

Lee Bul: Crash

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entre Baie-Saint-Paul et L'Isle-aux-Coudres, en 1994, l'œuvre *Migrations* de Derouin suggérait la disparition de l'humanité sous les eaux. Pour sa part, Chivers interroge la capacité de l'intelligence artificielle à remplacer l'empreinte humaine dans ses tâches pragmatiques, intellectuelles et éthiques. Il suggère la possibilité de contrer les effets nocifs de l'activité humaine sur l'écosystème de la planète par un rééquilibrage d'algorithme.

D'un saut à un autre, *Migrations* expose des réalisations concrètes qui permettent de saisir le prolongement ou l'augmentation des capacités manuelles de l'hominine bipède par des outils, instruments ou machines qui le dépassent. Par son travail objectif relié à l'algorithme et à l'intelligence artificielle, et par sa voix subjective reliée à la captation vidéographique, Chivers propose que, d'une façon ou d'une autre, la transition actuelle aura un impact sur notre cerveau, notre vie et notre conscience.

Dans le contexte de la Déclaration de Montréal sur le développement responsable de l'intelligence artificielle (novembre 2017-décembre 2018), la question suivante se pose : qu'advient-il du vivant lorsque l'intelligence artificielle se reproduit sous forme d'agents outils

inconnus ? Déjà, avec *Migrations*, Mat Chivers propose des pistes pour explorer les questions philosophiques et éthiques des mutations en cours.

1. Marshall McLuhan, *Pour comprendre les médias*, trad. fr. de *Understanding Media*, Paris, Seuil, coll. « Points essais », 1968, rééd. 1977.

Chercheuse, critique d'art, membre de l'AICA-Canada et essayiste, Louise Boisclair vit à Montréal.

Intéressée par l'expérience esthétique en art actuel, elle poursuit une nouvelle recherche « Art et Milieu, Écologie et Climat ». Détentrice d'un doctorat interdisciplinaire en sémiologie de l'UQAM, elle a prononcé plusieurs conférences, publié de nombreux articles et essais. En 2015, elle a publié *L'installation interactive* (Presses de l'Université du Québec), coll. « Esthétique ») et fera paraître bientôt un ouvrage ayant pour titre *De l'expérience immersive et interactive, entre affect et émotion, à l'événement esthétique*.



Lee Bul, *Hecuren and Earth*, 2007. "Sternbau No. 2". 2007. Exhibition view. Gropius Bau. Photo: Matthias Völzke.

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GROPIUS BAU

BERLIN

SEPTEMBER 29, 2018 –

JANUARY 13, 2019

A 17-meter-long silver zeppelin floats over the archaeological exhibition presented on the museum's ground floor. This is a foretelling outset for the visitor to the Gropius Bau, when entering Lee Bul's retrospective exhibition, a creative universe that looks at the history of Korea through the lens of imagined futures and revolutionary utopias. After a critically-acclaimed presentation at the Hayward Gallery in London over the summer, *Lee Bul: Crash* arrives at the Gropius Bau in Berlin as Stephanie Rosenthal's first show as the German institution's director.

Upon entering the exhibition, the visitor is greeted with an impressive installation. *Civitas Solis II* is composed of a shin-high platform of mirrors onto which light bulbs of various shapes and sizes spell out the title of work in both English and Korean without actually being readable. The work appears as an unknown topography that extends through infinity and over which a ring of light hovers.

Since the 1980s, the revered Korean artist has been making works that are eye-catching, often both bizarre and compelling. She has used an impressive array of materials ranging from precious stones, mother-of-pearl and crystals, expensive fabrics, reflective metallic surfaces and lights, but also somatic materials like dead fish and human hair. Behind the visually extraordinary—at times even ostentatious— aesthetic that has come to prevail in Bul's work, she is firmly grappling

with Korea's history, the bleak episodes. One of the strongest pieces in the show is titled *Heaven and Earth* (2007). Among shattered ceramic tiles stands a bathtub filled with dark ink that reflects surrounding white peaks. This work addresses the authoritarian use of waterboarding to suppress freedom of speech and more particularly the traumatic death of Park Jung-chul, a student who had campaigned for the pro-democracy movement in 1987 and was subsequently tortured and killed under Park Chung-hee's authoritarian regime.

