

TEXTS //
MINJA GU

GENERAL BIOGRAPHY MINJA GU

Minja Gu's work is based on personal performances that observe and question daily behaviors, which in turn are projected through various media including photography, video, installation, and drawing. She majored in painting at Hongik University and philosophy at Yonsei University and received a master's degree in Fine Arts from the Korea National University of Arts. She participated in the SSamzie Space studio program (Seoul), the Hangar Residency for artists (Barcelona), the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP, NYC), and the HISK program (Ghent, 2015–2016). She received the award of excellence in the *Songjeun Art Award* in 2010. Selected solo exhibitions are *Identical Times* (SPACE CROFT, Seoul, 2009), *Atlantic-Pacific co.* (Moore Street Market, New York, 2011), and *Inside the Belly of Monstro* (Citadellaan 7, Ghent, 2018). Gu has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, including the *Taipei Biennale* (Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2008), *VIDEO: VIDE&O* (Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2009), *A Cabinet in the Washing Machine* (Seodaemun-gu Recycling Center, Seoul, 2012), and *New Visions New Voices 2013* (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, 2013). In 2018, Gu was selected as one of the four sponsored artists for the *Korea Artist Prize*, an annual award and exhibition co-organized by MMCA and SBS Foundation.

GENERAL WORK MINJA GU

Her works appear frail and intimate, and almost indistinguishable from everyday life. Gu is predominately interested in what society uses and then discards. She recycles back into presence and with grace, wit and poetry the many supposedly valueless remnants of daily consumerism, such as leftover coffee cups or plastic bags. In addition to her physical artistic production she also initiates activities that run in parallel, or could be considered parasitic to everyday participation in society. These have included running the marathon at her leisure to complete it in a day-and-a-half, a time-period too slow and also not grandiose enough for the media to remain interested, and a ' symposium ' on love that involved a quite plausible and again totally unspectacular 12 hour get-together for women of the same age on a roof-top.

Vasif Kortun

On Minja Gu

It was in the spring of 2015 that I met Minja for the first time, during a studio visit at the HISK. I remember that she had already been in Ghent for two or three months, and didn't really know yet what exactly her project in the upcoming months might be. She expressed a vague interest in the infrastructure facilitating this city — statistics and information of all kinds, from the register of the local population to the product palettes of the local supermarkets, everything guaranteeing our life to be as fluid and free of obstacles as possible, also in the sense of a common ritual. If one reads that Minja was hesitating or thinking what to do, one immediately thinks about the peerless complexity of an artists' life, the time span until ' the ' thing suddenly appears with which you then can work, ' the ' thing which is not there and for which no one asks with conviction. What I found remarkable about this first encounter was not so much the fact of searching as such, because as we know that permanent reinvention is one of the standards and challenges of an artists' life. Instead I was intrigued by her attitude towards a pace of working, including her own. When we were browsing through some of her latest projects she has realized all over the world, consisting of an artistic real-time analysis of a wide range of subjects — ranging from love to a recipe for food, a plastic bag, lifetime statistics or job searches — I realized that time is often not the only primary subject in Minja's work. In particular how she takes, provides, and constructively misuses time in time creates a difference with respect to any other artists' methods.

Vasif Kortun described attributes such as ' frail ', ' intimate ', ' grace ', ' wit ' and ' poetry ' as key qualities that come into mind when thinking about Minja's work, and, just as she does with products, statistics, standards, I am appending my opinion to an existing judgment. By the way: wasn't it Douglas Huebler who once formulated this famous sentence: ' The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and/or place. ' It seems as if Minja took Hueblers wise sentences from the 1970ies as a genuine point of departure for her performative trail through the objects and social relations that exist in the world: the certainties of our daily lives that Minja steadily confronts with their blind spots, so that her work reminds us that nothing is finished; nothing is perfect; everything is fluid. It doesn't matter if she presents us with a series of images presenting one missing second in the global calculation of time, or whether she prepares one truly authentic dish out of many " authentic " recipes written on the back of product packages. The standardization of the world provides a rich feeding ground abundant with gaps and clichés. Suddenly I am reminded of Lee Kit, the Hong Kong and Taipei-based artist we showed at the S.M.A.K. in 2016, who is a friend of Minja's. What unites their work, for all their formal differences, is the particular combination of both a laic and Kafkaesque equanimity towards the endless course of things versus the invaluable, undeniable value of a singular moment, which in both their practices even takes on a sculptural quality from time to time. Both their practices embrace this impossible combination, and bridging impossible gaps, at least in my humble opinion, remains the central role of the arts.

