

AHL Foundation

Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA)

Interview

- Interviewee: Dohee Lee
- Interviewer: Dr. Stéphanie Jeanjean
- July 29th, 2022 / Zoom Interview
- Recorded and Transcribed by JooHee Kim (AKAA Research Fellow 2021- 2022). Edited version by Stéphanie Jeanjean, with Boram Shim (July 2023), from transcript by JooHee Kim (July 2022)
- 1 Video file
- This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity
- Open for research use

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JooHee Kim (JK): Today's date is July 29th, 2022. We are here to interview Dohee [Lee] on her artwork. The interview will be done by Stéphanie [Jeanjean]. Shall we begin?

Dr. Stéphanie Jeanjean (SJ): Yes. Thank you, JooHee [Kim]. Thank you, Dohee, for meeting this morning. We worked together for the AHL Artist Fellowship in 2021. I was part of the jury and invited to curate the exhibition of the recipients' work, and Dohee Lee was one of them. In total, there were four artists involved in the fellowship and exhibition. I will mention the other names quickly: Heehyun Choi, Gyun Hur, and Yozmit. The show took place in New York, in 2022, in the new exhibition space of AHL Foundation, in Harlem. It was called *When Attitudes Become Positions*, and the idea was to present artistic practices as personal positions regarding society at large; to suggest that art practices are "attitudes" presenting challenging and provocative individual, social, and political positions. The artists were taking a different angle on that topic to resolve tensions related to cultural and/or spiritual identities, colonial and/or gender identities, and/or political claims for social change.

Today, I want to start the conversation by developing from the exhibition and asking Dohee to tell us a little more about her choice of artwork for the show, which was a performance-based work called *Chung Ryung: A Calling to the Spirit for Theresa Hak Kyung Cha* (2017). The way we presented her piece was in the most isolated and intimate space, on the back of the exhibition rooms. This was intentional for allowing the piece to have its own space and giving a greater opportunity for the audience to connect with it.

This display probably emphasized my perception that Dohee's piece was developing in three parts; for me, there were three different materializations of moments, or different occurrences that were surrounding the performance itself. With those three parts, maybe we should start with the performance itself, and then move on to the video recording of the preparation step of the performance, which was also shown in the exhibition in a video. And then lastly, we should speak about the photograph that you showed, which is the 3rd element or moment composing your piece. So, do you want to speak about your choice of work first, and then do you want to expand on about the various visual materializations of it in the exhibition?

Dohee Lee (DL): Yes, thank you, Stéphanie, and thank you, JooHee, and thank you, AHL Foundation, for inviting me and other co-artists, and doing this work and sharing it. When I was invited, I had an idea of what I wanted to bring out; we were going through the pandemic situation [COVID-19] and there were a lot of the racial issues, uprisings, and especially those related to Asian hate crimes. So, I paid more attention to use my ritual as representation of the sickness, the sickness of the system, of this white supremacist and patriarchal system that is not working. I wanted to do a ritual, and some of the segments are indeed the actual preparation for that ritual.

Then, I thought back about the work I had been doing in the past and pondered that the AHL foundation was based in New York City. I felt I needed to create a connection with the spirit of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, who experienced the same oppression as me, as a Korean woman artist immigrating to U.S. When I immigrated in 2002, someone gave me the book *Dictée* [1982] and, at that time, I did not know who she was. So, I received this book, but I did not open it because her book was so hard for me to read. You know, somehow, it was really a nonsense. At that time with my broken English, about to learn a new language and all things, it was hard for me. And I abandoned that book for many years on my bookshelf.

Living in America as an immigrant woman and as an artist, there are a lot of breakthroughs; I figured out how to stabilize in this land and made a lot of adjustments to live in this country. But at the same time, whenever I did my work, people in the art scene kept mentioning Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* to me. So, I was like: "Okay, I have to go back to that book." So, I started reading it, and I was like: "Oh my God!" That was the time when I started crying. Now, this is my story.

Her story contains a lot of historical backgrounds that I know of, including those about [my] hometown, which she wrote about from her memory, and which I knew as a part of my ancestors' history. I knew about colonization and how many of our ancestors suffered from that. I empathized with a lot of her historical lines and her experiences living in this country [U.S.]. From there [*Dictée*], she was finding her own tongue to express her art and life through art; I believe that she was finding her way out the struggles. So that was so emotional to me, but it took me some years to really understand it [*Dictée*].

