

BAE YOUNG-WHAN

So Near So Far | March 21 - May 4, 2024

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

BB&M is pleased to present *So Near So Far*, a solo exhibition of new work by Bae Young-whan. Recognized for a practice that melds a keen awareness of vernacular beauty to neo-conceptual strategies, Bae is a key figure in the influential, albeit loosely defined, post-*minjung* generation of Korean artists who emerged in the late 1990s grappling with the legacies of Korea's turbulent modernity. Often making use of humble, mundane elements (discarded material from construction sites, broken bottles, sentimental song lyrics), his art is attuned to the ephemeral surfaces of lived experience as well as the deeper structures of feeling that underlie Korean society.

The present exhibition is centered around wall works that elaborate on his long-standing preoccupation with language, in particular the demotic of popular music. Some of the artist's most recognized works from the late 1990s to early 2000s delved into the way sentimental Korean pop song lyrics from his youth were sublimated into a common poetry of resistance against an authoritarian society. Composed of abject materials like broken liquor bottles on beat-up wooden panels, they also spoke to a peculiarly Korean strain of self-destructive, self-romanticizing masculinity.

The works in *So Near So Far* expand the parameters of Bae's subject to more universally familiar songs that have attained an iconic status for a generation of (mostly) male devotees, like the artist himself, weaned on vinyl LPs. Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here," Neil Young's "Heart of Gold," and David Bowie's "Space Oddity" – first encountered as pirated contraband in the stalls of Cheonggyecheon, Seoul's traditional market for electronic goods, that the artist frequented in his youth – serve as a departure point for a series of works delineating the contours of his mind, via EEG readings taken as he performed the unmistakable opening notes on a guitar.

The result, rendered in 3-D reliefs assembled into abstract panels with expanses of translucent painted layers and gold-leafed crests and ridges, is aptly titled *Mindscales*. This term finds its correlative in *shimsang* (literally "an image in the mind"), a central concept in the tradition of Asian landscape painting that resonates with Bae's practice. As the artist has observed, it is "an interpretation of a scene shaped by your individual consciousness – quite a radical notion in what's usually thought of as a conservative genre."

Sustaining that ideal image of the world may be the central project of Bae's art, even as some of his work evinces a more visceral sense of loss and existential drift experienced by his generation. A counterpoint to the wall works, an installation in the main gallery brings together rough-hewn guitars on a bed of shattered bottles heaped on a black-mirrored platform. The guitars are built by the artist using intricately decorated wood veneer salvaged from abandoned cabinets and vanities in old neighborhoods emptied to make way for high-rise developments. There's also a turntable spinning a large, silent rock in place of an LP. Titled *Like the Beginning*, the installation is a poetic acknowledgment of the impossibility of recreating the perfect note, of making something broken whole again.

Yet it somehow makes sense that the only sound in the exhibition – which revolves around music as a generative system of ideas, symbols, and language – should be the wistful, faltering notes of the guitar chords played with a true amateur's ardor by the artist in a video that shows him hooked up to EEG sensors, his brainwave readouts blending with scenes of a mountain blanketed in freshly fallen snow.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Bae Young-whan's artistic practice encompasses sculpture, painting, drawing, and photography, as well as public projects that effect mediations in the society at large. Born in 1969 and sometimes identified with a generation of Korean artists grappling with the legacies of Minjung art—a politically charged genre that emerged amid the pro-democracy movement in the 1980s—he is more interested in devising a poetics of lived experience than in a program of politics.

Bae's work combines a keen awareness of vernacular beauty with neo-conceptual strategies. Often making use of humble, mundane elements—discarded wood from construction sites, broken bottles, sentimental song lyrics—his art is attuned to the ephemeral surfaces as well as the deeper structures of feeling that underlie Korean society. Academically trained in traditional Asian painting (BFA, Hongik University, Seoul), he also draws upon the conceptual tenets of that discipline to undertake a distinctly contemporary engagement with timeless questions surrounding the individual's relationship to nature, culture, and society in the collective Korean consciousness.

Bae Young-whan has held solo institutional exhibitions at Platform-L Contemporary Art Center, Seoul (2016); PLATEAU, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul (2012); and Art Sonje Center, Seoul (2009), among others. His work has been included in group shows at the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2013); Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (2012); Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai (2010); and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2009). He has participated in various international biennials, including SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul (2014); Sharjah Biennial 11 (2013); 3rd Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (2011); 51st Venice Biennale (2005); and Gwangju Biennale (2000, 2002, 2004). In 2013, he was recognized by the Korean Ministry of Culture with a Grand Prize, Korean Public Design Award, for a project which set up modular, prefab libraries for children and senior citizens in rural and economically depressed communities. Bae's work is in a number of prominent public collections, including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; Art Sonje Center, Seoul; and Mori Art Museum, Tokyo.

EXHIBITION VIEW



Exhibition view, *So Near So Far*, BB&M, Seoul, 2024. Works by Bae Young-whan.

