



Sunaparanta
GOA CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

Songs without Lyrics

a solo show by Kyungwoo Chun
curated by Leandr e D'Souza

18 AUGUST - 11 NOVEMBER 2023



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Foreword

In 2015, we were all witnesses to an exceptionally powerful performance by Kyungwoo Chun at Sunaparanta. Both emotional and tactile, the piece had such a bearing on our audiences that many recall their participation and experience even today.

It is with much pride that we welcome the South Korean artist back to Goa in this magnificently poignant show. Chun's work revolves around questions of time and human perception. In his photographs, videos and performances, people are placed at the intersection of time and space.

Inquiring into the possibilities of empathy and compassion, Chun investigates what it means to be human. He creates situations where people, mostly strangers, come together and unexpectedly, requested to perform the most banal actions.

For us at Sunaparanta, the relationship with our community has always been instrumental to our work. Addressing questions concerning care and the need to remain close to our core human values has been vital to us.

We have a long-standing association with the Ektaal Children's Choir, and so, a collaboration with the children, from where this show begins its journey, was a perfect match.

Over the last few weeks leading up to the show, Chun has been working with the children from the choir on two major productions that we will experience in Goa for the first time. The children were asked the most unusual requests: to sing to nature, to imagine sounds to picture compositions. What evolved was a deeply emotional and personal connection between the children and nature, and with each other. All of us at Sunaparanta, watched in awe at this unison that emerged between living elements.

Along with these photographic and video performances, we present a series of participatory works that require activation and the involvement of our audiences. As we navigate this show, we introspect into the dialectics of being, emptiness and how we relate to ourselves and those beside us.

**Isheta D Salgaocar, Patron
Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts**



Curator's Note

It is said that the goddess Cura (care) sculpted the first human from clay. Jupiter grants the figure a spirit and soul. And Terra bestows it with the name homo (human) being made from humus, the earth. Cura treads the binary between devotion and burden. She creates and cares for human but also carries his/her pain. Care is our very essence. It moulds the empathic process, shapes social cognition and our understanding of the world, the basis of which lies in our fundamental connection to others. In that sense, care can only be imagined as a collective act.

Kyungwoo Chun foregrounds his practice within this space - knotting together empathy - care - compassion. He is concerned with how we interact in the world, how we relate to ourselves and each other. Creating un-familiar situations that can provoke modes of interdependence, he provides a space for individuals to enter, shed exterior excesses and traverse an interior scape. Ordinary conversations, requests, tasks initiate the possibility for exchange. The simplest gesture can spark perceptual functions. We see ourselves - as we are. The body loosens, we rest on another. Pain, joy, relief is transmitted, shared and soothed.

Forging a series of meeting points that require our physical presence and engagement with strangers, the body, histories, hopes, fears, faults become the raw material for Chun's study. Part of his working process is to nudge us into unusual settings. How we accept/reject these provocations determines the shape that the work will take. We deliberate on the meaning of the most ordinary actions. A role reversal that results in chaos and failure. Strangers invited to sit on a bench and lean against each other for several minutes. Shaking hands which are then wrapped in tin foil for 20 interminable minutes.

This exhibition, *Songs without Lyrics*, explores alternatives for lyrics with no notes. The works in the show make visible what is often not seen or yet unknown, stretching our capacities for listening to sounds that are invented, and generating unimaginable terrains for communication.

Engaging collaboratively with the Ektaal Children's Choir, children become the main actors in a series of interventions in Goa. *Resonance* is a photographic piece where the children sing to nature. At dusk, they perform the action, in harmony with the trees before them.

As the radiance of the evening sky turns a pitch black and the moon lights up a night sky, leaves shiver against the reverberations of their voices. As the children speak, the plants come alive, and subtle shifts recorded. The final portraits are inverted to appear as negatives, residues of saturated monotones and memories of this communion between each child and tree.

Chun's association with the choir continues with *Songs without Lyrics* as they select scores that were composed by Korean children with hearing and speaking disabilities. Each score has a title, a colour corresponding to melodies and a number indicating the length of tone. In Korea, the sound sequences were activated by sounds of bells. In Goa, the choir singers, acting like conductors, create their own rhythms to each piece and perform for the original composers of these scores.

Ordinary Unknown is a performance that marked Chun's first intervention in Goa. 30 guests are called to dinner. At their arrival they are divided into rows A & B and are seated at either end of a dining table, laid with a spread of 15 sets of tiny bowls, filled with Goan delicacies. Each performer sits before someone they have never met. Each is requested to select his/her own combination of gravy, bread, pickle. Row A is instructed to feed the stranger in front of them. In utmost silence, the session lasts for 10 minutes followed by Row B feeding their unknown partners. Over 20 minutes, some performers use their hands and form little morsels of rice, vegetable that is softened with a dip into the curry to moisten the palate. Another gently wipes the mouth of his partner. Others begin with dessert and then move on to the meal. A participant recalls his mother and is moved to tears. Tapping into sensibilities of nurturing, trust, humility, feeding becomes a symbolic gesture enabling layers of intimacies to unveil. The participants, bound together for a limited time, automatically enter into a state of physical dependence and are bound to each other.