Then when I had this project, which is called *Ara with the Waterways Time Weaves* [(2016–2018), first presented at Counter Pulse in San Francisco, and Eastside Cultural Center in Oakland, CA], I was working with this women community [in California] that mostly consists of Asian immigrants and other community members. I immediately brought up Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and her book to them. But even before I was doing this work, my initiation was researching about Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's death. Her art is here, out there. Some people spoke about her death, but I wanted to know deeper about it. So, I reached out to Cha's family members. I met Cha's brother, James Cha. Before I met him, I researched the trial documents, going through how the trial went and where it took place. Then, when I met with James, we just talked about how he was doing, and what he wanted to share with me about Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. In addition, I also wanted to ask for permission [from him] to do a ritual at the site where she was murdered, so I asked: Is it okay?

When we are doing a ritual, we need permission. Some people wonder and this is what I also want to share, especially with artists. When artists are doing site specific works, site rituals, specific performances, or whatever that is, it depends on the intention. So, instead of permission, I want to say intention. We need to have a clear intention. When

we have a clear intention, we know what actions we need to take. So [for my art project] when they [members of the women community in California] first came to me, I said: “I need to meet the members of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s family and ask permission to do the ritual there”.

And James was like: “Oh, yeah, go ahead. We appreciate it.” That is the video clip that you saw: the journey from how she entered the building and how her body came, and how her body was disposed. It was extremely difficult to go through that path, not only from the records that I had as documents, but also my imagination through the ritual. At the end, this was the association that I wanted to make in the exhibition: the sickness in the system of the 1980s and how women, especially Asian women, were treated with sexual violence.

SJ: Yes, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha was raped and murdered.

DL: Exactly.

SJ: In 1982, in New York City.

DL: Exactly.

SJ: In Lower Manhattan, at the specific location where you performed this piece... The performance is very dramatic; it is very intense. The visuals allied with your body expressions—the violence that you are expressing through your body movements—, and the sound, I think those are probably what resonated with me the most. So maybe you can speak a little more about the use of gestures and sounds in this piece? I could hear some drums, bells, and some singing as well.

DL: Yes. Honestly, the songs I sang are just spontaneous. I did not prepare anything for it, it is just something that comes out, I had to let it be. Sometimes, the spirit wants to sing, so I let myself respond with singing. If the spirit wants to run, I must run. I follow what the spirit needs to show and do. Later, when I saw what I did, I could imagine: “Oh, that is the part when something caught up with her—a situation in the present—, but also from the past—the past that she had carried. I also wanted to express the violence back then in Korea. The footage that I added also referred to Korean dictatorship time era. I wanted to communicate that among multiple reasons why she immigrated to the U.S., one of them was the dictatorship. I wanted to add that to her spirit—how much we are haunted by our history too—, this was later built into the work, you know.

The drumming is very important when I am doing a ritual, the drumming is the spirit. The drum is always helping to connect, release, and activate everything; drumming is very important. The drums use metals and leathers of different kinds. I use different kinds of metal instruments, bells, gongs, and also the leather instrument 북(*buk*) or

장구(*janggu*). I use those instruments to really create the vibration to communicate with the spirits.

SJ: I thought it was interesting that you created a soundtrack for the recording of your performance. We do not necessarily hear the sound recording of what was happening live during the performance; it is an actual soundtrack you made. We hear you singing, playing the drum, ringing the bells, and performing; I find this collage or composition formally also particularly interesting.

Just to finish on the performance itself, when you perform do you have an awareness of what is happening around you and how people are reacting to your work? All of this is recorded in the video of the performance capturing the surroundings and the resonance of the performance on the site. It is very interesting to see the various polarized reactions from street-goers: while some people seemed or tried to understand the gravity of what was happening, others just tried to go by as quickly as possible, ignoring the happenstances. But at some point, in the video, it seemed also that some people were looking at a paper handout. It would be interesting to know what they were looking at; can you develop on this?

DL: Yeah, definitely. I prepared this handout paper about Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, explaining who she was, what happened to her here, and what this ritual was for. I wanted people to know why this Asian woman, wearing a very dramatic garment and walking around, was doing a ritual. By the way, all the words I wrote on this garment were all her words.

SJ: That's beautiful. I wanted to ask about that...

