

THE OPEN AIR

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In space.

In the invisible, immaterial wind, in motion.

Transparent, rustling, floating, whispering, snapping. And screaming sometimes.

Lifted by the wind.

Inflated, amplified, turned upside down, dispersed, blown away, abandoned to the ever changing.

– What breath and why?

– The open air, to experience its freedom!

Since she left South Korea, her native land, for France in 1983, Ha Cha Youn has made the bag – the retrieved plastic bag wrapping the mercantilism of commodified life – a symbol of the living body, desiring, touching, tearing, drifting, fleeing, wandering, struggling, creating. And sketching a direction, a path.

Whether plain or striped, usually held at arm's length, almost sharp under the weight or light emptiness of an epidermal thickness of a few microns of hydrocarbon, from the beginning of her endless journey in Europe, Ha Cha Youn has turned this bag of any color into an allegorical writing-reading-painting of the human being: solo, in duo, in multitude, in planetary people. In peace. At war.

In the heart of the 1990s, in her studio in Hanover, Germany, the first “portrait” appeared with *En couleurs-Fardprob*.

Green and orange, the imaginary couple *Elisabeth and fRol* thus paved the way for Ha Cha Youn's future work. From the two-color process specific to German plastic bags to the extensible, cosmopolitan color palette, abstract human presences were born through transparency in flat tints, folds and superimpositions. A polychromatic human forest thus emerged: *Carola and Laurentin, Maité, Krysia, Violetta, Pawlesch...*

In 1998, a cloud of 65 black and white butterflies rose on a wall of the Künstlerhaus in Meinersen. Ha Cha Youn observed how an industrial shape could evoke the anatomy of a butterfly.

In each of these ensembles – the sum of individuals – Ha Cha Youn chased away uniformity with a trait of singularity. It was a question of making the difference, her difference, our differences, legible. Thus *Blue Stick* on a Pink Background or *Planting Rice*. While the Olympic Games were opening in Korea, the artist performed an indispensable cultural graft by creating a symbolic rice field on a piece of German land to counteract the diseased Earth.

Since then, on video screens or under glass, her anemochore assemblages have unfolded, surged, and settled like a Saharan sand wind wherever the artist is invited to land – in Korea, France, Germany, Poland, Japan, or the Netherlands.

In 2006, above the Seine, Ha Cha Youn shot *Balade dans Paris* dedicated to Cyrille. In front of her, she pushed a metal trolley overflowing with large plastic bags full of other plastic bags. She drove a multi-colored crowd.

In 2008, in *Balade de Carola*, Carola spun pink above the asphalt, slid along a pavement, rose, bent under the wheels of a bicycle, and came to rest in a puddle. The scene took place near the Canal Saint-Martin, after the eviction of a migrant camp supported by *Les enfants de Don Quichotte*. This pink also derived from the fields of wild azaleas, from the Jindalai flowers in the mountains.

Invited in 2016 to Korea to the Toji Cultural Centre in Wonju – created by Pak Kyung-ni, the author of *Toji (The Earth)*, a masterpiece of Korean literature written between 1969 and 1994 – Ha Cha Youn took a few handfuls of earth preserved in eleven yellow, black, white and red bags.

As a care of humanity, through this action, she invested herself *Tojijigi (Watchwoman of the land)* alongside the villagers who practice organic farming on this territory.

The result was *Tojijigi*, a video with the eponymous title that celebrated the writer and ecological pioneer.

Hadn't the visionary Pak Kyung-ni collected tons of plastic waste in the fields?

In 2019, *Return Home* was shot in Brittany, on a beach in Douarnenez.

What were these twenty-four black plastic bags that the artist pulled from the ocean?

Migration, asylum, rescue, shipwreck. Human. Inhuman.

If it all began with a collection of used bags from friends, Ha Cha Youn also recovers her material from the urban rubbish bins of the Ile-de-France region where this material is to be found everywhere in the streets. It also invades all the seas, forms a 7th continent poisoning fauna, flora and human health.

The plastic bags are emptied of their waste, then cleaned, dried, smoothed and stored by her in her studio, as shown in two recent films, *Lavage* and *The Collecting*.

Since the pandemic in 2021, one hundred and eight *DUOs* have been composed in twelve oeuvres of lively gestures playing with chance. Seized, unseized.

From *DUO I* to *DUO XII*, on a white, grey or beige background, the bags swell, dance in the open air, rise and fall from the artist's hand to the table, from her hand to the floor. In a sensual choreography, the bags slide and fold over themselves.

They overlap, embrace each other, generate new forms through transparency, before being suddenly frozen and suspended in space by the covering of a sheet of glass.

At the same time, against the background of newsprints of the world, the geometry of the tape lines encircle the inside and the outside of *Flying-inside of Window*.

The unconfined imaginary escapes viral confinement.

DUO XI: looking closely, with or without Van Gogh's crows, Ha Cha Youn's *Wheat Field* recaptures the blue and yellow of the Ukrainian flag on Kraft paper. A landscape of resistance.

DUO XII: the national colours of the world's warring countries become entangled...

Each bag in movement, lifted up, swayed by the wind, sounds the tocsin.
Pollution of the air, of the water, of the earth. Extinction of species.
Deforestation. Drought. Intensive monoculture. Urbanization. Melting glaciers.
Flooding. Cyclones. Refugees of any statuses. Distress. Beauty. SOS. Uprising.

Translated by Pascale Drouet