Martin Germaan (Curator of SMAK, Ghent, Belgium)
Exhibition catalogue, *The Empty Fox Hole*, Ghent, Belgium, 2016

Taste and Flavor

About two years ago, I first heard of Minja Gu's idea for this work. She talked about her interest in images printed on food packaging, as well as the cooking processes to represent those pictures. Gu made dishes that faithfully embodied the images on famous food packages, and conceived a restaurant as an exhibition format. During the process, she attended cooking classes and prepared for the test to obtain a cooking certificate in Korean cuisine. From the series of preparation and research — including her studies in the cooking school to get the certificate — to the realization of this exhibition, all procedures are the chapters that constitute this artwork, and it took her two whole years to make this exhibition. The artist was already planning this work since her stay in New York in 2011.

This was triggered by her encounter with unfamiliar ingredients at a market in the city, where various cultures coexist, and while wondering how to cook them she began to take particular interest in the images of food on the packaging. Food is related to the process of accepting an unfamiliar culture. Tasting is a firsthand experience in which one physically accepts another culture. What Gu started to feel unfamiliar with, however, was not the new ingredients in New York, but the images of food on the instant-food packages in Korean markets, such as ramen, cooked rice, soy sauce, noodles, and retort curry. Gu realized that familiar things begin to appear strange when she carefully observed the packages; thus she ventured to make a different cultural experience by representing the food images while tracing its unfamiliarity.

While learning the basic skills in cooking classes, the artist conducted thorough research on food that was common in markets. An extensive chronology of the changes in the Korean food market was recorded, although it was not introduced in the exhibition. Among the food, best-selling products, food with well-known packaging, and products that portrayed changes in Korean food culture were selected for representation. Curry was Korea's first retort product, and dried laver came to have its standardized form after a major company entered the business in the 1980s. Smaller firms filed a petition to block these larger firms from entering the industry.

Likewise, a large company dominated the noodle market where small noodle companies overflowed before. Also, during their occupation the Japanese influenced the broth for the noodles by using an anchovy or katsuobushi base. The invention of cooked rice brought about a tremendous transformation in Korean food culture (rice is now a daily prepared staple food for Koreans). An image of a boiled tofu dish was on the soy sauce bottle, an image of gimbap (Korean roll) was on dried laver, and a Spanish canapé was on Spam.

Two versions exist for ramen, as the package changed while preparing the exhibition: one is in a white bowl while the other is in a black bowl, and the placement of garnish in each image is also slightly different. After the selection of food, Gu studied the arrangements in detail. She calculated the size of the carrots and potatoes in the curry according to the proportion of the bowl. To make the exact shape of jeon (Korean pancake) to match the image on the jeon mix package, she even ordered a mold from a foundry. Dishes were custom-made to bear an almost identical shape as the image, after undergoing a number of mistakes, and similar looking leaves were found, which were to be placed beside the dish as ornaments. Making every single dish on the nine menus requires extensive time and detailed work. Potatoes have to be cut around the edges in six different ways respectively, and beef has to be retouched on the top, while incorporating the side that touches the bottom. One also has to consider the country of origin of each ingredient labeled on the package, and should study what sauce to mix and apply, in order to create the same color as the example. These examples were installed on the wall of the exhibition space, half resembling art, and half resembling menu items in restaurants. Neat, delicious looking pictures on food packages were translated into pictures in an exhibition space. Additionally, for four times during the course of the exhibition, a demonstration of the process, as well as tasting were available by making a reservation.

All of these procedures require effort, time, and skill that are not necessary in regular cooking. Food images on the packages are obviously not for eating purposes but for looking, or to be more specific, for selling. A proverb says, "what looks good tastes good." This food however, does not always follow the principle. Food that was made for packaging image actually possesses an inedible taste and texture. This food meets artistic practice, for it is a product of design in which the form is designed and paint is applied in order for it to look tasty. Within the history of art, painters and sculptors have dedicated immense time on representation.

