

MOON KYUNGWON & JEON JOONHO

WITH URBAN-THINK TANK

News from Nowhere: Zurich Laboratory

29.08.–08.11.2015

MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho: *News from Nowhere*

The works of the Korean artists MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho address fundamental issues of contemporary civilization in light of political, socioeconomic, and ecological changes. The artists outline a post-apocalyptic world: humanity has been almost entirely wiped out by a natural disaster—whose causes remain vague—and is compelled to reconsider all previously held convictions, which may no longer be tenable. Community, morality, the purpose of life, social relations, art: the fictional society of survivors must envision and reassess the basic terms of human existence.

This "narrative" underlies the expansive exhibition project *News from Nowhere*. Initiated in 2012 for documenta (13) in Kassel, it is designed as a steadily evolving ensemble. After a presentation at the Sullivan Galleries of the School of the Art Institute in Chicago in 2013, the exhibition at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst is its third iteration. MOON & JEON's ongoing project establishes an interdisciplinary and participatory platform on which they discuss the urgent challenges of today and the future with experts in the fields of product and fashion design, music, architecture, and urban planning as well as medical and biotechnological research. Their two films *El Fin del Mundo* (2012) and *Avyakta* (2012) lay out the dystopian future scenario sketched above. They serve as the exhibition's framework plot and the point of departure for the artists' work with their local collaborators, with whom they explore questions such as: What is needed for human survival in an apocalyptic future? Which forms will community life and public space take? Which utopian forms of residential living can we imagine? And what is the role art will play in society? Collaborations with different partners have yielded specialized apparel, designs for new cityscapes and infrastructures, and visionary plans to secure water and food supplies. Previous collaborators have included the Japanese architect Toyo Ito, the Dutch architecture firm MVRDV, the Japanese design studio takram design engineering, and many others.

For each presentation, MOON & JEON adapt the project to reflect aspects of local society, politics, and history. In Zurich, the history of Switzerland's emergence as a nation and its unique democratic system inspired them to join their local cooperation partners, Urban-Think Tank (U-TT), the Future Cities Laboratory and the Chair of Information Architecture at ETH Zurich, in an inquiry into how community is constituted. U-TT, a leading incubator of ideas in urban design and sustainable and social architecture, revive the Greek agora as a place of assembly that helps establish a shared identity; the Future Cities Laboratory and the Chair of Information Architecture have compiled an anthology of images to grapple with the urban planning challenges of the future and, on a meta-level, with questions of collective knowledge and communal learning.

MOON & JEON's exhibition project *News from Nowhere* spotlights contemporary art's ability to facilitate intellectual exchange, debate, and critique. They believe that art can encourage people to take charge of their own future, build a sense of community, and promote social change, complementing the rationality that rules our everyday lives with a space that accommodates a more unrestrained and intuitive thinking. The collaborative process and the utopian horizon of reflection are essential to learning with and in art. At the heart of this vision, the agora marks a scene to be reclaimed: a place where productive engagement and dialogue in the medium of art are possible.

Curator:
Heike Munder,
(director, Migros Museum
für Gegenwartskunst)

A companion book including
contributions by Joe Jeong
Hwan, Heike Munder, Tobias
Peper, and Urban-Think Tank
(Alfredo Brillembourg,
Hubert Klumpner, Daniel
Schwartz) will be published
by JRP|Ringier.

MIGROS MUSEUM FÜR
GEGENWARTSKUNST
LIMMATSTRASSE 270
POSTFACH 1766
CH-8005 ZÜRICH

T +41 44 277 20 50
F +41 44 277 62 86
INFO@MIGROSMUSEUM.CH

MIGROSMUSEUM.CH
POURCENT-CULTUREL-MIGROS.CH

MOON & JEON: *El Fin del Mundo* and *Avyakta*

The film *El Fin del Mundo* (2012) and its sequel *Avyakta* (2012) form a poetic reflection on the quest to identify the core of human community and the foundations of society in a world confronted with a tremendous challenge: after a devastating natural disaster has inundated much of the earth's landmass and annihilated most of humanity, the survivors must make a fresh start.

El Fin del Mundo interweaves two plotlines. The first is set before the apocalypse and tells the story of an artist in his studio, who keeps working even as the world outside his door is literally drowning. The parallel second strand is the story of a woman living after the catastrophe. All social structures and national governments have collapsed, and a small number of corporations rule a new tightly controlled system of human society. In exchange for their labor, these corporations guarantee their "citizens" a safe existence in a dangerous and contaminated environment. One of them, known as Tempus, has sent the woman on a research expedition. Tasked with cataloguing the relics of the old world, she chances upon a locked door—the door to the artist's former studio. In a moment of epiphany, the encounter with the surviving remnants of his art leads her to rediscover the aesthetic sensibility she had suppressed and experience the beauty of creativity and its defiance of conventional categories. At that moment she breaks free of the dystopian system's rigid restraints.

