



**LOOKING AT KOREAN SOCIETY THROUGH AN ARTIST'S EYES:
ART OF KELVIN KYUNGKUN PARK**

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Utilizing video as his primary media, Kelvin Kyungkun Park has perceptively traced the entanglements between Korea's industrialization process and various elements and ideas related to pre-modernity and modernity. In *Cheonggyecheon Medley* (2010), Park explored the small metal-working shops and factories clustered around Cheonggyecheon Stream in Seoul, as well as the people there. In *A Dream of Iron* (2014), he used iron as his context for two of the dominant symbols of Korea's industrialization: Posco (a steel-making company) and Hyundai Heavy Industries. Initially inspired by ancient drawings of whales from the Bangudae Petroglyphs, which he thought resembled modern-day ships, Park investigated these two massive industrial infrastructures, both of which are located near the Bangudae Petroglyphs. In addition to exploring his personal emotions, the film also contemplates the origins of Korean art and myth, and considers the role of cultural ideology in guiding the country's contemporary history. More recently, in *1.6 Sec* (2016), Park captured the incessant large-scale production of an enormous car factory through a dynamic play of light and air, heightened by the ubiquitous sound of robots. *Army: Portraits of 600,000* (2016) examines how Korean society has been affected by the army culture experienced by most Korean men, who are subject to mandatory military service. Notably, in all of these video works, Park represents the male-centric hegemony of Korean society with a distinct symbol: iron, cars, and the army. Park uses these elements to unveil the masculinity embedded in Korean culture, and to reveal the hidden side of his visual spectacle, in which such culture unfolds.

Park's most recent work again conveys an incisive critique of society but also demonstrates the evolution of his critical approach. It is a video and performance work entitled *Stairway to Heaven*, which most Koreans know as the title of a hugely popular TV drama from 2003, rather than as the title of the Led Zeppelin song. This work involved both pre-produced video and real-time filming of a performance at the opening of an exhibition, using the entire gallery as a backdrop. Like the drama, Park's piece involves four major characters, and he uses performance to explore and classify the ways in which people form relationships with one another. Emotions experienced during the process (e.g., passivity and excitement, hesitancy and eagerness, joy and regret) are expressed through the faces and gestures of four dancers as they meet, slide by, and depart from one another. Most memorably, a real-time video of the live performance was juxtaposed with a previously filmed video that was projected on the walls of the gallery, thereby disrupting the audience's perception of both time and space. Furthermore, two different videos were projected onto the walls: one video that had been previously shot, and one video that captured the "real-time" events happening in the gallery (including the projected video). Notably, Park used the exact same camera angle and set-up for both videos, thus creating a mirroring effect that made it impossible for the audience to perceive the subtle time gap between the two projected videos. The resulting work combines synchronization and asynchronization in the same



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space, so that the moment that has just happened, the moment that is now happening, and the moment that is about to happen are merged in the same video frame. By visually emphasizing the synchronization, Park actually evinces the asynchronous and segmented time that usually cannot be perceived with the naked eye. In his video, time is segmented, repeated, and mixed; continuity continually gives way to segmentation, and vice versa, as if a digital clock has been hung in the performance space. Park's visualization of the spatial and temporal gap enables Einstein's synchronization and asynchronization to coexist on the same screen. Such segmentation might also represent the dislocated and disintegrating relationship among the performers in the video.

Being set in a digitized time and space, this segmented relationship hovers around the past, present, and future, eventually eliminating the division between here and there, and between that moment and this moment. The critical approach of *Stairway to Heaven* echoes another of his earlier works, entitled *Spatio-temporal Machine* (2015). Both of these works demonstrate how Park, who started out as a documentary filmmaker, has begun to integrate elements of film and art, producing his unique works in parallel with these two fields.