If they had the Idea, God, absolute beauty and detailed reality as objects for representation, Gu re-presents images on food packages. This series of processes can be seen as an allegory for the tradition of representation. If art virtually described reality, the artist retrieves the virtuality of an image into the real. The fact that one cannot arrive at the same result as the image on the food package, even though he/she follows the recipe, is an obvious non-trick trick.

Although Gu knows that the image is a good-looking fake made as an "example," she follows it to the very end. In regards to the course of this work, that has no coerciveness yet is just being strict to herself, the question "Why don't you prefer not to do it?" would be more appropriate than merely asking "Why do it?" Dedicating a considerable amount of time and energy in adjusting the angle of a single grain of rice with a pair of tweezers does not seem a mere exposé of the real behind the illusion of an image.

Rather, this work can be viewed as an extension of the artist's continuous inquiry on the issue of speed and practice, through the experience of labor. Gu focuses on the fact that one can spend infinite time on this kind of "endless work." If we accept the accustomed notion that the image and the real are not identical, curry will be ready in three minutes, and cooked-rice will be done within a minute and a half. If we accept this, there is no disappointment, but once we start to question it, the problem expands to three hours, to six hours. One can even readily devote two years to do it. The time of the "instant" continues endlessly. Using time differently relates to questioning and doubting the external conditions and requirements that awakens me, makes me walk, work, fall asleep, as well as questioning the approach of convention, certification, and the proof it entails. Gu's course of cooking and the tenacious usage of time seem to talk about all this. If this hectic Korean society runs at an average speed of a car, an ordinary person has an engine with the speed of a bicycle. Gu's engine seems even slower than this. Yet, does the slow speed only portray a peaceful and calm world? Not a chance. The loss of a sense of speed by contrast revives the ability to doubt the familiar world. As the puppet show has the background slowing down and ultimately coming to a halt, what runs is not the car, but the picture in the frame. Gu has expressed a different sense of speed by copying an entire novel instead of just reading it, like in *Thirty* (2006), or has finished a marathon by walking the course for two days rather than running it, like in *42.195* (2006). Like Molloy, she continues the repetitive task of taking a stone out of her right pocket and putting it into her left. The question of speed is a question of the system, and contains a strong protest by stating "why can't I do it this way?" Another interesting aspect is that rather than temporarily playing a certain role or offering someone else this position, Gu herself continues the practice throughout an extensive time. Amongst the course of her lengthy process, the moment of exhibition is just one aspect. Particularly, the artist herself carries out these roles rather than taking an observer's role when questioning the condition of individual life in a society, thus enhancing the intensity of her queries. In 2011, at Gyeonggi Creation Center located in Sungam-do, Gu created *Winter-ing*, which was a kimchi-making project (gimjang in Korean). She made kimchi by earning cabbage and sauce, in return for her labor in helping out local residents. This was an artwork as well as a labor in which Gu entirely contributed her effort and time. For *The World of Job* created in Taiwan in 2008, Gu documented the whole process of making a job-search advertisement, getting a job, and actually working there. Although silently accepting the administration of museums that apply their institutional way of working towards artists, Gu does not stand in the position of a mere by-stander or observer, but plans a structure or executes "becoming-." For example, she opened a *Public Hearing for Arranging Artist-Civil Servant Hiring Regulations* (2013), and opened *Minja Gu Art Fair* (2013) in which she laid out her clothes, artwork, and collection of objects on a stand. Data — constructed through these experiences as well as enduring time — indifferently exposes the exact procedures of how events are made. Through works that are earnest yet not loaded, gentle yet solid, Gu defies — if not resists — conventions that omit individual differences favoring efficiency, with rules predetermined by the system. Through a continuous series of time and practices, with forms that are not blunt — although not sharp either — their firm layers precisely convey an authentic taste and flavor.

