

The 6-channel sound installation *Zepheth, whale oil from the Hanging Gardens to you, Shell 3 to 1*, exhibited in Venice is a series of her 2 previous works. Such 'variation' is indeed, Kim's primary means of expression. Based on historical materials from her long term research, she weaves texts and sound as the warp and woof. The societies of Korea and Kuwait dealing with oil and construction, the symbols of industrialization and modernization, are dialectically developed into a polyphony music theater. / Hyejin Moon

# Polyphonic Texture of Sound Montage



"Zepheth, Whale oil from the Hanging Gardens to you, Shell  
The crisis is rolling in the desert, with major water,  
the oil crises of company, blackishing pitch is bitumen,  
Pitch itchy qualqual, good. Babylon's rise up.  
Covered CREEK! Qualqual, several petroleum need be solved  
Coming to take hold SPRING"

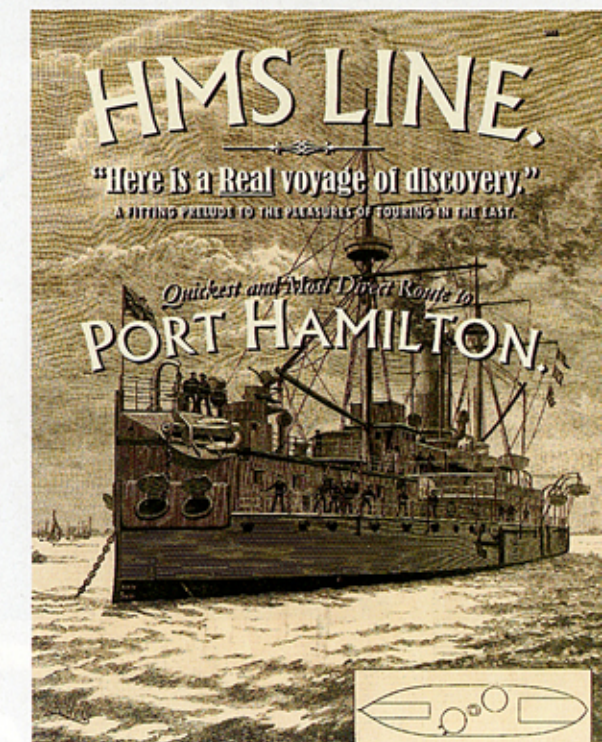
## Floating Language and Sound

The libretto above, which seems like a Surrealist poem applied *cadavre exquis*<sup>1)</sup>, deconstructs and reconstructs the artist's original text, based on the synchronic and diachronic history of petroleum at large, by employing a computer algorithm. The deconstructive title, *Zepheth, Whale oil from the Hanging Gardens to you, Shell*, the origin of the *Zepheth*<sup>2)</sup> series which started with a voice performance at Seoul Museum of Art in 2014 and lasted four more versions, is a creation not by a human being but by *deux ex machina* ("god from the machine"). This algorithm, which applies the syntactic and semantic structure of Korean language in reverse, breaks a sentence into five morphemes, categorizes them by semantic properties, and then builds corpora. In this way, the segmented words are recombined into a new sentence in accordance with several rules<sup>3)</sup>.

When randomness increases as it does in chaos theory, the original context vanishes and a new text of unfamiliar meanings appears. The libretto A written by the artist meets the score produced by the algorithm, and the libretto B produced by the algorithm meets the other score written by the artist; each combination of the two results in the two voice performances. In this procedure, the signified from the original text are destroyed and the signifier such as a word and sound are floating as images. Throughout much of her works, as a strategy to create new meanings, Kim Ayoung takes a riff and either loosens the existing combinations of language and sound, or overlaps multiple texts and sound. Language, image, pause between sounds, and a new possibility emerged from gaps are indeed the source that fascinates the artist incessantly.

