National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea

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The Korea-France Year 2015-2016

LEE BUL

AUBADE Ⅲ

19 October 2015 – 10 January 2016

Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France

Lee Bul

Aubade Ⅲ

2014-2015

Aluminum structure, polycarbonate sheet, metalized film, LED lighting, electronic wiring, stainless-steel and fog machine, dimensions variable

Commissioned by National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea

Sponsored by Hyundai Motor Company

National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea(MMCA) and Palais de Tokyo co-organizes Lee Bul's project *AUBADE III* as part of the program exchange and collaboration between the two institutions. *AUBADE III* was presented as an inaugural project of the MMCA Hyundai Motor Series in Korea and is the first project from the series to be exhibited in overseas. It is the latest work produced by the artist, which introduces the context of the artist's oeuvre in the most intensive manner. The exhibition at Palais de Tokyo will present the recent trend in the artist's work as it is installed at a site within the museum that requires sufficient understanding and interpretation of space. In the context of the site for installation, *AUBADE III* is a work that is optimized for realizing the distinctiveness and symbolic value of the space in which it is presented. Coinciding with the France-Korea Year, the exhibition of Lee Bul's work at Palais de Tokyo celebrates the exchange between the two countries and contributes to the growth of interest in Korean contemporary art in France.

[AUBADE Ⅲ]

Lee has now extended the themes of her *Mon grand récit* series in *Aubade Ⅲ*. This artwork develops the structure of her existing light tower work. The word "aubade" in the title refers to a song or poem about lovers separating at dawn, a popular trope of European lyric poetry from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century. In an aubade, the image of dawn is typically used as a dramatic expression of unfulfilled romantic love. *Aubade Ⅲ* is a huge installation that takes advantage of the 11m high ceilings in the exhibition space. The work is a visual reinterpretation of Bruno Taut's *Monument des Neuen Gesetzes*(1919), as well as the Hindenburg airship, the symbol of modernity in the early twentieth century.

Periodically, the exhibition space suddenly fills with white vapor that is emitted from inside the structure. Up near the top of the space, some dots of flickering red lights vaguely hint at some type of signpost. But as the vapor slowly dissipates, people's vision returns, and they are presented with an astonishing scene of a monument and an airship, shining brilliantly in the air above. However, this

sight is not only entrancing, but also somewhat ominous, because the diagonal angle of the monument makes it look like a projectile accelerating towards the airship. Moreover, large fragments from the airship float through the air, as if they will never disappear, and could fall to the ground at any time. As such, viewers are forced to reconsider the actual meaning beneath the dazzling appearance.

Lee Bul actively questions the narratives presented by modernist projects purportedly aimed at the freedom and liberation of humanity through the creation of utopia. Furthermore, she addresses the fantasy of perfection that has tantalized us throughout history. By forcing viewers to confront our futile desire for perfection, she unreservedly presents a naked reality that most of us would prefer to avoid. Her works advance, both coldly and hotly, in search of the point that marks the crossroads between life and death, ugliness and beauty, secular and sacred, dream and existence.

*The Korea-France Year 2015-2016

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[Exhibition View]









[Work Label]

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[Photo Credit]

Lee Bul
Aubade Ⅲ
2015
Aluminum structure, polycarbonate sheet, metalized film, LED lighting, electronic wiring, stainless-steel and fog machine, dimensions variable
Photo: Kim Sung Jae
Courtesy: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea

[LEE BUL(b.1964)]

Lee Bul has firmly established herself as one of the most important contemporary artists, not only in Korea, but in the entire world. Since the late 1990s, Lee has been featured in exhibitions at many of the world's most prestigious international venues, including the Museum of Modern Art, the New Museum, and the Guggenheim in New York, the Venice Biennale, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. After beginning her career in the 1980s, Lee has earnestly developed her artistic senses and ideas through projects that continually question and explore contemporary art and society.

Monster (in the 1980s)

In the 1980s, Lee received a very traditional education in sculpture at Hongik University in Korea. From her earliest works, however, she has actively rebelled against the conventional academic art that tends to dominate the Korean art field. She officially launched her professional career in the late 1980s with a series of provocative performances, installations, and sculptures that scathingly criticized the social and political power structure of patriarchal culture. She hung upside down from a rope while naked, to the accompaniment of a pop song. The work was a powerful visualization of the pain of abortion as well as a public confession about her own experience. The same year, in her outdoor performance, she wore the makeup of a shaman and a soft costume of a monster with giant tentacles, and then ran through the fields of Jangheung. In another performance, she wore a similar monster outfit when she wandered Gimpo Airport in Korea, Narita Airport in Japan and the streets of downtown Tokyo for twelve days in costume, eliciting various responses from pedestrians. These performances represented her resistance to a number of binary oppositions: human vs. monster, reason vs. feeling, man vs. woman, logic vs. illogic. Furthermore, they were parodies of femininity, which has been identified with the seditious object of exclusion. As such, she raised compelling questions about existing values and conventions.

Cyborg (in the 1990s)

For Lee Bul, the exhibition at MoMA in 1997 served as a kind of rite of passage for the wider world. After *Majestic Splendor*, she was almost immediately rewarded with a nomination for the prestigious Hugo Boss Prize from the Guggenheim Museum in 1998, which enabled her to create new works focusing on cyborgs, an interest she has maintained ever since. She produced *Cyborg W1-W4*, a series of similar shapes made from white polyurethane. Cyborgs draw upon elements from art history, science, and the popular imagination to give expression to our fascination with, and anxieties about, the utopian promise of perfectibility through bio- and social engineering and technology. Lee's karaoke project, first exhibited at the 1999 Venice Biennale – where she was awarded a prize for her contributions to both the Korean national pavilion and the international exhibition – expand her inquiry into the interplay between nature, culture, and technology. The most recent phase of the artist's development is represented by "Mon grand récit."

Mon Grand Récit (in the 2000s)

Lee's *Mon grand récit* series, first shown in 2005, continued to explore the oppressive relationship between the human and society and the gloomy future of science and technology. At the same time, Lee harkened back to some of the central issues of early twentieth-century architecture, with its pursuit of utopia through design. For *On Every New Shadow*, Lee's 2007 exhibition at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Paris, she made to unfold massive installation works, as if reconstituting these themes as landscapes unto themselves. The *Mon grand récit* series reflects Lee's views on Jean-François Lyotard, who posited that the so-called "grand narrative," or metanarrative, was impossible in the age of post-modernism. Recognizing the impossibility of grand narrative, Lee presented various "small narratives" that were fragmented and imperfect, and which continuously floated around with no resolution. Her works were designed to make viewers contemplate the traces of corruption disclosed in history, the failure of modernist idealism, and the specters of modernism

that continue to haunt the daily life and consciousness of individuals.

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