Haeju Kim (Deputy Curator of Art Sonje Center, Seoul, South Korea)
Critical Essay on the work *The Authentic Quality*, 2013

P.S. One food company that is famous for its "3-Minute Curry" as well as its yellow colored package uses the image of a well-known red roly-poly toy (Ottogi) as its corporate identity. While introducing its corporate identity as "a healthy child with a plump face licking his/her lips" on its website, Dharma's portrait and his life are uploaded instead, asserting the origin of the Ottogi as the Dharma. To cite the webpage, the spirit of the Ottogi is: (1) Active not static. (2) Does not submit to foreign forces (3) Emphasizes action over words (4) Does not waste things. (5) Always neat and tidy (6) Never tumbles.

Against exotic objects: the recent direction of conceptual artistic practices in contemporary Korean art: Wan Lee, Minja Gu, and Junebum Park

Minja Gu's project, included in the National Museum of Modern Arts' group show presenting new talents in contemporary Korean Art, is equally notable for her usage of consumer products in dealing with how the values of certain objects are decided upon by the viewer's perception of "exotic" cultures. Her project *Atlantic-Pacific Co.* (2012) began during her residency at The International Studio & Curatorial Program in New York. During her residency, Gu gathered a massive amount of exotic consumer products from Atlantic and Pacific Avenues and sold them for nine percent more than their original prices as a way to reflect the time and labor she had invested to search for, purchase and display these products.

Products at *Atlantic-Pacific Co.* were attributed with different personal, artistic and educational values. An old lady from Trinidad at the Moore Street store was, for instance, surprised to find coffee imported from her home country in Gu's *Atlantic-Pacific Co.*, whilst at Geumho Art Museum in Seoul, most visitors regarded these exotic food products as educational references through which they could learn about an unfamiliar culture. Gu's tentative company and her objects implied not only how globalization makes objects from different cultures interact with communities, but also how the difference of perspectives can produce an array of interpretations about the same "exotic" products. Moreover, Gu's object, not unlike the case of Wan Lee's products, points to what Lucy Lippard has called the "dematerialization of art". As an active community artist, Gu appropriated these consumer products as an important initiator for stimulating and expanding the viewer's interaction with her project. ...

Dongyeon Koh
Modern Art Asia, n°16, p 26 - 30, november 2013

Old New Territories : ISCP at Moore Street Market

That “ artists have the capacity to condense, anatomize, and represent symbolically complex social and historical processes, ”¹¹ is certainly the case with South Korean artist-in-residence Minja Gu’s *Atlantic-Pacific co*. In this project, Gu allegorizes ocean exploration in the age of discovery through a local expedition along the corridors of Atlantic Avenue and Pacific Street in Brooklyn. Here, the mode of participation is mediated through exploration and exchange. Gu’s project resonates with the power relations of imperialism as participants embark on voyages into unknown territories to collect rare and exotic products. These explorations reveal how the sovereign powers of imperialism have given way to globalized economic and cultural configurations without clearly identifiable territorial power centers, and without fixed boundaries and borders. This disjuncture is evident in the *mélange* of commodities that accumulate in *Atlantic-Pacific co*.

Although the commodity takes center stage, the conditions of exchange are not defined by economics alone. Rather, the commodity is rearticulated as a mediator to activate social and cultural dialogue. Gu creates a market within a market at Moore Street, and like the Greek agora, it functions as a composite of social, cultural, economic and spatial relations, posing a fragmented narrative and critical commentary. The company’s “ rare products ” assembled at Moore Street as an interactive installation act as a parable of the existing booths at the market and its exotic persona. These artifacts, the plunder and booty of adventuresome explorers, are assembled in a functional store alongside a logbook and map that tells the stories of the voyages. Collecting items from Brooklyn thoroughfares creates a fictional, subaltern version of historic colonial trading companies. Gu gives the same care to record keeping as her predecessors, yet the trajectory of the cultural commodity is disrupted and re-sited, resulting in shifts in terms of value and meaning. The acts of consumption along which these commodities move, reflect broader patterns of migration and show how the mobilities of goods and people transfer objects from one repository of memory and context of ordering to another.

