

## Crystal Seeing 2008 – The Correspondence Between Memories and Images

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Kim Hee-seon's recent work, *Crystal Seeing*, a video installation made of nine crystal balls and featuring four people, is based on documentary interviews she conducted with several of her acquaintances. This work is about the moments when one feels happiness in life. In her previous work as well, Kim has consistently based her work on her thoughts about various phenomena derived from human beings. In her recent work, she makes distinctive attempts to blend reality with fiction, to break down the lines between one's private life and lives of others, to expand and fabricate ordinary incidents, and to generate a universal communion that brings the valuable memories of others to us.

The monitor in this work captures a close-up of the face of a man who comfortably narrates about the trivial incidents in life. The work radiates a dim, clear, and pellucid sepia or emerald tone of light, corresponding with the various-sized crystal balls placed on the floor. The artist intentionally rids the work of the reality of video images, employing literary rhetoric to underlie its authenticity. The interview video, presented in a decolorized, achromatic color that perhaps represents the color of happiness, flows extremely slowly, attempting to capture a type of momentous climax in the drop-shaped crystal capsules. Separately heard voices, flowing at different speeds, generate a murmuring effect that suggests the boundary between harmony and disharmony.

For the artist, listening to another's narratives is by no means as easy as confessing her own confidential memories. Paying careful attention to the words of the interviewees, we can discover their happiest moments such as a racy affair with a boy or girl friend, eye contact with their baby, or the feeling of passionate love. Kim doesn't conduct these interviews just to hear expected or unexpected replies but is interested in capturing her interviewee's absent-minded, infatuated look during the flow of their private conversations, which can be referred to as the moment of exclamation. As we have no set of controls for our brain, we are unable to intentionally draw out memories from among those stored in our neurons. Although we cannot control them as we please, they flow in and out of us in reverse, from yesterday to today and to tomorrow.

The fragments of memories correspond to images, which glitter like gold dust and are as transparent as precious gems. We can revive memories through images, as if in a flashback which refers to a phenomenon past images restore when its seal takes off. It is also used as a somewhat degenerative cinematic apparatus that takes past memories back in time from the current point.

As humans living in the bondage of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, our realities appear gloomy, hard to adapt, and dissatisfactory. Such a lack of desires draws the past to the present, thereby fusing or juxtaposing the two. As a result, her work generates space-time in which past and present images coexist, posing a question about the meaning of existence, images, and remained memories.

Like the balloon effect that describes what happens when a person squeeze some part of a latex balloon, the balloon will bulge out elsewhere, the memory of other's happiness Kim triggers brings about an unexpected situation after going through the intersection of complex feelings, moving beyond a simple principle of action and reaction referred to as "happy tears".

James Elkins explains in his book, *Pictures and Tears*, when asked why people have cried in front of pictures, it is not merely because they were touched or overwhelmed by them, but they reply that it is because they were unable to endure an indescribable and complex emotional state. Thinking about the memories held beneath the figure in her video with tears streaming down his or her face, who at the same time shows a strange, enraptured look, we perhaps catch a glimpse of the relationship between these dramatic life scenes and the intense pain that can be associated with them. Raising again the long-cherished question concerning the connection between life and art, Kim Hee-seon asserts that the pleasure of recalling indescribably happy memories can be identical with the joy of experiencing great art.