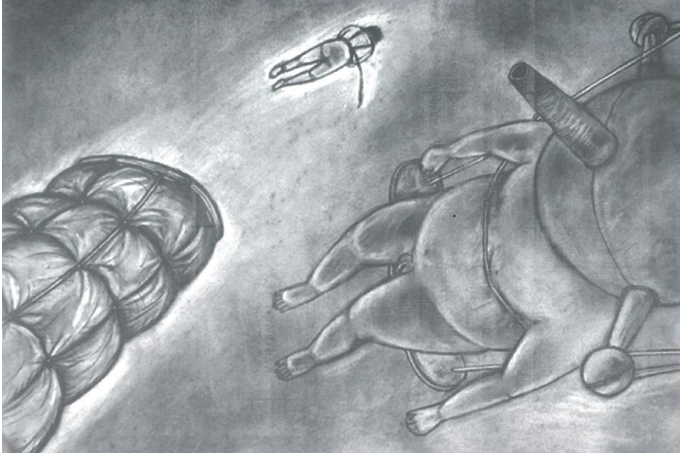




# PROFILES



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Tackling Taboos

**AGUNG KURNIAWAN**

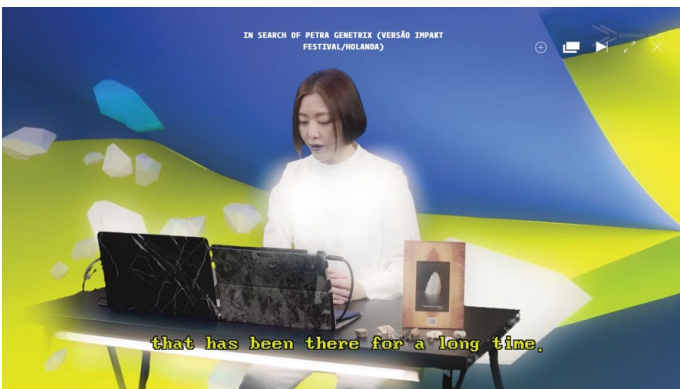
BY KERSTIN WINKING

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Poetic Resistance

**ABDULLAH M. I. SYED**

BY SUSAN ACRET



40

The Seismogenic Zone

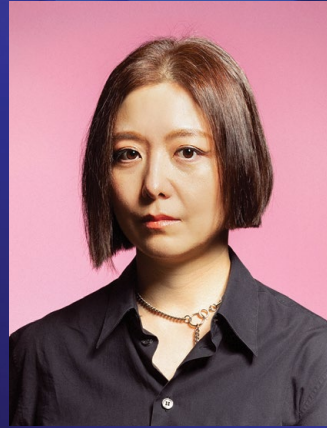
**AYOUNG KIM**

BY OPHELIA LAI

# The Seismogenic Zone

다섯 바다  
Pre assessment

Notice of Non-Recognition



Portrait of AYOUNG KIM. Courtesy Seoul International Women's Film Festival.

- Operational Safety
- Situational Awareness
- Crisis Response
- Digital Awareness
- System Health Awareness
- Tactical Communication
- Backup Process



백업 프로세스

# AYOUNG KIM

BY OPHELIA LAI

An oxbow lake forms when a wide bend in a river gets cut off, leaving a crescent-shaped body of water. “I feel like we’re stuck there now, that deviated stream,” remarked Ayoung Kim when I asked how she was tackling the disruptions of Covid-19. “We’re living in a fragmented temporality,” detached from the continuous flow of time as we wait for a sense of normality to resume. The Seoul-based artist has a knack for geological analogies, which in Kim’s multimedia practice represent ways of understanding humanity’s place in time. What histories are embedded in the ground on which human civilizations were built? And how has the earth shaped the trajectories of our existence?

Kim has foregrounded this line of inquiry since *Zepheh, Whale Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You, Shell 1–3* (2014–15), her series of experimental musical performances centered on “how oil mediated modernity in the 20th century.” The artist had always been fascinated by the interrelations between modernity and the movement of people and resources, but this project was personal: Kim’s engineer father was among the wave of Korean workers dispatched to the Gulf countries in the 1970s and ‘80s during a construction boom afforded by oil wealth. “I was able to see my father only twice a year. He sent cards written in Arabic, and presents like Arabic fruits and dried dates. [Until that period] that kind of massive male migration didn’t happen in South Korea. This oil money became the basis of Korean development in the ‘90s. So it was meaningful to look at the macrocosm and microcosm of my life in modernity.”