For Chun, we've forgotten our sense of time being completely disconnected from the natural world and its cycles. In *1000 Names*, we are greeted with a bright red wall and are handed headphones carrying music. As we listen to the sound piece, we are given a minute to remember those most precious to us and to pen these on the wall with no interruption nor separation between individual names.

Travelling Faces is a video performance in which 200 people of varied ages and backgrounds participate. They are asked to spontaneously connect to a person close to them residing in another country via their smartphones. The contacted person is requested to send a selfie portrait.

Using clay, participants are instructed to make a sculpture based on the photo they have received. In *100 Questions*, a hundred participants from varied backgrounds ask a personal question that is answered anonymously with a slight nod.

With *Seventeen Moments*, the breath, or our perception of life and the expanse between one breath and the next, is at the heart of this moving image piece. Acted out by 17 dancers, the video starts and ends with a single moment – when the act of breathing is stopped. Separated on two screens, life and death oscillate as the repetition of inhalation and exhalation points out to the beginning and end of that moment that sustains life.

While Chun is not physically present in the work – the portraits, performances, videos – there is a conscious relational exchange that is visible, perhaps unspoken, but its presence is felt. The temporal settings and the conditions that are prescribed become the catalysts and witnesses for something to take place between people who are brought together. It is in this in-between liminal space where relationships can emerge, communication takes place, vulnerabilities can breathe, “we become aware of a phenomenon” Chun explains. He has often remarked that “sometimes, we forget we’re alive.” The portrait, performance, video become time capsules. Our movements and changes are layered and are etched into the pictorial space. We watch, listen, experience the rhythmic circulation of time. We look at ourselves and beyond. In this passage of time, we live.

**Leandré D’Souza, Curator
Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts**

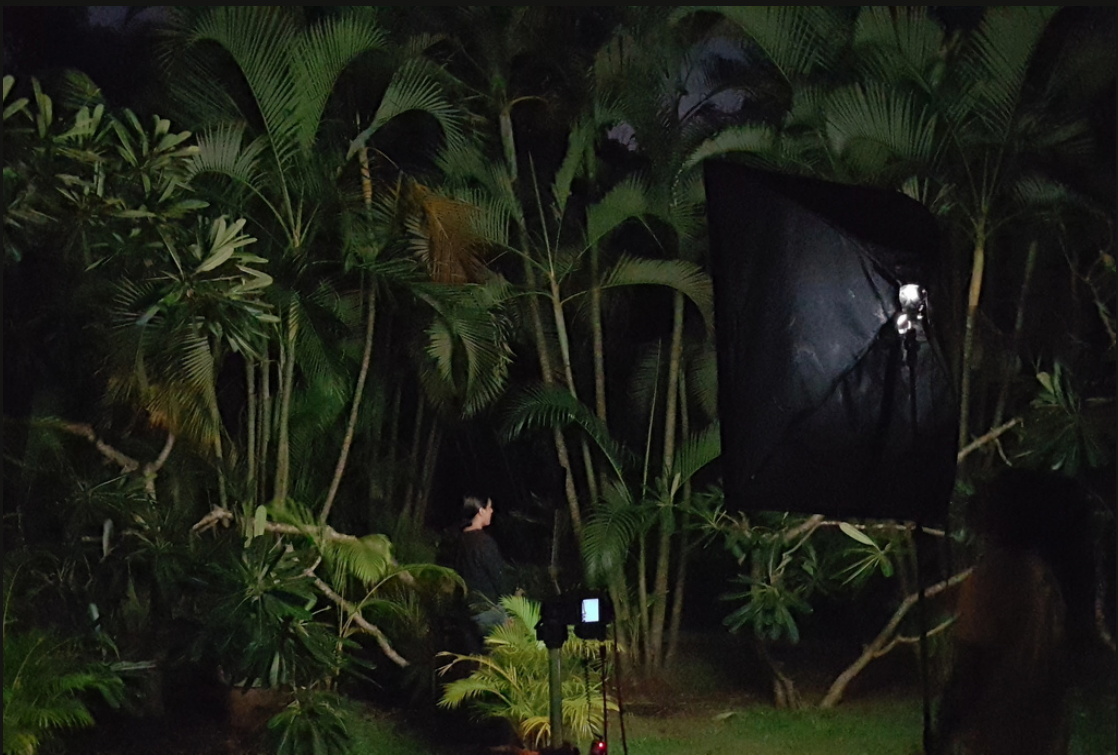


Resonance, 2023

Photographs, various dimensions

The artist invited children from the Ektaal Children's Choir in Goa to participate in the project. This is a photographic piece where the children sing to nature. As each one speaks to trees, their portraits are captured using the technique based on temporally set processes, rendering the final image as a blur of moments that passed between each child and the tree.