DL: Yeah, that was her words. I wanted to write something that was very familiar to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, so her spirit could be quickly reached and connected. They were some sorts of wishes on the garment. This work is not about "just making it..."; it is about what the intention is and what meant to happen. Then the handout paper helped, so that people knew what was going on. Because when I am in it, I do not know what is happening around me. You see, I am in it. To anticipate that, I had a few helpers around me who were there to take care of me and deal with the surrounding circumstances in case something happens. In fact, many things happened.

While doing rituals on site, especially outside, I do not want to provoke anything. I am just doing it as a part of nature, like a part of the natural flow. I want to understand what I am doing and what is happening in the area, so that the ritual can flow without any conflicts. All violence is coming from conflict, and I do not want to support that or keep the conflict going on anymore; in the way I am using my resilience to move through and break through it. So, what do I need? I need people to support me to go through it. I also need a paper that says what I am doing, so some people would understand it,

some people would stay, stand, and watch it. Some people would walk by... That is their choice. In ritual forms like that, we are not controlling the people.

SJ: I find interesting that your pre-planned intent is not to be aggressive or provocative because your piece—the performed reenactment of the murder—is very dramatic and provocative. This being said, I can also see your attempt of navigating this content without an edge, and that is so inspiring. Is this how the ritual functions: to help navigating through traumatic experiences? Do you want to reflect more on that?

DL: Yeah. You know, that is why you need to know what it is about, when you are doing a ritual. You really need to research a lot; for me, this is my study. When I am doing a ritual for Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, I need to find out more about her, so that I could have a closer feeling about her and receive more information. So, I think this is a very critical work for the ritual. And that ritual itself can reconcile and heal people rather than provoke uncertain feelings and energies. I believe in performance too, and in other types of work. If you want to do a ritual about a particular subject, then you need to work, study, and research that subject; therefore, when you are in there, you can go deeper. When I am doing the work, I want to go deeper.

SJ: Yeah. I think it is a good transition here. I want to move away from the performance to what I call the video recording of the preparation of the performance. That is also what I was trying to formulate earlier. Your work is a performance-based work, but the performance itself is not the goal nor the principal focus. This relates to my perception of your piece in the exhibition as taking different materializations or referring to different moments of the performance. This other video recording, which was also exhibited at AHL, informs us about what happened before the performance, which is the costume preparation. We can also see you writing on paper... Do you want to share some information or details about the preparation of the ritual? Like, what are the different actions that are part of this preparation, for example? Also, why did you want to exhibit the preparation of the ritual, and give it as much importance as the performance itself?

DL: Yes, one of the video clips I showed was about the ritual preparation. How I prepared from the beginning, until I go out to do it. It shows the process and the progression. That is really what I wanted to show: the process from beginning to end. As performers, we typically only show the ending part—the product. Here, I want to bring up my teacher Anna Halprin. When I was studying with her, she emphasized staying in the process and not even thinking about your end product. When you are in the process, you are getting there; when you get there, it does not matter what that is, because that is it.

Also, when I trained in Korea, I felt there was a very strong demand there. The patriarchal system and its competition-driven model requires you to be perfect. I was also trained in that supremacist system. Coming from such a country that was always hard for me, it caused me a lot of stress: "It has to be good. It must be good..." But

meeting Anna at that time—when I was struggling and wanted to find a different way—; she was the one who really taught me the tools, how to do it. As a result, I found my way to do it after that.

Little side story. I am always looking for a teacher who can teach me artists' and teachers' deep understandings, and I felt so lucky that I found Anna, the one who made me feel: "Oh my God, this is the right teacher I have met in my life!" I received a lot of wisdom from her—which I share with my friends and with the next and younger generations—, and that is: that we need to pay attention to the process, rather than the product.

Not only her, but I also want to mention my hometown in Korea, Jeju Island. Not only Jeju Island but the rituals; overall, they are also all about processes. When they are doing a ritual in Korea, it takes at least several hours, one day... a short one can be one day, or three or five hours—a short one, right? Another one can go for 12 days... So, you can see, all they do from beginning to end is a process. I learned a lot from experiencing this.

Anna [Halprin]'s approach is: "You are a person; you are the person looking at the ritual form, and you see not only yourself, but also the people, the nature, and the community. Everything surrounding you, the food, visual art, music, dance, and garments, everything." So, I was like: "Wow, I can see it, I can see why this process is essential." That is why I wanted to share through showing this video [recording of the preparation of the performance], as well.