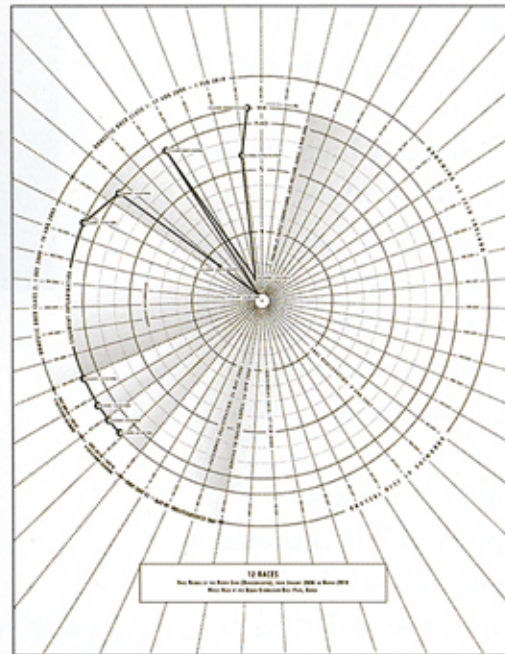
## A Chorus of the Variations on the Zepheth Series

*Zepheth, Whale Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You, Shell 3*, the 6-channel sound installation submitted to the main exhibition of the Venice Biennale 2015 is the third work of the *Zepheth* series, numbered in sequence under the same title. While the first performance, premiered at Seoul Museum of Art, was an experiment on syntactic rules such as a way of writing a script, the relationship between language and sound, and articulation and segments, the second performance in Mullae Art Village was a form of musical drama, emphasizing the semantic aspect of the multilayered narrative and the contents. In *Zepheth 3*, the narrative and the musical drama coexist with the words and music deviated from the orbit of a language and a melody. In other words, the outcomes of *Zepheth 1*, the libretto A (by the artist) and B (by the algorithm) are interpolated into the form of musical drama *Zepheth2*. This way, in *Zepheth 3*, a new narrative structure is generated by intersecting the movement of petroleum as capital, the labor export of Korean construction companies to the Middle East in 1980s, and Gulf War on one hand, the text and sound of the fragmented mechanism intrude into the narratives on the other hand. The



Above: *Zepheth, whale oil from the Hanging Gardens to you, Shell 1*, 2014  
Below: *HMS Line*, Digital Print 65x50cm 2011

Page on the left  
Kim leaving her Studio for Venice, image captured at the last minute.  
Photo by Kwon Hyun-Jung



#6. 1930s. 쿠웨이트, 바이올렛 덕슨, 동네꼬마 합창

Englishman with a hat on your head,  
we hope you die tonight in bed!

TRACK4

소리치듯

V1. 2, 7

Eng a head

V3. 4, 5, 6

Eng - fish-man with a hat on your head we hope

interference in the structure of language also occurs in the sentence unit; for instance, a sentence “a country like a man with huge lungs but a tiny windpipe” is broken into two phrases: “a country like a man” and “i huge uns u a inyidipe.” The latter phrase “i huge uns u ainyidipe” arranged in an arbitrary order, is a consequence of which a phrase “with huge lungs but a tiny windpipe” passes through the algorithm.

When it comes to the methodology of the *Zepheth* series, the mode of *Zepheth 3*, which attempts to integrate the syntactic experiment of the first and the semantic experiment of the second, represents overall characteristics of Kim Ayoung’s works. The artist develops the works in consecutive order with the different interests in the form of the series. The method of the artist, which reenters the shortcomings of a previous work or the new interests after thorough inquiry, is not only sincere in the sense that a motive to transcend from one work to the other is exemplary, but also subversive in the sense that the aspects of the experiment extend beyond the boundaries of a certain genre and category. The artist utilized the third-dimensional photomontage in the early works by reason of its possibilities to generate the different shades of meanings unlike the second-dimensional photography. By the same token, the transition from photomontage to visual images is caused by a realization of the difficulty of the visualization of imagery. For instance, the two visual image works with the same subject matter *Busan, Every North Star*, 2010 and *Please Return to Busan*, 2012 demonstrate the complementary and dialectic development process. While *Every North Star* focused on the texture of the narrative structure, *Please Return to Busan*

Right: *51 Months and 12 Races*, digital print, 2011  
Counter-clockwise from the top left: Research material for *Zepheth* series

Page on the right  
Above: A Map for *Zepheth*, *Whale Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You*, *Shell 1* and *Deus ex Machina*, digital print, 2014  
Below: *Zepheth*, *Whale Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You*, *Shell 1*, a voice Performance by 12 People, 2014

