

On the white, snow-like surface, shapes resembling letters and traces left by something passing over the surface overlap atop each other. Between these traces, there are objects here and there that look like either small hills or pottery turned upside down. The scene is reminiscent of the complex roads and the mountains and hills around the city as they are seen from above. While at the same time, it looks as if someone walked around the snow field and made a playful sculpture. The objects existing in this quiet, bleached space do not directly refer to objects outside the work. The installation may read as “poetic” to some viewers or to others like a formalist work of art where these objects gain autonomous meanings in silence.

In fact, Hyeree’s work is based on her own experiences rather than any sort of poetic or formalist ideas. *Flour Hat (Floor)* is based on her paternal grandfather who worked at a flour manufacturing factory, her father who made hats, and herself. The numerous traces and objects occupying the floor cite specific references rather than arbitrary decisions. For example, on the same spot of the white flour surface, she traced out the name of her grandfather then covered it with flour, her father and covered it, and then herself and covered it, repeatedly cycling through each name. She also drew figures including stars, hats, and palm lines closely related to the personal experiences of her grandfather, father, and herself and covered them with flour. The tracings of her intimate family stories that accumulate and overlap on the white surface appear like a large *palimpsest*, the tracings and erasures visible simultaneously. In this space, the past is neither completely erased nor remaining fully intact. Rather, as time goes by, the past continues to affect future events while transforming itself in its interaction with future events. Without providing many clues or much explanation, there is an opacity to the past envisioned in Hyeree’s *palimpsest*, making itself highly illegible to viewers. The objects almost look like an old archetype of objects; even though they evoke the viewers’ interpretation, it is difficult for viewers to specify particular referents that the objects and traces represent. It can be said that these objects do not deliver any specific memories of Hyeree’s past. This raises a question: if the objects’ meaning is opaque, then why does she make and arrange these objects in such a specific manner? It seems that the objects and traces do not represent a certain past but question the ontological status of the past itself. And this question inevitably leads to another question: how do we “remember” things in the past, especially if the past is something that we have never experienced but only heard about?

In many artist’s works, the word “remembrance” is often associated with grand historical narratives. But before thinking about past events in relation to larger historical narratives, we might ask in a very fundamental sense, how do all past events exist in the present? All past events endlessly deteriorate while continuously lingering in the present. Certain past events do not necessarily claim any legitimate reason to be remembered nor do they hold historical importance within a “grand” history. The past envisioned in Hyeree’s work through the objects and traces is neither one of a precious collection preserved and curated in a museum, nor one of enlightening cultural heritage archived in a library for the future generation. Neither are her objects dead relics in an excavation site waiting for being discovered. Then what is the status of those objects? How do the objects function in her work?

In Hyeree’s previous performances, “objects” played no less of a crucial role than her body. An art critic described that in *LA-sung* (2016) “objects are both a tool to

help narrate a story and evidence of memories.”¹ In *Flour Hat (Floor)*, however, the status of objects radically changes. Objects do not merely exist as a tool to deliver specific events. In this performance work, the materiality, characteristics, origins, and socio-political conditions of the main objects, that is flour and hats, generate countless meanings that exceed a mere representation of her personal memories. For example, flour and hats can enable viewers to think of numerous pairs of concepts such as daily necessities vs. decorative items, post-Korean War economic conditions in the 1950s vs. South Korean economic conditions in the 1980s, food inside of a body vs. clothes covering the outside of a body, and so forth. Exploring the various tactile qualities of flour and hats and thinking about possible meanings generated from the two objects, Hyeree makes dough, sprinkles flour, writes on flour, and hides herself in a big hat during the performance. She is not a storyteller who utilizes objects as instruments for addressing her memories; she is an activator who creates a site in which various meanings of the objects and their pasts can emerge and interplay.

Differing from the somewhat ambiguous and opaque installation, the video seems to explicitly address the theme—the story of three generations—of *Flour Hat (Floor)*. Wearing a long hat together, braiding each other’s hair, and placing the long hat on their stomachs, the three actors infer a strong familial connection. They also create a star-shaped string figure together, and in the next sequence, stars appear in a person’s destiny on the palm lines of their hand. In the other scenes, which likely connote the stories of Hyeree’s grandfather and father, a person’s hands handle wet and soft flour dough, and another person outside hides her body under a big, dry, and thin hat-like object. Paralleling the two objects with each other explicitly reveals their contrasting tactility. Another person’s hands make noodles and braid them as if the noodles are hair. The motif of the line repeats, as hair, noodles, and string, while the various shapes of a star continuously appear. Even though the video follows a relatively clear narrative and theme, it is written in a folkloric style with a universal and archetypal quality, rather than demonstrating/illustrating concrete details from her family’s stories. Watching the video almost feels like reading an old folktale transferred from generation to generation in one’s region. It seems that Hyeree wants to refer to her family’s history, but at the same time she does not want her story to be confined in the realm of the “personal” or “particular.” What is seen in her work is somewhat contradicting impulses: impulses of narrating the particular and the universal. To what extent can her story be particular, and to what extent can it be universal? To what extent can it be personal, and to what extent can it be familiar for others? Can a “personal narrative” ever really exist? *Flour Hat (Floor)*, covered by, overlapped with, and made of white flour, embodies an ambivalent and yet porous space with multiple entrances. Now it unfolds itself waiting for other stories to emerge.

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¹ Haeju Kim, “What Fills Time: Object, Body, and Word,” <https://hyereero.com/files/hjkim2018.pdf>