SJ: What I find interesting is that you speak about Anna Halprin's approach and her insistence on to the process, while you are also explaining that in a traditional ritualistic Korean model, the intention is first and essential. If you can, could you discuss how you navigate these spaces between Halprin's lesson and the Korean traditional shamanistic approach?

Also, before we speak about Jeju Island that you just brought up, I would like you to address the 3rd element, or moment, in the piece you exhibited in New York: the still life photograph composed of various objects and materials: papers strips on which you are writing, fabrics strips of different colors—red, green, and yellow—, as well as several small figurines, which seemed to be made out of corn. Is that correct? The basket appears to be composed at the end of the video clips on the preparation of the ritual. First, can you tell us more about the basket and its content, as well as the symbolic meaning of some of the elements composing it?

In fact, when we were working on the exhibition, you told me that ideally the basket should be physically present in the display, but because of difficulties working long-distance, the purpose of the basket could also be communicated through images. You mailed us a photography of a basket, which we hung in the exhibition at AHL to

complete the composition of your installation piece. I am interested in this notion of transfer through images. Formulated in a very simplistic manner, can you speak a little more about the power of images? How are they able to communicate or transfer meaning, ideas, or intentions?

DL: Thank you. You know, the photo I sent was the altar I created for the ritual of sickness, which I talked about earlier. Then in the different video clips, I am wearing weird costumes and garments—like when I do a ritual in Washington, DC—that relate to those little figures, which you see in the photograph of the altar. I manifested them in my real body; it [the corn figure in the basket] is that one figure [an *Heomaengye*]. It represents the one who causes all the sickness; for me, that was the patriarchal and supremacist systems we previously discussed. They are what caused the sicknesses and the reasons why Theresa Hak Kyung Cha got murdered. So many people were murdered because of racism, sexual, gender violence, and Asian hate crimes; and so many people are still killed by that today...

I wanted to create that object, to objectify this thing. We call them *heomaengye*. So, I made a *heomaengye* representing all the systems causing death. You can see the snake in there. The snake [*Chilseong*] represents life and vitality for the humans who got killed. We need to revive their lives, the vitality of these lives. The symbol was that the snake can revive, this life can revive, and other things—such as humanity and the mother earth—can revive. One day, it can cause the sickness, but we have to convert this into a good spirit. The eggshells are offerings for the return of life. Also, I used a lot of masked figures in there; I am not only using one mask or *heomaengye*. They are so many *heomaengye* that are causing problems. I wanted to represent that.

I felt that making this altar and bringing the monstrous spirit in there were ways to convert the spirit's energy into the right direction because, somehow, all of them are victims. So, how do we bring them [the monstrous spirits] into the positive energy of the altar? It was my intention to create the altar. I wanted to do that in the physical space, making the altar as a piece. Then, because we were working long-distance, I wondered who would assemble it if I sent the elements to make the altar... It was just too complicated... That is why I greatly appreciate that you guys agreed to hang the photograph of the altar in the exhibition.

SJ: I may not be entirely objective here on the viewer's perception, and having worked on the exhibition, I may be overinterpreting your piece; but I think those three elements function together and expand the spatial and temporal limits of your piece. I mean that while watching the video recording of the performance, it is obviously about New York today, but it is also about a drama in the past which, as you said, continues happening. Hence, the continuous engagement in process and attempts of negotiating sickness and violence occurred and continues occurring. Is it what you mean?

DL: That is true, because the work evolves. I realized that. A lot of the works I had been doing for the past 15 years were the same, but different in their ways of coming out. I noticed that I kept doing the same work: releasing something that we have to heal and healing ourselves at the same time. I am also wondering: “Am I healing or just adapting? Can I accept this process as my healing time?” But the way of expression is always coming out in different ways because the intentionality—from beginning the preparation of the ritual to finalizing it on the site—is holding my work.

I feel that it is very important, as well as the beauty of how all the things are changing constantly; nothing remains the same. Sometimes we want to fix ourselves, but there may be no need to fix because every day is different. The way we understand the concept of time in our life is related to others, our society, the land, and the planet. I feel like this is very important to communicate.