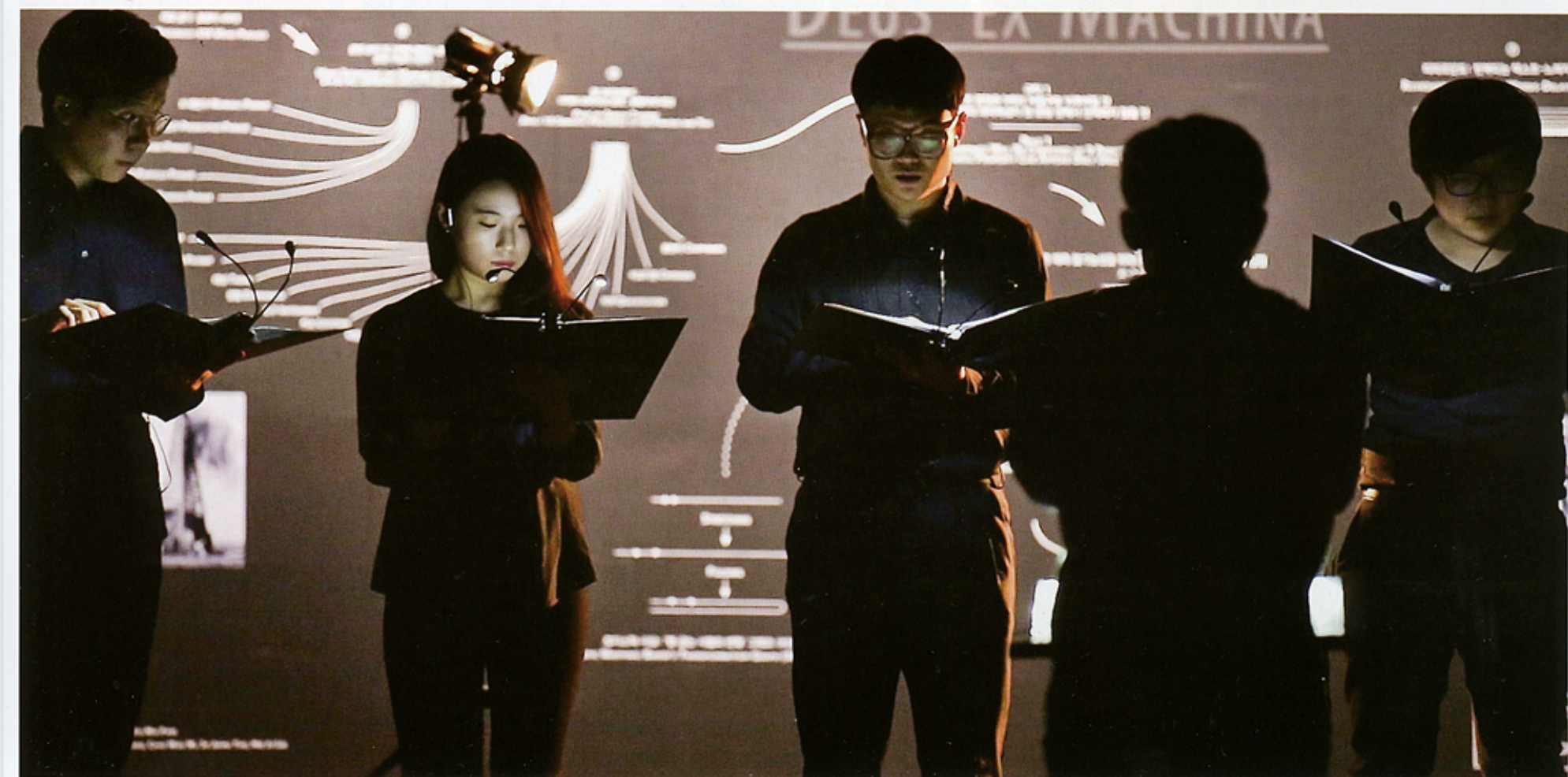
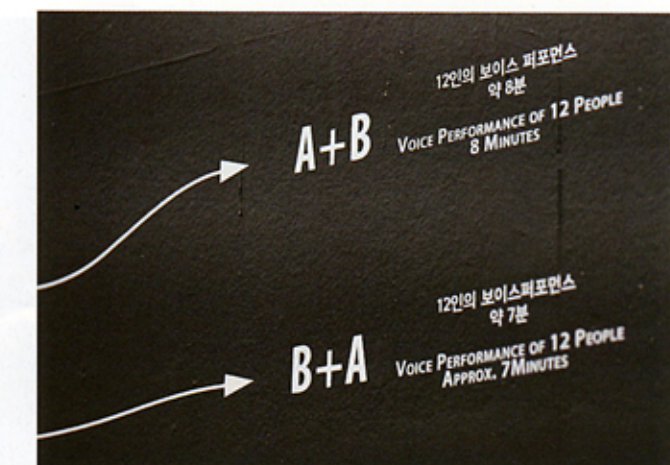
paid attention to image and its representational capacity that was overlooked in a former work<sup>4)</sup>. In this respect, not only did *Zepheth 3* synthesize the two previous works, *Zepheth 1* and 2, but also serves as an omen of the imminent fourth work (the image work in a form of sound film) of the *Zepheth* series; furthermore, *Zepheth 3* is an atavistic result of a form of the play *PH Express*, 2012 and 6-channel sound play *The Railway Traveler’s Handbook*, 2014.

