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Kyoung Eun Kang/A.M. Richard in conversation  
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*M* Kyoung Eun Kang, a native of Korea, is a performance artist. *HAPPY BIRTHDAY*, is the title of her videotaped performance to be screened at A.M. Richard Fine Art (May 7<sup>th</sup>-June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010). The videotaped performance took approximately one hour to enact and was subsequently edited down to 17 minutes 54 seconds. Please summarize the action in **HAPPY BIRTHDAY**.

**KEK:** My body is surrounded by a sweet smell. Wearing only pink and blue cotton candy, I am melting. I lick the cotton candy, which is my skin. The cocoon is warm, and it is coming apart because of my sweat and my movement. I hatch out of the shell and clean myself in an act of self-consumption. The fragile cotton candy becomes part of my skin and I metamorphose.

In my performance "Happy Birthday", the melted cotton candy became a sculpture of skin. I left the remnants for a few days. The remaining fragments in the space preserved my presence even though I was not there any more. The space stayed open for people for a few days but I didn't invite anybody.

I talked with my mother on the phone. I let her know about my web site where I present my work. I was shy about showing my work to my parents. I thought it would be weird for them to see me naked. My mother called me back and said, " I almost cried when I saw your "Happy Birthday" performance. It was sad, but I started to know who you are. You resemble me in some ways. "

*M* The dichotomy of the performance is that in being visually beautiful it is rather disturbing to see you go through the process of eating yourself out of the candy cocoon. Can you recall your state of mind? I imagine the initial delight in eating candy floss was annulled when you had to eat 100 clouds.

**KEK:** The ephemeral cotton candy has dramatic character. It is seductive and also disturbing. It is sweet and childish but if you see the melted color, you recognize it is artificial and chemical. I wanted to embrace the dichotomy and discover my instinct in relation to the material and my body. I wanted to have pure relationship with my body and material. Also I wanted to go back to the most primitive state of human being in an act of eating and licking. I am interested in the state of exuviations and rebirth. While I performed, I focused on the act of eating and licking rather than tasting, I don't really remember if it was sweet or not.

*M* All the performances I have seen of yours, so far, have included some type of endurance test. Although the premises are seemingly colorful and innocent, each time you go through a painful process i.e. "**Islands**" clutching/balancing on small Korean rocks, "**Partners**" mimicking strangers behavior at close proximity; "**Breathing in Public**" walking around the city with a glass jar over your head, to name but a few of our performances)

**KEK:** I like the continuity of pushing and challenging myself because my mind controls my body or my body resists my mind. My main goal is not about testing my limit. The most important thing is experiencing as much as I can. I don't think it is painful process because it is like beginner's practice. In my other performance '**Island**' I carry and step on stones from Korea through New York City Street balancing myself. I learned how to walk on the stones as if babies learn their first step.

I create ephemeral situations, which only exist on the very moment. I don't rehearse because I'm looking for surprises and the unexpected. I like the first meeting, observing and feeling. I expect accident and improvisation.

*M* You are now living in New York, having recently graduated from Parsons New School for design with a MFA and completed a residence at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. How has living in the US affected your work if at all?

**KEK:** My work starts from mental and physical practice that tests my ability to fit in America. Living in New York City makes me need to be strong to overcome cultural displacement and to adopt new environments. I test the body as thread hold to rediscover my identity in relation to new relationships with people and places. I expand the possibilities of the body as complex states that can transform situations. Consistently exploring my body as membrane to examine inside and outside of my body, my work gradually moves toward the cultural and social implications of how we belong to others, how we adopt others and what does it mean to be human being.

*M* Your background is in painting – when did you decide to make performance your main medium of expression?

**KEK :** I made a series of painting, which I called "**Exuviations**". My paintings address transformative body to interconnect with time, space and stage of life. The process of making is lifting, pouring, adjusting and watching rather than painting.

The paintings address my movement as moving state rather than making images. The work " Exuviations" both explores freedom of image itself and exploration of new state of painting as stage to be able to be shifting to performance.

I gradually move my art practice from painting to performance to expand the visceral and dramatic change of transformative life in the context of our society.

*M* I have had the privilege of seeing one of your series of drawings. I don't see that they document any of your performances but perhaps their essence does. Can you explain how the act of drawing relates to your performances?

**KEK:** My major practice was drawing and painting. I continuously practice this medium even if I currently do performance. Drawing is very important in that it is a way I explore my essential ideas and also free my thoughts. Drawings help to address much more complex and ambiguous meanings in relation to live performance.

*M* Your work touches on notions of social anthropology, migration, and consumption. Can you comment?

**KEK:** I create accidental live situations, which is inspired by our daily life rather than academic Art form. Therefore my art reaches a larger audience that can easily connect with my art. I expand performance art to cultural and social issues in the context of life cycle, evolution and global society. Also my work enlarges the use of body as social medium rather than body as material.

In "Happy Birthday" I explore human condition as a shifting and transforming stage and introduce the body as elastic identity. Through the act of self-consumption, I question the fundamental meaning of consumption in relation to self and society.

*M* There is a very sculptural element to your work, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, for example looks like a soft sculpture coming to life. What are you looking at i.e. what inspires you?

**KEK:** I like ephemeral, soft and transformative material because it can easily assimilate with myself. I was expecting the intimate relationship between my body and material. Also I wanted to address the progress of exuviations showing the transformative sculptural aspect. It was interesting that the cotton candy melted according to my body temperature. I could not control the melting process and I felt strong attachment with the material as if I peel my skin or I lose my hair. After the performance, the fallen and melted cotton candy became crystallized mixed with my hair, sweat and saliva. I keep them very precious like it is part of my body.

 *What are you working on now?*

**KEK:** Recently, I've been interested in a public bulletin board located in a small street of Chinatown. The board is covered with a multitude of notes written in Chinese characters.

This billboard epitomizes questions of integration and how a community blends into a larger collective.

I plan to realize a series of performances that will use the billboard as a central element. I will post notes on the board that will be the starting point for a series of simple and discrete actions such as being guided through Chinatown, collecting white hairs, or finding a partner to scrub my back.

 *Thank you Ms. Kang. HAPPY BIRTHDAY (2009) on view May 7<sup>th</sup> through June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010. An artist talk is scheduled for Saturday June 5<sup>th</sup> at 4pm and 5pm.*