SJ: Now is a good moment to speak more about Jeju Island, which you brought up earlier. You are originally from Jeju Island, correct? Is this where you gained learning of your traditional approach and training in some of your current practices, which relates to singing, drumming, and engaging with rituals?

Also, to continue speaking about healing, your project on Jeju Island is also about trying to resolve some other forms of man-made dramas, catastrophes, or destructions. It can be an opportunity to mention some of these events and reassess how important is the relationship between your performative work and the site that inspired it.

DL: One thing first, the drumming and singing that I learned are in fact both on the mainland and Jeju Island. In fact, I studied Korean traditional music and dance more on the mainland. Korean music and dance are deeply rooted in Shamanism (Indigenous practice). Going into Shamanism, people have the choice to focus on their technique or spirituality. I went into spirituality, and that is where I learned all the drum and dance techniques. But because of my interest in spirituality, I also started digging into my hometown, Jeju Island. With my identity, how can I deliver myself from my ancestors' practice to modern times? How can I respect the traditional form, learn the functionality of the ritual, and create new rituals with people from any countries?

So, I have developed a different way, which is based on learning the traditional practice and opening it up to new methods, since we are now living in diaspora. But the foundation and the functionality are not lost; they are very important for me. The intention of the ritual—knowing what I am doing—is fundamental, because that is all about the ritual. If people are not doing rituals, there is no reason, nor any purpose being activated. We always have a reason why we are doing rituals. My work could have developed in a natural manner that fits into rituals, or maybe I was trained before, in past lives. But when I was born, I knew that this was my path, so that is how much comfortable I feel doing this performance artwork in a ritualistic way.

I worked on my *Jeju Island Project*, from 2018 to 2020, with a local artist and scholar—Jino Han—based in Jeju Island. This project was about how art can be the reporter and help address what is happening on the land. We created several connections among past, present, and future. We connected with the past through mythology and local history. For the present, I connected with the current happenings on the land: the military destruction of Jeju Island, as well as tourism, which is operated by capitalists... How are those impacting the land, and what does that mean for the future of the island? What are we losing here? This was the real intention why we did a performative ritual together.

Everything in the work that I show is ritual-based, and it is very performative. This is also who I am, an artist. When I am doing rituals, I also want to show and express who I am. So, working in Jeju Island was like choosing the right site for me: the suitable land with the story of the goddess. Jeju Island's mythology is unbelievably rich; I am so pleased that we have so many rich stories that are inscribed into rituals, which we can still talk about today. It is all connected!

On that site, the story of the goddess is that she gave up on humanity because people were asking too much from her. So, she said: "Oh my Goodness children, you are so greedy that you don't know the preciousness of your homeland, looking out more and more, I am leaving now until you see the value of your own land and yourself." So, she disappeared. This was her story but, with the ritual, we wanted her to return. We need her; actually, we really need her. Our demand was: "The land is dying; your body is dying; we really need your spirit back on the land." This was the intention.

Also, we are doing this on the specific site that carries a well-known history of Jeju Island: the massacre of April 3rd, 1948. It was a huge massacre that happened because of Communism. That was when the American military involvement in Korea was massive. The American government sent the order: "Let them kill each other." They [The Americans] did not come to do anything; they just ordered it. That was the time when America also felt beaten by Communism and they were very sensitive about it. Korea was split into these two ideologies—in the North and the South parts of Korea—; and, as a result, conflicts began. By then, after the liberation from the colonization of Japan, the Korean and American governments were very tightly working together, and they stated that the uprising of Jeju Island's people was against the government order. They said: "Whoever is against the government order is Communist." That is when so many people died. 1948, it is not that far ago, it is recent; it is recent history!

I went to those sites on Jeju Island, where a lot of people got killed. This is included [in the final project] so that anyone can see them. We included the mythology. We included the history of the site. I also went to the site where today, the military wants to build an air base, but for that they must destroy the land, cut the trees down, and probably have to crunch this huge grand-mother rock. So, we brought local youth to this site, and we discussed: "Does this land need to be destroyed?" The youth were a representation of

the future... How can we give them the charge of what is happening to this land? This was the intention for doing the ritual on the land; each side had a story to tell.