Polyphonic Montage of Narrative, Sound, and Image

What makes the artworks of Kim Ayoung so difficult to grasp at a glance is that the work is a form of polyphony in that each independent narrative, sound, and image are multilayered and operate simultaneously. Indeed, the term, ‘montage’ encapsulates the world of her art works. In this regard, Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein’s viewpoint on the method of montage seems to be applicable to the works of Kim Ayoung in that different independent elements in the juxtaposition form a new synthesis through the impact while maintaining the uniqueness of each of the elements. According to the attributes of the sound installation/drama, the counterpoint to the narrative and sound is a conspicuous feature in *Zepheth 3*. The framework of the project comprising 14 chapters is akin to a play script to experiment on the narrative structure. The artist, dealt with the colonial history and modernity in previous works, assorts and integrates universal and local history and macro history and micro history effectively. Korean workers, represented by the artist’s father, those who sent in the Middle East in 1980s and their life, the landscape of modern Kuwait, pearling divers in 1930s, and the petroleum probe during the period of modernization of the late Park regime are intercrossed fragmentarily. Evanescently appeared and disappeared narratives from the different space

and time are intermittently bonded while maintaining their own context; here, the joint exposed between the narratives breaks the traditional practice of the narrative integrity.

The techniques of the author is identical with the one before in terms of creating the hybrid space where existence and nonexistence, truth and fiction, and the past and the present are intermingled by processing various materials such as advertisements, newspaper articles, archive videos, and oral history and so on. What a new salient point in the *Zepheth* series is the text format. In other words, *Zepheth 3* summons a variety of narrative as seen



Kim Ayoung / Born 1979, Seoul  
 2010 MFA Fine Art, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London /  
 2007 BA Photography, London College of Communication, London  
 (Honours) / 2002 BA Graphic Design, Kookmin University, Seoul /  
 Selected Solo Exhibitions: 2014 *The Railway Traveller's Handbook*,  
 Culture Station Seoul 284, Seoul ; 2012 *PH Express*, Kunsterhaus  
 Bethanien, Berlin ; 2010 *Minima Memoria*, Street Level, Glasgow  
 / Selected Group Exhibitions: 2014 Malfuction Library, Seoul  
 Museum of Art ; 2012 *Art Spectrum*, Lecum Samsung Museum  
 of Art, Seoul / Awards: 2010 The British Institution Award, Royal  
 Academy of Arts, UK ; 2008 2nd Prize, 30th Joong-Ang Fine Arts  
 Prize, Korea.

*Please Return to Busan Port*, 3-channel video, 5min, 2012

Page on the right  
 Top: *PH Express*, two-channel video, 31 min, 2011  
 Bottom: *PH Express: Journal of Maritime Adventure and  
 International Dispute about Port Hamilton*, free journal,  
 27.2x38cm, 12 pages, 10,000 copies, 2012

in the dramaturgy experiment. The libretto A and B from the  
 previous works is a form of poetry and recollection of employee's  
 wife Violet Dickson is a monologue, a verbal discourse. The lines  
 of a Korean worker Mr. Kim are the epistolary. In addition to that,  
 a diplomatic official congratulatory speech, the conversations of oil  
 experts, and a list of buildings constructed by Korean companies  
 are added. The texts, employing varying methods each chapter,  
 form a heterogeneous collage per se, and the overlapped spaces  
 ('inbetweenness') between one chapter and another intensify the  
 confusion.