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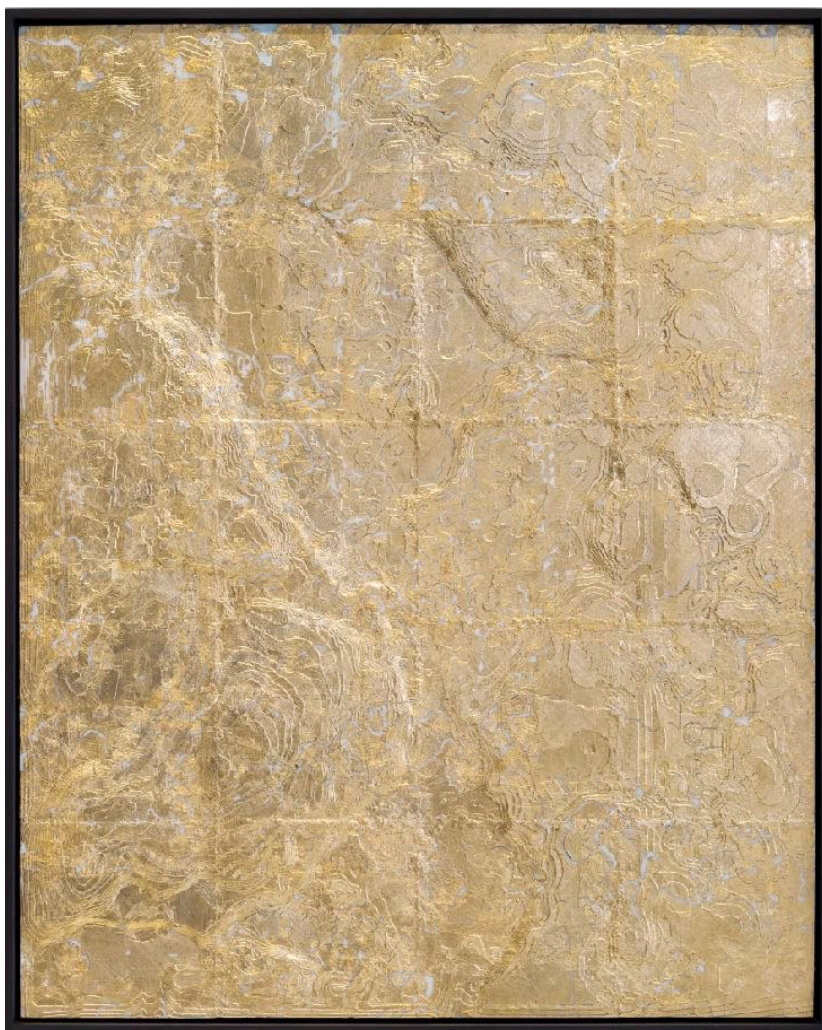
SELECTED WORKS



Mindscapes No. 2 (Hot ashes for trees), 2024

Artist's EEG data, 3D-printed relief, acrylic paint, gold metal leaf on panel, framed
117 x 92 cm (120 x 95 cm framed)

SELECTED WORKS



Mindscapes No. 14 (Keeps me searching), 2024

Artist's EEG data, 3D-printed relief, acrylic paint, gold metal leaf on panel, framed
91 x 73 cm (94 x 76 cm framed)

SELECTED WORKS



Mindscapes No. 13 (Cold comfort for change), 2024
Artist's EEG data, 3D-printed relief, acrylic paint, gold metal leaf on panel, framed
117 x 92 cm (120 x 95 cm framed)



ABOUT THE GALLERY

Beginning in 2009 as an art consultancy, BB&M has been instrumental in the ascendance of some of the most acclaimed contemporary Korean artists now on the international stage, including Lee Bul, Minouk Lim, Park Chan-kyong, and Bae Young-whan. BB&M's current iteration as an independent gallery is a joint effort between James B. Lee (Founding Principal) and Si Young Hur (Principal), who brings decades of experience in the commercial sector as Director at Gallery Hyundai and PKM Gallery and as Partner at Gallery Baton. In her previous posts, Ms. Hur was responsible for organizing and overseeing exhibitions of such artists as Liam Gillick, Olafur Eliasson, Thomas Struth, Robert Rauschenberg, and Yun Hyong-keun, a key figure in *Dansaekhwa*.

BB&M inaugurated its gallery space in October 2021 with a solo exhibition of Lee Bul, widely recognized as the leading Korean artist of her generation. Encompassing over 2,500 square feet (233 square meters) of exhibition space over two levels, including a double-height space with a 17.5-foot (5.4 meters) ceiling, BB&M is located in the culturally storied district of Seongbuk-dong, in the vicinity of Gansong Art Museum, established in 1938 as the first private art museum in Korea.

In addition to Lee Bul, the gallery's roster includes such prominent, critically important Korean figures as Minouk Lim, Bae Young-whan, Heecheon Kim, Jeongwu Woo, Sikyung Sung, and Young-jun Tak, working across a range of genres and shaping contemporary Korean art in an international context. The gallery also represents younger international artists rising in recognition and spanning different visual cultures, among them Alex Dodge and Miko Veldkamp.

From the outset BB&M has also sought to introduce curatorial perspectives from outside the commercial sector to ensure its program is intellectually expansive, inviting, for instance, Dan Cameron, the former New Museum curator, to organize an exhibition. These efforts reflect the gallery's long-term mission of building an exhibition program that engages both critically and aesthetically with contemporary visual ideas.

ABOUT THE PRINCIPALS

James B. Lee, Founding Principal, brings decades of varied experience in the art world, as a writer for such international magazines as *ARTnews* (New York), *Flash Art International* (Milan), and *Art AsiaPacific* (Hong Kong); in institutions, as the Head of Exhibitions at Art Sonje Center, Seoul, and the Director of Exhibitions at the Gwangju Biennale Foundation; and in the commercial sector as Partner at PKM Gallery, Seoul. Mr. Lee was trained in finance at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, before earning a master's in writing from Columbia University, New York.

Si Young Hur, Principal, earned a BFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA from Hong Ik University, Seoul, where she studied with major figures in the *Dansaekhwa* movement, notably Park Seo-bo. Ms. Hur went on to study art management at ICART, Paris, and embarked on a career in the commercial art world, first working at a Paris gallery that exhibited Lee Ufan. Upon returning to Seoul, she served as Director at Gallery Hyundai and subsequently at PKM Gallery.