So, my body is just there, standing; I am not doing anything. The people [participating or attending the ritual] must be curious about it: where is it? Why is it there? It is about creating connections that make people curious about the land. An essential part of the project concerns how the human body needs to connect with the land and the events on specific sites. The same demand applies here in America too. This was the kind of projects I did on Jeju Island with Jino Han. We are still working together; we are planning our next project in collaboration. It is an ongoing project for protecting the land.

SJ: That is what I was going to ask: do you consider your work in Jeju Island as an ongoing project?

DL: Yeah, I think I am going to do it until I die. I want to do this for my entire life...

SJ: Thank you for sharing all this. It gives a lot of dimensions to the discussion on how your work is inscribed with time and communicates different specific moments in time and space through different materializations and/or happenings. I think you are very modest when you say: "I'm not doing anything," because I want to remind you that, without your initiatives, your interest, and attention, those topics would have been forgotten. I mean, here, your role is significant and crucial.

Let me develop, I imagine that if you are just yourself, alone doing the project, nothing will happen. It must be a community coming together. But I also want to acknowledge that you are the very center and origin of those initiatives; they would not happen without you, right? That is also what I find particularly strong in your work, and what I am trying to bring in this interview: how you find ways to share and collaborate with different stories and experiences. Your personal experiences, your work with Jeju Island's people, its traditions and recent history, which as you said: "is not that far" but still traumatic, not only bring visibility to specific issues but also point out their role in negatively influencing people and/or affecting the land. I think it is significant and I appreciate this in your work.

Transitioning to discussing your work with the community, we should speak about *Puri Arts*, an organization you created.

DL: Yes. I think it is a great time to talk about *Puri Arts* that you generously introduced. I founded *Puri Arts* in 2004, two years after I came to the U.S. in 2002. I felt like I needed to do something for myself, so I chose the Korean word "*Puri*" (플리), which means "releasing" in English; releasing what suppresses the spirit. I felt so suppressed that I wanted to do something for myself as a ritual. That was the beginning, in 2004 and I remember, when I started, I was like: "Oh my God! I have so many dreams." So many women were coming to my dreams and asking: "Tell my story. Tell my story..." It was

like going into the Korean War, meeting these Korean women—who got killed or suffered from it—, and who wanted to talk about that. I had to do this performance ritual for the Korean War [*Puri Project 1* (2004–2005), at Korean Youth Cultural Center in Oakland, CA]. Then, after that, on and on and on, women who suffered sexual slavery came to me, and I had to tell those stories [*Unblossomed* (2006), also at Eastside Cultural Center, Oakland]. All of my tales are oriented toward women. It is all about women and what happened to them. After I went through these stories of traumas, I went even further back to the deities—especially the women who became deities—by connecting with stories from the mythical time and explaining how those women became deities, the figures.

Within *Puri Arts*, I expanded my solo work into collaborations with other artists. I did one solo project combining Korean and American history called *FLUX* [(2008), at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, in San Francisco, CA]. It was not about American history, but more specifically about when Americans were involved into Korean history. So that was the kind of piece in which I mixed speech and some spiritual practices. After that, I did *Mago* [2014], which is the poster behind me. During *Mago*, I also did a solo performance with some of the community members from Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, which little by little included Jeju Island and what happened there: the war and the massacre.

After I finished that project, I felt like my spirit mother was telling me to reach out to more people: “You need to work with the community.” I did not wait for the community to reach out to me; I reached out to them by myself. I went to this woman-oriented Asian community to do a project about our life, especially our immigrant life. This is also when I brought in the spirit of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

That was the beginning of *Puri Arts*, the project with the collective women's team and the Korean drumming group. Also, I began teaching since I arrived in the U.S. in 2002. I am a cultural practitioner; I teach cultural knowledge and drumming to the Korean community. This group is now part of the ritual, so is one of the new groups I have also been working with, the youth Bhutanese Nepalese community. They are a refugee community and bringing them into a ritual allows to tell their stories, about how they came here [U.S.] as refugees.

Now, I have been working together with these communities for many years, over five years, since 2016. Working with a community is not a half-year or a one-year project. For me, it is like if the participants are becoming part of the family. It is about becoming a family. Therefore, developing this kind of projects takes a lot of time. One of the members of The Storytellers, the Bhutanese Youth Group, came to me and said: “Hey, Dohee, can you work with us?” This group was part of the Asian Refugees United and they wanted me to be part of their organization. Now, I am also working there as the Program Director of Art and Healing.