If it is true that “ commodities, like persons, have social lives, ”¹² then the ways in which they travel and encounter struggles over their meaning, tells us something not only about the objects, but also about the cultural, economic and social values around which these objects circulate and coalesce. In Gu’s project the object’s value is reinterpreted through its out-of-placeness, through its imagined biographical tale, through its uniqueness, or through recognition of its simple utility, expressing the “ commodity potential ” that allows objects to change value and status at various points in their lives. In creating new trajectories for these objects, *Atlantic-Pacific co*. presents the conditions that now characterize a global economy. In this way, Gu’s project expresses a Benjaminian proclivity— that it is only when the object is ripped out of its normal context that we are able to clearly see the structures of which it is a part.¹³

Barbara Adams
2013

11. Martha Rosler, *Take the Money and Run ? Can Political and Socio-Political Art ‘Survive’ ?* e-flux Journal 12, 2012, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/take-the-money-and-run-can-political-and-socio-critical-art-%E2%80%9Csurvive%E2%80%9D/>.

12. Arjun Appadurai, *Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value* in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1986

13. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002

1. Gu Minja / Truman Show

21st century humans live a life that is inundated with commodities. Dwellers of metropolitan cities live while consuming accumulated goods and produced messages. Cities roll away to the cycle of production and the rhythm of goods - not by human cycle. The relationship of the people is mediated through all kinds of possessions and electronic exchange systems.¹

Gu Minja's works include ordinary objects and conventional behavior that are seen every day in the city. These objects loyally follow up Jean Baudrillard's 'system of objects', which means that objects are consumed because they are produced. Plastic bags are used as plastic bags that are blown away in the wind, and Dunkin' Donuts disposable coffee cups as recyclable paper cups; electric heater as a heater that emits heat; a mirror as a mirror that reflects light. They are all used as they are. There is no deception or twist. Without any decoration, the circumstance and purpose for which the goods were produced are appropriated. The only intermediary agent that transfers the usage of ordinary objects to the artworks is that the duration of use has been prolonged ridiculously, and the inevitable abandonment of the efficiency of objects.

In this regard, Gu Minja's objects illustrate fundamentally different attributes from that of the ready-made that is formerly known to have become a part of art through its appropriation for a different use.² Robert Rauschenberg started his *Combines* series in the mid-1950s in which he employed ready-made objects like everyday junk from the attic or rubbish dump yard, but insisted on endlessly emptying meaning through re-placing the objects and painting over them. For instance, bicycle handles, dolls, cups and clocks lost their initial functionality and existed only as symbols for its utility.³

On the other hand, Gu Minja's objects, in spite of their being ready-made in her artworks, do not lose their intrinsic functionality. *Atlantic-Pacific co.* (2011) shows souvenirs, sake bottles, carpets and food products that can still function as they are meant to. Objects found in historic places on Atlantic street and Pacific street have added a function by the memories that are related to their original and historical significance - that these objects were part of an exchange of goods across the oceans. After the historical background is inserted, time and memory are added as new exchanging values in the sake bottles, carpets and food products. The goods have added value that is not really necessary. The goods are not anonymous, but are part of the context involving specific time, space and people. This context neither belongs to the artist nor to the viewers appreciating the works. The context belongs to the Atlantic-Pacific Company, as ambiguously indicated, and to the original owners of the goods of the company. However at the same time, the company and the owners are also very obscure. The original owners can be from Chinese mass-manufacturing factories, Malaysia's small-scale production places, or Latin American, Canadian, and American shops. After all, however ambiguous and obscure that may be, through the process of very universal, historical remembrance, the anonymous goods return to our own context.

The World of Job (2008) captures the re-experiencing of a job searching story of one ethnic local woman 40 years ago, whom the artist happened to meet in Taiwan. In this work, the essence of job searching does not change, but is just employed as it is. The problems that are encountered in the course of job searching, like language barriers, or discrimination, is reality without exaggeration or reduction. Only the circumstance has changed: 40 years later, it is about a Korean artist job searching in Taiwan in 2008, but it does not change in terms of the exchange of labor. It seems to have started from a concrete story, but the story of the ethnic local woman is the story of Korean miners and nurses who went over to Germany in the 1970s to make money, and also it is the reality of the artist making one's way to New York in the 2000s in search of better opportunities; it is the story of the Germanic race who migrated southwards to the Roman Empire for their survival 800 years ago. By appropriating the narration that happened 40 years ago, the artist arouses the universal empathy of the human experience that tries to prove the value of labor in an alien society while endeavoring to become accustomed to new culture and language.