Resonance, performance view

1000 Names 2009/2023

Performance with installation

Commissioned by Van Zoetendaal Collection,
Amsterdam 2009

Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts, 2023

The performance was first realized in Amsterdam with the participation of public visitors who were given a set of head-phones with music and were given a minute to write down the names of the most precious people in their lives.



Travelling Faces, 2022

Performance documentation

Video, photograph

Commissioned by MMCA Cheongju, South Korea

100 people were first invited by the artist to create portrait sculptures for an exhibition at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea.

For the performance, the first 100 participants were asked to contact a person residing in another country and requested to send their selfies via their smartphones. Once the images were received, they created a figure of the person using only their hands and clay as the material. The participants/performers in the images appeared as 3-dimensional figures.





Can you remember the dream you had last night? Do you think you can change the world? Are you free today? Do you like me?
Haven't you ever done anything that would hurt others? Do you think your future does not exist without the present? Do you respect your parents?
Do you manage pain well? Have you ever loved someone without letting him or her know? Have you told a lie more than once today? Are you an active person?
Would like to meet the person you did your first kiss with? Have you ever hated your family? Have you had breakfast yet? Have you ever wanted to be mute?
Have you ever felt animosity toward foreigners? Do you believe in yourself? Have you ever thought of the place or time you want to die?
Did you have a happy childhood? Have you ever imagined how your mother would feel when she died? Do you hold a secret that nobody knows?
Should one implore fate to give them a chance to see beyond themselves? Have you ever been in trouble with an extreme emotion you felt recently?
Does a question need to be answered? Do you think what we call "love" is in fact selfishness? Does music pull at the strings of our heart?
Since God must have a reason why he allows suffering, can I cope with his answer? Do you think you can die for someone you love? Do you want to cry now?
Are you honest with yourself? Do you exercise regularly? Do you live your life as you have planned? Did you look up in the sky at least once yesterday?
Do you have plans after retirement? Are you afraid of the journey that reminds you of your childhood? Do you often judge people by their blood type?
Have you ever stolen anything that does not belong to you? Do you have anyone who can hug you for five minutes when you want?
Are you satisfied with your look today? Do you imagine your future more beautiful than your past? Can you love someone unconditionally?
Would you mind if you were to die today? Do you feel better if the shampoo or body lotion you use is in a pretty-looking bottle?
Do you think you are making a difference in the world? Do you think the place we call "heaven" is in fact "hell"? Have you ever opened other person's drawer?
Should we stop ourselves from making mistakes? Did you turn the gas oven off? Have you ever shed crocodile tears in front of others?
Would you take a peep into someone's private life if you can? Have you ever cheated on your spouse? Would you like to live alone? Are you okay now?
Is Shanghai the capital of China? Can you live without art? Have you ever picked up food dropped on the street to eat it?
Are you under a lot of stress at work? Is friendship between man and woman possible? Have you ever had the impulse to kill someone?
Do you believe that the media affects your sex life? Do you have children? Are you happy these days? Do you believe in an afterlife? Are you a man?
Would you like to do it again? Do you believe that UFOs exist? Have you ever taken pleasure at other people's misery?
Are you happy? Have you ever been unfaithful to your spouse? Do you think about sex everyday? Do we really need pollution free bio-tech food?
Do you have a secret that you can tell a total stranger more comfortably than a close friend of yours? Does this performance have any influence on your behavior?
Is the life you are living now close to the life you have ever expected? Do you believe in soul mates? Does the world look beautiful?
Have you ever fallen in love with someone other than your spouse or lover and had emotional and physical relationships with him or her?
Do you feel happy at this every moment? Did you have a good night sleep last night? Can you eat art? Did you run naked in the field last night?
Have you been to Havana? Do you sincerely believe your partner / wife / husband is THE ONE for you? Is your real estate property worth over 500 million won?
Someday, will I be before your religion, culture, race and tradition? Have you ever thought that you could be my lover even for a moment?
Have you ever knowingly hurt someone you loved? Are you satisfied with your job? Do you feel good when it rains? Do you donate regularly to other people?
Do you feel you are a totally different person in private? Have you ever been in love with two women (men) at the same time?
Have you ever had an erotic dream? Do you really believe that natural disasters are punishment from God? Do you believe that you can live up to 80 years?
Do you think North Korea and South Korea will be re-unified in your lifetime? Do we humans have the right to take our own lives or choose when to die?
Have you ever felt intimate with someone of the same sex although you are not homosexual? Have you understood that you are alive?