While Lee Bul is known mostly for large installations and intricate sculptures, she is also an accomplished painter and an audacious performance artist, and this exhibition succeeds in tracing the complete course of her career. Early in the visit, the viewer is invited to delve into Lee Bul's practice as a performance artist. In the 1990s, she used her body in a series of performative actions to challenge Korea's control over women's bodies: at the time, women were not allowed to adopt any hairstyles other than the state approved ones, and the authorities measured the length of women's skirts. Watching footage of the artist's naked body hung upside down in front of an audience, while she recounts her experience of abortion—a medical procedure that is still illegal in Korea today—is gut wrenching.

In *Via Negativa II* (2014) a maze of mirrors culminates in a chamber filled with lights that obliterate the viewer's reflection. On the exterior walls, reverse excerpts are printed from the American psychologist Julian Jaynes' text, arguing that humans experience a 'split of consciousness' in which one side of the brain experiences messages sent from the other side of the brain as hallucinations. Walking through the exhibition creates many opportunities for feelings of déjà-vu and hallucinations, and elements are subtly referenced throughout the exhibition. There is the recurring use of certain materials such as crystals, mirrors, light bulbs, and there are reappearing shapes: body parts (usually part human, part machine), architectural models, mountain landscapes and so on. In *Bunker (M. Bakhtin)* (2007), visitors are invited to walk into the large black Plexiglas mountain-shaped structure and experience a disorienting and eerie soundscape that echoes their own movement and breath, re-actualizing them with a slight delay that produces a sensory experience akin to being stunned by one's own reflection.

In Lee Bul's work, she engages with physicality, dealing with how our bodies experience the world and how this helps shape our understanding of it. To understand the science fiction aesthetic that emanates from her work, it is crucial to acknowledge that she has witnessed the transformation of her country from a military dictatorship to a liberal and capitalist democracy.

Korea is still split into two worlds today, on one side, there is an isolated and sequestered society and on the other, one engaging with the challenges of globalisation and technological progress. This is encapsulated in the juxtaposing of *Monster Black* (1998-2001) and *Monster Pink* (1998-2001), two similar, outlandish figures with protruding limbs and tentacles that look like a pair of mutant root vegetables—reminiscent of the costumes used in her early performances, which are also included in the exhibition. The two 'monsters' stand as an uncanny presence, sharing the gallery space like two islands in the same sea, each floating over their metallic puddle, analogous yet



disengaged. And this is made all the more significant in the space of Gropius-Bau, a building that was at the border of East and West Berlin during Germany's thirty year rupture. The exhibition underlines this reciprocity, offering a historical pause mid-way through the exhibition; a timeline traces correlations between Korea and Germany's respective histories since the late 1940s.

At the end of the exhibition, the visitor leaves looking at *Civitas Solis II* yet again. This is a curatorial decision that illustrates what Lee Bul hoped the exhibition would achieve: "my works are a kind of journey to another place, another time. We travel, but the stories are in the landscape and you can see that it's always the same place. It's like a diorama: there is a journey, but it is always the same view. The same site." Although this retrospective exhibition transports the viewer on a journey through three decades of work, one never reaches a final destination. Because the future is not a destination: the future is the present not yet realized.

1. Lee Bul, exhibition statement, *Lee Bul: Crash*, Gropius Bau, Berlin (2018).

Anaïs Castro is an art critic and curator based in Berlin. She holds a BFA in art history from Concordia University and a Masters in contemporary art from the University of Edinburgh. Since 2011, she has curated a dozen exhibitions in Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany. She participated in the Shanghai Curators Lab in November 2018, was a curator-in-residence at Titanik in Turku in July 2017 and a visiting curator at BCA in Burlington in April 2016. Her essays and reviews are published regularly in *esse arts + opinion*, *ESPACE art actuel* and *thisistomorrow*.