The strategy of appropriating the object's functionality and context in the territory between art and reality is the most efficient means to access the masses that is no longer moved by illusion, also often used by real-variety TV shows sprouting everywhere. Similarly, the strategy could become a direct apparatus which take in a context beyond a reality that appears in everyday life.

In *The Truman Show* (1998), the creator who created reality by setting up a virtual reality says in a self-mocking tone, “We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented,” but in spite of that, there always exists a person who questions the reality, just like the protagonist, Truman, did. Artwork starts from there.

Sooyoun Lee (Curator at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea)
2013

1. Mark Poster(ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, second edition, p.29
2. Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp: Or, the Castle of Purity*, London: Cape Goliard Press, 1970, p.84
3. Anna Dezeunze, *Unpacking Cornell: Consumption and Play in the Work of Rauschenberg, Warhol and Georg Brecht*, *Surrealism*, n° 2, summer 2004, p.4

Perspective without Average

The place I first saw the artist Minja Gu's work was at an open studio in the Gyeonggi Creation Center on Sun-gam Island in the beginning of 2011. In her studio, the artist had set up a table and served warm, delicious rice and her homemade kimchi which is usually made for the winter. This humble but delicious meal was her work entitled *Wintering*. She made kimchi with Chinese cabbage and seasonings that she got from the villagers of Sun-gam Island, the location of her artist's residency, in return for her labor. Even the rice she cooked was from the same source. This work *Wintering* --featuring a studio whose entrance was decorated with plastic kimchi storage bags, a veneer table, and a small TV showing a documentary of the process of the work--is the result of the artist's labor during the winter. In this way the artist substituted pure labor for artistic work and had the audience eat kimchi and rice instead of just looking at her work. As in this work, one of the focuses of the artist Minja Gu's work is the matter of labor. She doesn't deal with this subject as a serious social issue but asks how her labor can be fully labor while also being an artistic work.

For example, one work of hers, *The World of Job*, in 2008, documents the process of getting a job in Taiwan. The artist accidentally met and had a conversation with a woman who had lived for forty years in Taipei since she moved there to get a job. So the artist decided to try to find a job by herself. Because she cannot speak Chinese she hung a sign asking for a job in a park and on a street, and two weeks later she barely got a job taking care of an old woman. In this work the artist defines her work as experiencing the reality of an unfamiliar place in the role of a foreign worker.

In her recent work *Atlantic-Pacific co.* she experimented with the boundary between labor and artistic work and overlapped the making of artwork with trade by expanding the method. *Atlantic-Pacific co.* is the name of a trading company which was established by the artist. The artist found two streets named Atlantic Avenue and Pacific Street in Brooklyn during her residency at the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York. Lining these streets, there are many shops selling a lot of traditional food, ingredients, and products from different countries. In reference to the exploration during the age of discovery, the artist pioneered new places for exploration on the streets of New York and during the expedition collected rare products which were to be found on Atlantic Avenue and Pacific Street. Then she presented them in a shop. She opened this shop and sold the items twice in New York and once in Seoul in the summer of 2012.

Another interest that is shown in her works is the measurement of time. To explain the invisible mass of time she suggests different ways of measuring time or different way of experiencing time, by using a variety of experimental measurement apparatus. One of her works *Symposium - On Love*, 2007, was a performance in which five men and women, who were in their thirties, had a conversation about love on a rooftop of a building on the night of December 29th 2007. They started talking at 11:05 at night and continued until the next day at about noon. The twelve hours they used for the talk were measured by language and became a book.

Meanwhile another work *24 Hours* is a video project, a recording of a performer spending 24 hours simulating the 'average time usage of Koreans,' to be filmed in real-time based on the data that shows the average adult's time usage, based on information from the National Statistical Office. An instructor, beside the performer, directs the performer on how much time he is to spend on each type of action--traveling, studying, eating meals, eating snacks, and sleeping -- and what needs to be done. The performer behaves according to the strict rules of the data.

The measurement of the unyielding experience of 'average time' became a video recording and is in clear contrast to the usage of time in real life. *Identical Times*, which was made between 2008 and 2009 when the artist had a Hangar residency in Barcelona, is a work in which units of time are moved onto spatial coordinates. The artist imposed a circle onto the city and divided it into 24 segments - the central point of the circle being Barcelona's plaza clock tower--as a day is divided into 24 hours. Then she walked in the segments. At each specific hour, in the place for that hour, she explored and recorded images of what she found. In this work, time is not a unit which is divided into 24 hours but a reference point for an expedition which indicates directions in space.