The sequel, *Avyakta*, is set some time after *El Fin del Mundo*. Inspired by her encounter with the traces of the artist's work in the first film, the woman begins to make art. Many people admire what she does and follow her. The rigid hierarchies of their society begin to crumble. Tempus, the ruling corporation, feels threatened by this new form of ostensibly unproductive appreciation of and attention to the sensory qualities of the world and ostracizes the protagonist. To understand the source of the danger to the system she represents, it uses a time machine to send an agent into the past on a mission to study the roots of the phenomenon. Having arrived in the world before the apocalypse, he is overwhelmed by its vitality and richness. A "conversation" with a painting teaches him about the creative and intuitive aspects of art and the origin of his world—he, too, experiences an sublime moment of liberation from the restrictive conventions that defined his life.

MOON & JEON: Selected contributions by past collaborators

In addition to the two films by MOON & JEON, the exhibition presents the products of collaborations with various partners, some of which also appear as props in the films. The design researchers at takram design engineering in Japan have developed a kind of survival kit: MOON & JEON's scenario of massive global environmental degradation prompted them to envision a water purification system to be implanted in the human body. Modeled on physiological features of antelopes and Kangaroo rats, the implants regulate the body's water balance under conditions of extreme heat. The Korean fashion designer JUNG Kuho created avant-gardistic uniforms that combine silicone-based hexagonal shapes reminiscent of honeycomb cells with silk fabric that look like a second skin. The Dutch architects at MVRDV produced a computer-generated simulation of a future urban landscape composed of autonomous dome-like units that contain complete ecosystems; built to be movable, they can dock to each other in flexible cooperative arrangements. The Japanese architect Toyo Ito, meanwhile, probes the future social functions of architecture and its communitarian potential in a concrete scenario: for the city of Rikuzentakata on the east coast of Japan, which was obliterated by the 2011 Tsunami, he designed new types of public buildings presented in documentary footage.

Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich): *Mobile Agora*

For the exhibition *News from Nowhere: Zurich Laboratory*, MOON & JEON and their collaborators at Urban-Think Tank have asked themselves how community is constituted in urban settings as well as in the exhibition space and which challenges urban planners will face in the future. The central question concerns the role of public space, which we used to take for granted as the scene of encounters and the marketplace of ideas. With the progressive development of digital technology, such encounters have increasingly migrated into the virtual universe, which allows for greater individuality but also leaves people isolated. U-TT and the artists have developed a novel adaptation of the classical agora—the place of assembly as well as festive congregation in ancient Greece—in order to "reclaim" urban space. In their vision, the traditionally static agora has been mobilized; it can leave the exhibition space to roam the urban environment. It consists of a converted bicycle (*Mobile Agora (Mothership)*), which records images and sounds and plays them back, as well as movable stands for spectators (*Mobile Agora (Tribune)*). The ensemble is intended as an infrastructure enabling the residents of a city to talk to each other and share ideas.

Inspired by mobile street vendors' carts and the sort of simple architectural solutions one often finds in third-world slums, the bicycle is equipped with media appliances facilitating interaction in a range of formats: microphones, speakers, screens, projectors, recording devices, etc. allow the users to capture local impressions and broadcast them to the world via Internet. The mobile agora

MIGROS MUSEUM FÜR
GEGENWARTSKUNST
LIMMATSTRASSE 270
CH-8005 ZÜRICHT +41 44 277 20 50
F +41 44 277 62 86
INFO@MIGROMUSEUM.CHMIGROMUSEUM.CH
MIGROS-CULTURE-PERCENTAGE.CH

needs no external power supply; it is fast, flexible, and self-sufficient. In the *Mobile Agora*, U-TT and MOON & JEON have built a replica of an essential element of ancient democracy enhanced and brought up to date by mobility and multimedia capability. The *Mobile Agora (Mothership)* and *Mobile Agora (Tribune)* were designed by Urban-Think Tank (ETH) in collaboration with MOON & JEON. Lead designers were Diego Ceresuela, Alfredo Brillembourg & Hubert Klumpner.

The mobile agora transforms the museum into a site of interaction and communication by serving as a platform for lectures, discussions, and workshops, while also preserving traces of the urban environment of Zurich and other cities around the world. During a performance event held in the run-up to the exhibition, the sound artists and engineers Nadine Schütz, Zlatko Baracskai, and Marcel Aubert recorded Zurich's urban noises and combined them with music and sounds from all over the world to create a distinctive global urban composition. Working with footage from Zurich and other cities, the architect and filmmaker Daniel Schwartz has crafted an almost poetic visual portrait of public space. The city is brought into the museum—the walls of the exhibition space become permeable.

Future Cities Laboratory and Chair of Information Architecture (ETH Zurich): App *Teaching the Unknown*

Other partners in the exhibition and its engagement with questions of space are the Future Cities Laboratory and the Chair of Information Architecture at ETH Zurich, where scientists trained in a range of disciplines study ways to secure a sustainable future for cities. In 2014, they launched an online seminar ("Massive Open Online Course"), that is freely accessible at no charge; its purpose is to share and discuss the researchers' findings with interested students worldwide. More than 13,000 people from 160 nations enrolled in the first seminar. The format brings the scientists into contact with people in distant parts of the planet and allows them to learn about local situations and conditions in cities all over the world. An undefined crowd of anonymous participants becomes a source of in-depth information on blueprints for urban designs that offer maximum sustainability and resilience (defined as a city's ability to recover from natural or economic calamities).

