with society, nature, the flora and the rivers. Maybe this is why I keep saying to the kid, "Look at that tree, or that rock. It's angry at you, it would seem. Oh, look, that cat. It's asking you if you can hang out today. What's with the sky today, does it need to pee? How about you, do you need to go as well? Yes you do, don't you..."

I wrote my first poetry on breathing in Jerusalem, when I was working desperately hard to figure the thing out. It was in the early years of my marriage, and when I was studying abroad, before my children were born. Jerusalem was a battleground, even its climate being a difficult adversary; day after day was a fight against heat, both indoors and outdoors.

Jerusalem, April, 2002

In the beginning, God created man
and breathed the breath of life into him.
This is why when we breathe in and out,
we feel some kind of sacredness.
This is why
my old mother's breath makes my heart ache,
It's why, when I look at the swollen face of my sleeping wife,
the tick of the clock is magnified.
It's the same when I meet an old friend
who spills his secrets in his drunken stupor.
I want to hold his hand and comfort him
because of his rough breathing.
A girl who has fallen in the street,
gasping her last and slowly growing cold.
A cold plank of wood, the breath of life gone.
On the street where the paramedics and police are running and
shouting,
God has taken your breath away.

In the April of 2002, Jerusalem was struck by suicide bombers at least a twice a day. Among those responsible was an 18-year-old Palestinian. Today, she took the lives of three others at the entrance to a large supermarket, when at last she detonated her final bomb and killed herself as well.

To Throw Away Shoes

Back from my travels, I take off my shoes, which are filled with dust, both inside and out. It's as if I collected dirt, meticulously charting the areas I have been and taking pieces of it as evidence.

I left my shoes behind, outside the doors and forever, bye.

It feels as if a piece of myself is missing (as it rightly should...) The tale of a wizard? Used and forgotten?

My shoes have become a ragged mess, and I have thrown them out. Just outside my door, actually. They're not gone, just not inside my house. Can that truly be described as discarded? My wife asks me from outside the door. Should this be thrown out? she asks as she takes out the trash. Oh, she has left before I can answer.

Throughout my journey through the world, I put the same shoes on and take the same ones off, repeatedly. Then, in the corner of my lodging, I put them for safekeeping, away from the outside. I am worried about theft, as I should be because everything that I have may be targeted. The reason I leave it in the corner of the room, is because it is dirty. These are shoes that have walked many kilometers throughout the day, stepped on all kinds of germs and messes, and must be infested with all kinds of pathogens at this point. And yet, they are the same shoes that I put on in the morning as I set out, because isn't it cleaner still, than to step barefoot on the ground? These are shoes that have been with me for the last month, through thousands of kilometers. They have been flush with the grounds of countless remote trails, absorbing the minerals, wastes, and the ages of time accumulated over the years, experiencing travel with the whole of their bodies. In fact, the true travelers are the shoes, and I am but an aristocrat admiring the views atop of them. Have I just thrown out such shoes? No she is still at the door, and yells at me, throw them out or not? I shout back, yes! Throw them out! They're at the door, for that reason, throw them out! Do you hear me?

My travels are over. From my darkened face, I shave off my beard, put on my urban clothes and go out into Seoul in my new leather shoes to make a living. No shoes await for me at the door anymore, and these thick leather shoes feel uncomfortable. It's as if the entire ground has been covered with thick leather, dull and thudding. Which reminds me, there is no dirt anywhere, only cement and asphalt. I come to a stop, and think, I shouldn't have. I could have worn them for at least another half year if I washed them. They were as smooth as my own skin, and supple as my own wiggling toes. I had relied on them to feel out everything, as much as I did for my senses of smell and taste. But even more important is that each night, as I traveled by night from one city to another, they would wait for me at my feet, to greet me again the next morning and take me on new paths and roads. They were originally sky blue, with white shoe laces and a big N logo. At the end, they had become the color of the earth.

And I threw them out.

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Designed by **Seoul Selection**