

As If Nothing ... The Artistic Meandering of Sung Neung Kyung

Sung Neung Kyung's daily practice of art has escaped critical notice, yet he has been active for much longer and his influence is felt more widely than many realize. Sung's conceptual actions, documented through photographs and performance artifacts, reflect his decades-long interest in everyday moments of exchange between people in a social context. He seeks out "something that is not yet art," the daily action that "seems to be nothing" as raw material for his artistic practice. These small gestures create a "mosquito noise" by activating everyday elements of behavior into a resonant, politically charged buzz.

Sung wrote in 2008, "Some examples include reading a newspaper, cutting, counting money, stretching, eating candy (or cola, cake, or rice cakes), flossing teeth, jump-roping, sharing aphorisms, reading head copy from commercials and film, spinning the Hula-Hoops, lifting dumbbells, shooting ping-pong balls with a rubber slingshot, dragging a suitcase, applying baby oil, scratching, fanning, changing clothes, taking Polaroids, peeing, drinking, reading English newspaper, applying shaving cream, masturbating, reading poetry, performing handstands, etc. These are the fragments of oblivion excavated from everyday life." The exhibition *As If Nothing... The Artistic Meandering of Sung Neung Kyung* reflects the artist's ongoing interest in daily actions that become iconic when isolated within the context of the art work.

This is the artist's first solo exhibition with a commercial gallery. In 2023–24 he will participate in the group exhibition *Experimental Art in South Korea 1960s-1970s* organized by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, which will travel to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. Breakthrough works from 1976 included in *As If Nothing... The Artistic Meandering of Sung Neung Kyung* include *Smoking*, *Hand*, and *Contraction and Expansion*. Together these works establish the artist's set of terms. In *Smoking*, Sung arcs his body farther and farther backwards, smoking a cigarette in a single, long drag while he attempts to keep the column of burned ash intact atop the filter. The forms and endurance of the body and the cigarette are tested. Sung's body relates to the numerical terms of economics through *Hand*, in which gesture and quantity are equated. Sung's longstanding interest in print media as networked communication prior to the internet is reflected in his extensive body of performance work involving newspapers and state censorship. *Contraction and Expansion* extends these ideas to acknowledge the political stakes of Sung's work, which was created under the authoritarian rule of Park Chung-Hee. "Contraction is what the people in power wanted and expansion is what the people under control wanted," Sung

explains. In this work, as in his iconic Newspaper works, Sung silently comments on Korea's unfree condition and every individual's desire to expand.