It is all about how I turn art into healing; it is all about the intention. So, I came up with a methodology to work with people. I am also developing a tool that people can use later. It is not ready yet, but I am working, testing myself. It combines Korean ritual forms and techniques with what I learned from Anna and Daria Halprin, who are from the Tamalpa Institute, where I received some of my training. Now, I am also teaching there. So, I am mixing these methodologies together, so that Eastern and Western practices come together, like who I am and where I am at. Also, I have been wondering how I can do this work and focus more heavily on social and environmental justice. That is why working with art is very important for me.

SJ: Yeah, I think that it is essential to mention. Then I think you already answered, but one of my questions about *Puri Arts* would be: when you approach those organizations, do you present your project as—let's say—spiritual and shamanic, or do you present it as artistic, or is it both?

DL: I think now that I approach these projects more as art projects. Today, more people know who I am than before, so they know what I do, and they want a ritual. It is not about my wish. This is my tool and what I do, and now people want to be part of it.

SJ: So, when you answered my question by saying: "I'm in charge of Art and Healing," I thought you are bringing those distinctive practices together so nicely and easily.

DL: Yeah.

SJ: I found it fascinating. To tell you why I am also asking this, it is because our traditional art world is maybe becoming more open to marginal, different, or new art approaches and practices, which I find increasingly spiritual. And I think bringing art and social justice, with healing and Shamanism, together make your work really engaging in that respect.

DL: You know Stéphanie, I want to say that before the ritual or Shamanism, I feel that art is my priority. Art really guides me to where I should be. That is why when I am doing a project, I say: "It's an art project, but we should also talk about the healing intention underneath." Healing is, for me, a kind of methodology that we need to activate. When I am doing a solo work, I am really bringing a lot of traditional colors and practices; however, when I work with the community, I do not bring out anything, just the functionality of the ritual.

SJ: And you let them bring their own material?

DL: Yes. So, now rituals can vary in colors depending on what people want to bring and what relates to their identity. But when I am working with my people [people from Korean descent], I bring out more from our cultural activities. It is different when I am working with other cultures: I introduce myself as a Korean descendant, explain that my

ancestors are from here and there, and speak about my practice, but I never impose anything on them. I just bring the functionality of the ritual and share my experience. In addition, I asked them: "What is your practice?" They do a lot of research too in order to find out who they are.

SJ: That is also when you turn the research into tools, tools of analysis and reflections on the participants' condition.

DL: Yeah.

SJ: It might be a good time to speak more about what you said: the spirits coming to you are usually women, and go deeper into gender. Your experience as a woman Asian artist in the U.S., as you already pointed out, was charged with pressure and difficulties. Could you develop a little more on these difficulties? Also, do you feel that the art world is becoming, or not, more welcoming to women artists?

DL: Yes, I felt really oppressed by this culture [U.S.] at first. As an immigrant, I experienced many obstacles living in this country. As a first-generation immigrant, I felt what others also had felt as first-generations, regardless of the different time periods they came. It does not matter when you arrive; immigration causes a lot of stress. The language—how am I going to communicate with the people?—was, for me, the most difficult part, believe it or not. The language was a huge impairment because I could not speak English fluently. At that moment, the language barrier often made me silent. Imagine your parents as first generations immigrants; how did they deal with the language, and how did it cause their loss of confidence and identity

Also, I felt that immigration was erasing my cultural identity, which is a tactic also found in white supremacist cultures. I went through what other first-generation immigrants went through. I am still dealing with it. But then little by little, I felt that I was finding myself. And well, this is who I am, and this is what I love, and this is how I want to express that. I am not perfect; I am not the person you are expecting me to become... There are so many standards, and I wanted to become that way. But also, at some point, I told myself: "Ugh, I really don't care about that!" If I am changing myself that way, then I am becoming a puppet...

There are a lot of mental processes involved, which are filled with emotions. I did many mental and emotional processing on who I needed to be. Now, I feel like art helped me a lot with this process. Rituals helped me a lot, believe it or not. Maybe that is why I am into this ritual practice; when I am doing it, I am releasing something so that I can continue coping with the hardships in my life. This is also how I can relate to the experience of first-generation immigrants and our parents' generation. That was very important for me to understand.