The participants were encouraged to submit visual feedback from the environments in which they live. The resulting collection, which includes contributions by around 1,000 people from every part of the planet, offers unprecedented insight into the needs of cities. In the exhibition, it can be accessed using a custom-designed app that lets the user "play" the archive while becoming part of its operation: the game's challenge is to pinpoint the locations where the images originated as precisely as possible. The easier a picture is to place for the collective of players, the more specifically it would seem to capture a city and its distinguishing qualities. This lets the researchers extract iconic features that are representative of a given city, separating them from others that appear to be shared by many or all cities. Every time a user plays the game, the results are fed into a statistical database that continually grows over the duration of the exhibition. The Future Cities Laboratory and the Chair of Information Architecture's "Massive Open Online Courses" thus chart a way for a large community spread out over the entire world to build a collective learning process and share experiences.

The works of the artist duo MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho are currently on view in the Korean pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. Their art has been presented at the Fukuoka Triennale (2014), the Sullivan Galleries of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2013), documenta (13), the Gwangju Biennale (both 2012), the Moscow Biennale, and the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts (both 2010). Prior to 2010, both artists individually showed their work in numerous solo and group exhibitions.

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MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
El Fin del Mundo, 2012
2-channel video projection (HD, color, sound)
13:35 min.

Courtesy of the artists and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul



MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
Avyakta, 2012
2-channel video projection (HD, color, sound)
17:56 min.

Courtesy of the artists and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul



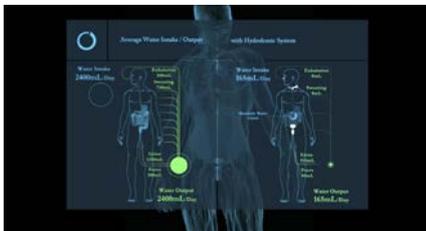
MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
with MVRDV and The Why Factory
I City / We City, 2012
Single-channel video on monitor (HD, color, sound)
08:22 min.

Courtesy of MVRDV and the artists



MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
with takram design engineering
Shenu: Hydrolemic System, 2012
Aluminum, resin, plastic, porcelain, foam cushion,
foam, titanium
Dimension variable

Courtesy of takram design engineering and the artists



MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
with takram design engineering
Shenu: Hydrolemic System, 2012
Single-channel video on monitor (color, no sound)
07:29 min.

Courtesy of takram design engineering and the artists



MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
with JUNG Kuho
 $A = \sqrt{3} / 2 d^2 \approx 0.866025404d^2$, 2012
Seidenorganza, Silikon
3 parts: 1 part 150 x 46 x 20 cm,
1 part 80 x 34 x 24 cm, 1 part 80 x 30 x 25 cm

Courtesy of JUNG Kuho and the artists

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F +41 44 277 62 86
INFO@MIGROSMUSEUM.CH

MIGROSMUSEUM.CH
MIGROS-CULTURE-PERCENTAGE.CH



JUNG Kuho
 $A = \sqrt{3} / 2 d^2 \approx 0.866025404d^2$, 2013
Single-channel video on monitor (color, no sound)
02:28 min.

Courtesy of JUNG Kuho and the artists



Toyo Ito
'Home-for-All' in Rikuzentakata, 2012
Single-channel video on monitor (color, no sound)
10:09 min.

Courtesy of Toyo Ito



Future Cities Laboratory/Lehrstuhl für Informationsarchitektur (ETH Zurich)
Teaching the Unknown, 2015
Table, wheels, cabel, Intel® NUC processor, touchscreen, application software
86 x 130 x 85 cm

Courtesy of the Chair of Information Architecture (ETH Zurich)



Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich)
In collaboration with MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
Mobile Agora (Tribune), 2015
Aluminum, wood, wheels
3 parts: each 181 x 340 x 425 cm

Courtesy of Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich) and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst



Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich)
In collaboration with MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
Mobile Agora (Mothership), 2015
Bicycle, umbrella, monitor, battery, projector, amplifier, fluorescent tubes, cabel, curtain, Velcro fastener, aluminum, wood
255 x 82 x 360 cm

Courtesy of Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich) and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst



Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich) & Gran Horizonte Media
In collaboration with MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
Mobile Agora (La continuación del mundo), 2015
Single-channel video projection (color, sound)
04:30 min.

Courtesy of Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich) & Gran Horizonte Media and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst



Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich) & Gran Horizonte Media
In collaboration with MOON Kyungwon & JEON Joonho
Mobile Agora (Remix Agora), 2015
Single-channel video on monitor (color, sound)
04:00 min.

Courtesy of Urban-Think Tank (ETH Zurich) & Gran Horizonte Media and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst

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MIGROS-CULTURE-PERCENTAGE.CH