Between a Talk and a Song

When the play is staged, a strand of polyphony woven in the texts is  
 amplified. A fixed text as one meaning become a speech as having a  
 voice and a dead language begins to take on vitality. Timbre, pitch,

the length of a note, tempo, intonation, and  
 the number (solo vs. chorus) enable the  
 possibilities of meaning to be extended  
 to infinity. Particularly, when a discourse  
 becomes a song by gaining a melody, its  
 richness doubles. How the form as a voice  
 maximizes the content of the text is key  
 question to bear in mind when facing  
 Kim Ayoung's works. All dialogues and  
 the chorus of *Zepheth 3* are assigned a  
 delicate tone and nuance. An advertising  
 of air conditioner in Kuwait in the 1950s  
 delivers a instable and excited boom of  
 development with exaggerated advertising  
 tone, the cross edited narrative of Kuwait  
 in 1938 and Pohang in 1975 get the rhythm  
 according to the differential tone of chorus  
 quickly changed. Because of lack of visual  
 images and intricately crossed multiple  
 narratives, the changes and differences in  
 voice is the only way to convey the situation  
 and atmosphere. While news, reports,  
 and contract details as official content  
 are articulated in such dry and neat way,  
 a personal retrospective or a letter is in  
 affectionate tone. Sometimes with humming,  
 with opera style, or with a narration,  
 vocalization that differed according to  
 situations leaves hint behind, expresses the



emotion, and also leave a quaint discomfort.

The correspondence between the form and the content, the distinguishing  
 features of the work is also reflected in the detailed expression of the lines in  
 dialogue, as well as the basic structure of each chapter. Each chapter of *Zepheth  
 3* are classified in a particular year such as the 1979 oil crisis, the 1991 Gulf  
 War, and 1938 the Burgan oil field discovery, and oil prices and oil production  
 for the year become the determinant of the pace and tone of the voice to sing  
 that chapter. This complimentary dialogue between the content and format as  
 'call and response' features commonly found in the artist's other works and this  
 might be the most remarkable virtues in terms of seeking the optimal form to  
 correspond to the content. 3-channel visual image *Please Return to Busan* is a  
 good example of which the form helps through the content. The fugacity of the  
 advancement what sports nationalism aims for and the intangible ambiguity of  
 the historicization are represented by archive footage being played backwards.  
 This backward pairs up the forward in the third channel chasing a boy, the  
 answer to<sup>3)</sup> a sprinting boy is in the first channel repeating the smuggling scene  
 insipidly. In a form of the sound play, *The Railway Traveller's Handbook* also  
 embodies the theme effectively by utilizing the synesthetic channels. The vision  
 of railway of the power of modernization is engraved on the bodies of the 21st  
 century audiences effectively with soundscapes such as the noise of trains, the  
 effect of light passing through a tunnel, and announcements.

A voice passed through the body shares and fills space and time with  
 discourse and songs. The moment thousand-folded narratives unfold  
 simultaneously with polyphonic chorus of voices; language and music become  
 one body. *Zepheth 3*, combining musical syntax with the language structure,  
 is formal experiment linking word, sound, and image. On this stage, *Zepheth*,  
 whale oil, and the hanging gardens circulate and the meaning of the third rises.

- 1) *Cadavre exquis* is a method of surrealism by which each collaborator adds to words or images in sequence without knowing what the previous person contributed. The name itself is derived from a phrase, "Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau" ["The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine"].
- 2) *Zepheth* is Hebrew, which means pitch or bitumen—a viscous substance produced by plants or formed from petroleum.
- 3) For instance, one sentence consists of nine phrases/clauses, and identical semantic properties should not be repeated in the same sentence.
- 4) For more detailed information about the works, please refer to the following. Hyun Soyung. *The Montage of Reconstruction of the Incident, Misoolsegye* (Art World), March (2013): p 57-61.
- 5) Kim Ayoung, Artist Statement, *Please Return to Busan*. 2012.