Then, the question is this for me: “Why is a woman doing this spiritual work?” I also want to talk about this, even if I feel like I do not know a lot. In Korean tradition, the leaders of spirituality and healing are mostly women. It is reasonable because this spiritual leader must look closely after nature, and especially the land. We call Earth, the land: Mother Earth. Right? That speaks for everything. Like in the beginning of whichever world, we want to revive and bring back the matriarchal system because that was how everything began. If we are going in this direction, to matriarchal energy, this wisdom can return, as can the understanding of the woman's body, and Mother Earth's body. I feel like, unconsciously, that is happening on earth in different countries. Nowadays, many women are standing up to do this spiritual work, which is also connected to activism.

SJ: Yeah, I agree with you on this. I think there is recent, but strong, interest by visual artists in engaging with healing. At the same time (and compared to earlier), art institutions around the world seem to follow that phenomenon and, along those lines, are better acknowledging women artists who have mostly developed these works historically. I have been using the term “Neo-Symbolism,” in several recent conversations, to speak about this phenomenon today, in contemporary art.

I know several artists in my surroundings, from Europe, Asia, and America—China Blue, Georgia Sagri, Moonching Wu, and others—, coming from very different cultural or artistic backgrounds, who are developing works related to our conversation, in my opinion. As visual artists, not only do they research traditional practices from their own culture—because they did exist in so many other contexts—, but they are also engaging in healing, assisting communities, and contributing to social and environmental justice. Many of their works also carry a posthumanist dimension, which I find fascinating. I also observed, as you pointed out, that they are all women.

Additionally, I came across a few recent publications on this topic, and there were also several exhibitions related to Shamanism and spiritualism. I just read this article entitled, “Communist Witches and Cyborg Magic: the Emergence of Queer, Feminist, Esoteric Futurism,” by Amy Hale (in *Burlington Magazine*, June 2022), on contemporary art and current exhibitions related to this topic. Another example would be the recent christening and institutional attention on Hilma af Klint, with her touring retrospective initiated by The Guggenheim Museum in New York (2018–19) circulating worldwide. In the early 1900s, Af Klint developed in Sweden an art practice called spiritualism and created series of symbolic and abstract paintings under the guidance of spirits. She initiated these works years before Vassily Kandinsky came up with his so called “first abstract painting.” Until recently, works by women artists engaging in spirituality and wisdom had been overlooked. However, there are quite a lot of exciting historical works to promote; think of Georgina Houghton who in England, created similar works, but in the mid-19th century!

Today, we start to be aware that there were historical groups of women artists practitioners with strong connections to the spiritual world. I am appreciative that contemporary artists continue doing this work today, and that finally there would be more attention given to their practice.

Conclusively, my last question relates to what you said in a previous interview, that you never thought you could have developed *Puri Arts* in Korea. Can you say a little more about this, and about your upcoming projects bringing you back to Korea?

DL: Before we end, I want to talk again about the notion of the woman's body that I mentioned earlier. I wish to correct myself—the feminine body does not mean man or woman. It is not about gender because both genders have two energies in them. What we need is more feminine energy, more matriarchal energy, that motherly kind of energy. I also want to emphasize that the work I have been developing is really about the body. We do everything through our bodies, so our bodily experience is more essential than our thinking process. My intention is to make sure the body is fully experienced. The emotional body and mental body are expressed through the body, which must be experienced physically. I want to emphasize that.

About *Puri Arts* in Korea. Yes, I am not ready to return to Korea yet, but as a *Puri* artist, I already work with the people of Jeju Island. There, I am doing a lot of performances and workshops with educational components. I am now teaching in Korea too; I am teaching at the Tamalpa Institute in Korea, as well as performing there too.

Then I am developing another project, which is more focused on the colonization of the body as land. I am developing it with a community, and this is a program that I want to bring to Korea someday. I am making my methodology more robust and transparent to share it anywhere. I want to open my practice to places where people feel displaced but want to belong somewhere. This is where I want to bring my work.

SJ: Thank you. What a journey! I think we covered a lot: discussing the themes and intentions embedded in your work, the development and evolution of your practice methods, and your past, ongoing, and future projects.

I believe in persistence; the persistence I see in your work is meaningful because it permits other different materializations and visualizations to form. Now, considering that your work functions as a process, I am looking forward to witnessing how it continues expanding beyond visuality into healing.

It was fascinating to talk with you. Thanks for being so generous sharing your thoughts. I feel like we could do this for hours.