100 Questions, 2011

Performance and installation

Wall text, sound from a performance at Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2011

100 Questions was produced from a cultural sense of alienation Chun experienced in Europe. 100 people from different cultural backgrounds were asked to participate by writing, anonymously, one personal question, that they wanted to ask other people. 10 participants were invited to take part in the live performance and the 100 questions were answered by a nod, moving their heads on an impromptu basis through performance. Along with these 100 questions, the sound used in performances is displayed.



Seventeen Moments, 2012

Video based on performance

2-channel video, sound

The work was realized with 17 experienced European dancers who had to work in the same way to make perfect moves. The performance begins with the act of a single stop to the most unconscious, routine breathing, and ends with that stop. Chun believes no one can easily define 'a moment' that is ultimately compared to the length of every other individual's breath and to the rest of life (time).







Songs without Lyrics, 2021/2023

Performance with installation

Seosomun Shrine History Museum, Seoul 2021

Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts, Goa, 2023

16 Korean people with hearing and speaking disabilities were invited to create a song that they would like to sing for other people. They were asked to give a title to the song and draw a picture score with colors, pictograms, and numbers.

Visitors are invited to choose one of their songs and play spontaneously, with the installed 6 bells.



Songs without Lyrics II, 2023

Video based on performance, sound

Children from the Ektaal Children's Choir are invited to select picture scores composed by Koreans with hearing and speaking disabilities. Each score carries a title, a colour corresponding to melodies and a number indicating the length of tone. In Korea, these sound sequences were activated by the sound of bells. In Goa, the choir singers, acting like conductors, create their own rhythms to each piece as they perform for the original composers of these scores.

Participants

ADAM PINTO

ELAHE SRINIVASAN

ERANAH D'SILVA

ERIN ROSE MAKASARE

HANNAH JOANNA VALES

JEMIMAH FAYTH HOMEM

KAIRA RASINE PEREIRA

KATYAYANI NAIK

KIAN NAIK

KRISHNA MADNANI

LEANNE VIEGAS

SHAWN KURIAN ABRAHAM

TARA GADRE

in co-operation with

Ektaal Children's Choir

Led by Nayantara De Lima Leitão









Ordinary Unknown, 2015

Performance documentation

Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts, Goa, 2015

Ordinary Unknown is Kyungwoo Chun's first intervention at Sunaparanta where he created an exceptionally powerful performance piece as part of Sensorium 2014. 30 guests were invited to dinner and instructed to feed the person sitting before them in total silence.

Tapping in to sensibilities of nurturing, trust and humility, feeding became a symbolic gesture enabling layers of intimacies to unveil. The participants, bound together for a limited time, enter into a state of physical dependence and are bound to each other.



About the Artist



Kyungwoo Chun (*1969 in Seoul) has for many years now been working on photography projects and initiating performances in which the audience is actively involved. Chun attained international recognition through his portraits, many of which have a characteristic blurriness in their movements—the consequence of extended exposure times. As diverse as the artistic approaches seem at a first glance, Chun considers both the performances and the photographs to be in equal measure "visible manifestations of that which is not visible."

Ever since early 2000s, performance works have arisen in parallel to the photography. These are temporally limited processes which can be carried out individually or as a group. As author and initiator, Kyungwoo Chun withdraws to a large extent into the background. He establishes a framework in which the participants can act independently. They generally have the possibility of leaving behind something of their own. Sometimes it is a personal object, a photograph, or just the answer to a question. In other cases, their physical presence is already sufficient.

The sensitization to an altered perception of time and the intensification of a dialogue with oneself and with others are essential aspects of this artistic practice.

The oeuvre of Kyungwoo Chun has been presented in many solo and group exhibitions in Europe and Korea. Furthermore, he has realized numerous performances with participation of the public in many cities including Barcelona, Seoul, Berlin, Liverpool, Zurich, Mumbai, Bremen and New York. The artist's work is represented in major museum collections including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston(MFAH), Huis Marseille stichting voor fotografie in Amsterdam, Kunsthalle Emden, Museet for Fotokunst Odense, Musée Mac/Val in Vitry-sur-Seine, The Museum of Photography Seoul, National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea(MMCA) among others. He is a professor of photography at Chung-Ang University in Korea.



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Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts is a not-for-profit, process-based arts initiative founded by Dipti and Dattaraj V Salgaocar. It encourages creation, learning, understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the multi-disciplinary art forms through outreach and dialogue in Goa.

THE TEAM

Isheta Salgaocar - patron & program advisor

Leandré D'Souza - curator & creative director

Nilima Menezes - exhibition manager

Justina Costa - media manager

Abigail D'Souza - production & program assistant

Micheal Praveen & Siddhartha Lall - photography

Vaibhav Raj Shah - videography

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