

MEN'S

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F O R C E   O F   N A T U R E



CEDRIC LOO



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Can you share with us the thought process behind your project for the “No Space, Just A Place. Eterotopia”?

The starting point of the works in the show, *Covers (QueerArch)*, (2019/2020) and *Untitled (Diary)*, 2020, is my research at QueerArch, also known as Korea Queer Archive. QueerArch was established as a personal archive of Chae-yoon Hahn, a prominent LGBT activist in 2002, and it is the only public archive focusing on queer history and culture in Korea.

Last year I co-curated an exhibition titled “QueerArch” that consisted of newly commissioned works by young queer Korean artists based in Seoul that were created after their months-long research at the archive. We thought of the exhibition as a way to challenge the narrow and biased perspectives in Korean (art) history and to resist the discursive and academic violence that has resulted in the historical erasure of queer people in Korea.

My works in “No Space, Just A Place. Eterotopia” continues this dialogue through a wall installation of book covers from QueerArch’s publication collections along with a large-scale graphite drawing. The work offers an alternative view of the queer community and its history by covering the

Lee Kang Seung, *Covers (QueerArch)*, 2019/2020. Exhibition view, “No Space, Just A Place,” Daelim Museum, Seoul (2020)

entire wall spaces of the museum’s staircase with approximately 1,700 covers and books and magazines scanned from QueerArch.

And how does it connect to “the idea of the alternative spaces as a utopian place”?

I think that the exhibition invites methodologies of collective thinking by bringing many differences and independent voices to rethink what is alternative rather than giving a static definition, which allows the viewers to reflect on otherness, marginalised communities and their histories.

I wanted to commemorate the invisible memories of queer lives in Korea that have been sustained and preserved by many generations of activists, scholars, and artists by a re-emphasisation and re-imagination of the archive and underscoring the lineage of queer history in Korea. Concurrently, the work is about how to imagine a queer future collectively with the knowledge and experiences we inherited, which is well tied to the central idea of the exhibition and notions of utopia.

How much does your work for “No Space, Just A Place. Eterotopia” inform your own work?

Very much so. My work frequently engages the legacy of queer histories, particularly as they intersect with art history. I am interested in the concept of liberating the archive by making the material within the subject of exhibitions and investigation – not only for the artist and historian, but also for the general public – and this process mirrors the primary focus of my art making, which is an attempt to create critical/cross-cultural/queer histories.

I believe this process allows alternative historical and personal voices, counter-narratives and strategies to emerge, and both *Covers (QueerArch)* and *Untitled (Diary)* are largely informed by that.

Please tell us more about your work for this project and the tools you used to assist you in conveying the emotion across to the viewers.

My work often results in the form of visual marks, traces and indices and is primarily realised in labour-intensive media such as tracing, graphite drawings, embroidery and collecting. In addition, collaboration has been an integral part of my practice. *Covers (QueerArch)* is a good example since the project works as an index of information and history as well as an immersive installation.

Lee Kang Seung, *Covers (QueerArch)*, 2019/2020. Exhibition view, “No Space, Just A Place,” Daelim Museum, Seoul (2020)

Also, it is important to mention the work was completed with the help of many people, especially archivist Ruin at QueerArch and several volunteers who scanned the covers of their publication collections.

What were some of the most challenging hurdles you faced when creating your work?

The biggest challenge came with the global health crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the exhibition was highly international in its production with the curatorial and design team located in Europe, the venue in Korea and me being in the United States, we had to find ways to communicate effectively. As the Covid situation in Korea was escalating in March, the show had to be rescheduled, and the installation was done remotely with instructions via text message and video calls. I am still incredibly grateful that they were able to make the show happen against all odds, and would like to thank all the amazing people who were involved in the process.

Did you have to work within certain parameters? If yes, what were they?

Since my work was a new commission and site-specific, we had to make sure the work fits well with the space. In addition, there

were a bit of adjustments from my original proposal given that the museum’s audience is quite young and often under-age. Other than that, everything went smoothly, and I had full support from the curatorial team.

What does it mean to be queer in Korea?

Things have changed a lot since I came out in the late 90s. However, I think it is still difficult to be openly queer in Korea. The congress has not processed the proposal of anti-discrimination law for many years, and for transgender people, transition and changing their gender on the government-issued ID is still a big challenge. There is no openly gay celebrities actively working since the actor Hong Seok-cheon’s coming out in 2000.

Having said that, many LGBTQ activists and allies are working very hard to make legal and cultural changes for queers, and I feel that things are improving every time I visit Korea. I am hopeful especially because the young generation of Korean queer artists, designers, activists, and writers are really active, confident and well-connected with their international peers.

How difficult was it to keep your work authentically yours? Because it’s not

easy given that the topic so commonly discussed in all different forms and formats.

It is not an easy task but I think my work is about engaging collective voices together at different temporalities, pointing out displaced lives and voids, absences in the history of art, in the history of a place, and in the discourse that informs future thinkers. In this way, I am trying to move across temporalities and cultural spaces, bringing out archival materials markings that inform those histories, and create works that are critical, multicultural and filled with different languages and cultural perspectives and global points of view.

Lastly, do tell us how does it feel to be involved in “No Space, Just A Place. Eterotopia”, an immensely diverse yet unifying project.

It is very empowering to be in conversation with many projects that value multiple perspectives, narratives and possibilities beyond the binary and heteronormativity. As artists, we have the power to imagine a future through our work, and I strongly believe in doing it together. ■

Take a virtual tour of “No Space, Just A Place. Eterotopia” at <https://nospacejustaplace.gucci.co>