The artist collaborated with composer Heera Kim to devise a scrambled choral performance using a custom algorithm, dissolving the artist’s research-based libretto about this history into barely discernible phrases and non-lexical vocalizations. The final iteration, shown at the main exhibition of the 56th Venice Biennale, “All the World’s Futures” (2015), culminated in a live choir performance and a six-channel sound installation featuring extracts spanning midcentury-style radio broadcasts about Kuwait to communiques on the 1991 Gulf War, punctuated by cacophonous fragments of song. An accompanying wall diagram included musical notation and archival materials, such as photographs of hotels and shopping malls built by Korean migrants, and Kuwaiti stamps from letters mailed by Kim’s father to his family. “My works are strongly script-based and can have too much information.

What I like most about the scattered sonic elements in my work is that they diffuse the link to text and disperse this meaning.”

Kim’s Venice invitation came just a few years after she obtained her MA from London’s Chelsea College of Arts (2010), but her path to fine art was meandering. “My first bachelor’s degree was in visual communication design [at Kookmin University, Seoul]. I worked as a motion graphic designer for a few years.” Seeking a more creative, autonomous career, Kim enrolled in a second BA in photography at the London College of Communication in 2005, and eventually realized that it was contemporary art she wanted to pursue.

Kim’s experience with motion graphics served her well in the production of her single-channel video *Porosity Valley, Portable Holes* (2017), commissioned for the 2017 Melbourne Festival and later exhibited at the 12th Gwangju Biennale (2018). The project marks a shift away from an archival approach toward speculative fiction, inspired by the artist’s love of the supergenre. The video’s central narrative follows the trials of Petra Genetrix—a mysterious being composed of modular blocks—as they navigate resettlement procedures after their home, Porosity Valley, is destroyed. Sequences of the 3D-rendered entity floating in an interview room with an immigration official are spliced with live footage of a hazmat-suited figure examining CG black portals in a forest and an absurd commercial in which a peppy blonde promotes migration services in front of a changing background of blue skies and multicolored shapes. Petra Genetrix was born out of a confluence of factors: the refugee crisis and Kim’s discovery during her research that Australia, which is notorious for its draconian border policies, sits on the fastest-moving continental tectonic plate. “Borders are so rigid and determined when people try to cross them, but if you think in terms of geological time, tectonic plates are always moving. At the beginning of the Earth, there was one continent, Pangaea, and then it fragmented and spread out. So borders are actually transient, always collapsing and shifting. World history is a history of migration, collision, and synthesis.” Kim envisioned Petra Genetrix as part mineral, part data particles—a shapeshifting protagonist both ancient and futuristic, facing a problem that parallels our present.

In 2019, as a Korea Artist Prize finalist, Kim presented *Portable Holes* and its sequel, *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters’ Plot* (2019), at Seoul’s National Museum of

Modern and Contemporary Art, where she transformed a gallery into a rocky, alien terrain. For *Tricksters’ Plot*, Kim invited three Yemeni humanitarian status holders in Korea to don robes and colorful masks shaped like a cresting wave, a striated rock, and a gray stone. The trio break Petra Genetrix out of a migrant holding facility and the modular entity returns to the godlike Mother Rock. Another displayed video featuring clips from the artist’s research trip in Mongolia, *Petrogenesis, Petra Genetrix* (2019), expounds on local lore about rocks. “One of the most important things I learned was that rocks are considered as living media. They were generated when the universe was formed, so they contain the history of all humans and the universe.”

*In Search of Petra Genetrix* (2020), commissioned by Utrecht’s IMPAKT Festival, fills in the enigma’s backstory. Due to Covid-19, the artist filmed herself against a green screen in her Seoul studio, then added galactic background effects. “I conjured many different entities with my voice [using a voice-transforming application] to explore the slippery and uncertain aspects of this strange character. Petra Genetrix can be seen as drifting data particles or minerals but they are myself as well, drifting through cities in my 30s. It was only very recently that I thought I could bring this out. The performance was my attempt at including myself in my practice—me but as a passenger, an undefinable thing—and it was so empowering.”

Kim also kept busy during the pandemic with a new video, *At the Surisol Underwater Lab* (2020), commissioned by the 2020 Busan Biennale and included in her 2021 online survey presented by Videobrasil. Also filmed with a green screen, the video follows a researcher—played again by a young South Korea-based immigrant—who investigates an outbreak of toxic spores at an undersea facility harvesting kelp for biofuel. The project hearkens to Kim’s earlier research on resource extraction, this time under the shadow of the climate crisis. She is currently researching another phenomenon happening underfoot: carbon capture and storage in places like the empty oil fields beneath the North Sea. “It’s a strange, vampiric idea—extracting oil, the blood of the earth, then injecting [the carbon dioxide emitted from burning the fuel] into empty oilfields. Imagine there is a major earthquake a million years in the future, and it all spills out. What will happen to civilization then?”