It can't be summed up easily, but the artist Minja Gu's work can be understood by several repeated phrases including 'exploration,' 'time,' 'labor,' and 'doubt about average.' The artist performs to create works which are focused on the process and intention instead of works of splendid colors or completeness of form. Most of her art works are activated by the participation of the artist and they are a realization of the artist's plan, either by a performer or by the artist herself. The places for her art work are a variety of spaces in a city and from ordinary life.

galerie dohyanglee

Most of her works are records of what she did during a certain time and are shown in archival form. With the materials we see in ordinary life, Minja Gu continues creating poetic, humorous, and sedate but not heavy works, started by questions from various phenomenon and objects of the world. It seems that the artist expresses insistence or gentle but stubborn resistant through her work. Like the questions of a variety of metric indexes such as hours and minutes which are added to the immaterial concept of time; and like resistant against the rudeness of the concept of 'average' which abbreviates the individuality of people and things with one or two words like average face and average time. Her work *42.195*, which indicates the full distance of a marathon, shows the artist's unmentioned rejection. In this work she participated in a real marathon. Instead of running, she finished the 42.195 kilometers in two days at walking speed. So, her marathon started at 10:00 a.m. on the third of October in 2006 and was finished at 7:26 p.m. on the fourth of October. With this walking marathon the artist resists the competition for speed which shouts for us to go 'faster.'

Haeju Kim (Deputy Curator of Art Sonje Center, Seoul, South Korea)
Moonji Cultural Institute, Saei, Art Folder Critic, 2012

Minja Gu

42.195 is a record of running a full marathon, or a record of 42.195 km of daily movements, through a walking measure. *Air Parcel* is a record of air currents flowing to or from somewhere. *Symposium* is a record of talks on love shared by six men and women from the time the moon rises to the time the moon sets - from 11:05 pm on December 29 to 11:20 am on December 30, 2007. *Identical Times* is a record of 24 reports about 24 hours and a place, showing two similar and different stories associated with summer time.

Minja Gu's work is completed by recording something: but the act of recording itself is of no significance. What's important for Gu is the end of the recording. Recording here is not the end of action but a temporary pause involving accidental elements unrelated to action. The end of *Symposium* is "Let's call it a day." People end their talks not because their talks come to an end but because the moon sets. In *42.195* an act of measuring the distance with a walking measure may be maintained, but the act ended because she arrived at a certain distance.

Discontinuation of the continuous flow of time is like dividing one year into 365 days; one day into 24 hours; one minute into 60 seconds. Difference is the system of dividing such time is perceived as an absolute norm. By disconnecting and standardizing a system, something unnecessary is removed, which makes all clear. Such disconnection may integrate all in a consistent frame, excluding subtle difference and ambiguity. We seem to discuss continuity but discontinuity masquerading as continuity is placed behind. Important is what disappeared when disconnected and what continuity bears.

Gu's work shows a recontextualization of her daily life by creating new rules through her body and her words, transforming a framework someone has applied arbitrarily to her own. Gu's exhibition is a congregation of multifarious words coming from a chasm of such disconnection. *Symposium* is a record of love among six people. A condition to join this talk is age, that is, they are those who lived in the same age. But a system applied to this work is 'one year'. They are classified with the same standard, and thus share experiences and sense, though each life is never identical. By dividing one year into 365 days, their lives appear in different positions: they are only of the same age. In *42.195* the artist moves the same distance as a marathon. One move is for the marathon, another is made through her daily life. The moves with different goals gain meaning in the same distance. To go the same distance may take 17 hours or 8 days according to the purpose (or means).

In *Identical Times* the places are set by incorporating time and direction, and the state of the places is recorded after being observed at a certain time. Time here changes from the rule of evenly splitting a day but is an indicator for direction. When two meaningless elements combine, a new perspective is formed. Where is now air generated from *Air Parcel*? It is hard to conclude the air flows as the current Gu presents. As Gu states, "The air spread with wind, stay somewhere, or move."

Daebum Lee, 2009