

a conversation with MediaSonyo

This conversation has evolved from a series of questions between mediaSonyo, exhibition designer Ben Evans James and Libby Leshgold Director + Curator Vanessa Kwan. As a group we’ve been in conversation for many months, negotiating time changes, timelines and technologies, to bring these works into the specific context of the gallery space. Spatial dynamics and embodied viewership has been a large part of our discussions, and how to bridge

the intricate work of coding with the poetic and philosophical underpinnings of the work. In many ways the conversation highlights how *as above / so below* envisions the flow between individual consciousness and collective pattern-making; how we bring broad practices into finite spaces, how artists relate to and support one another, and how we invite the public in.

The Intersection of Art and Technology

SEY MIN It’s very encouraging to see women, especially Korean female artists, gaining more recognition in the field of media art where art and technology intersect. However, in areas requiring advanced programming skills, only a small number of women manage to survive. Particularly in the field of “hard coding,” there are very few women who directly handle the technology, and they are not well-known. Not only for women, but the field of media art in general lacks diversity.

MediaSonyo was established to create an environment where Korean women media artists could receive more recognition. In particular, we wanted to move away from the trend where technology-focused works often appear as mere showcases of advanced technology. Instead, we aim to highlight the strength of female artists in emphasizing narrative. Notable for promoting diversity, our focus is not limited to women; we strive to pursue a broader diversity that includes all perspectives.

YALOO When I moved back to Seoul during the pandemic, I was fortunate to participate in a couple of funded programs within the media arts community. I noticed that people in the media arts field are generally more friendly and inviting compared to those in the visual arts. I suspect this is due to the collaborative nature of media arts and the way it fosters a more inclusive, creative team environment, whereas visual artists often work in solitude to create idiosyncratic work.

The media arts field in Seoul is heavily populated by artists with engineering and design backgrounds. It’s been fascinating to navigate between the fields of visual arts and media arts , as there aren’t many who explore this intersection of forms, even though there’s no clear separation. Despite this, there’s a significant gap between the two worlds. Many of my peers in media art are also active in academic electronic art conferences, design/tech fairs, and audio-visual festivals, which has been eye-opening for me in terms of seeing where else art can go.

Working closely with Sey and Hyo has been incredibly inspiring. When I first met them, I was feeling a bit lost as I grappled with the transition out of the “emerging artist” category (just because of my age) and unsure how to navigate this vague, post-emerging phase. Seeing them, both slightly older and continuously creative, pushing boundaries and advancing their work, was really reassuring. Sometimes, you just need to see someone else doing it to believe it’s possible for yourself.

SEOHYO My work started during the pandemic as a daily ritual to ease my anxiety. I would find inspiration in my everyday life, create an algorithm, and share the results on Instagram. Initially, it was more about documenting my daily routine rather than creating art. Over four and a half years, this practice has evolved into a deeper exploration of aesthetic possibilities and computational expressions. I’ve also expanded the presentation of my work onto urban screens and within architectural contexts, reflecting the forms of their locations. As these long-term projects continue, I aim to further explore how digital art can integrate with and respond to the physical world, constantly adapting and growing with each new environment.

예술과 기술이 교차하는 미디어 아트 분야에서 여성들, 특히 한국 여성 작가들은 점점 더 인정받고 있는 건 무척 반가운 일이지만 고급 프로그래밍 기술이 필요한 분야에서는 여전히 극소수의 여성들만 살아 남고 있습니다. 특히 “하드 코딩” 분야에서 기술을 직접 다루는 여성은 극소수이며 많이 알려지지 않았고, 여성 뿐만 아니라 미디어아트 분야에서는 다양성이 부족해 보이고 있습니다.

MediaSonyo가 설립된 이유는 한국 여성 미디어 작가들이 더 많은 주목을 받을 수 있는 환경을 조성하기 위함이었습니다. 특히 미디어 아트 씬에서 기술 중심의 작업들이 종종 고급 기술의 시연처럼 보이는 것을 지양하며, 여성 작가들이 서사를 중시하는 장점을 강조하고자 했습니다. MediaSonyo는 다양성을 창출하는 데 있어서 주목할 만하지만, 저희는 여성에만 국한되지 않는 포괄적인 다양성을 추구하고 있습니다.

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팬데믹 기간 동안 제 작업은 불안을 해소하기 위한 일상적인 의식으로 시작되었습니다. 일상에서 영감을 얻어 알고리즘을 만들고 그 결과를 인스타그램에 공유했습니다. 처음에는 예술 작품이라기보다는 제 일상을 기록하는 것에 가까웠습니다. 4년 반이 지나면서 이 작업은 미적 가능성과 계산적 표현에 대한 심도 깊은 탐구로 발전했습니다. 또한 장소의 맥락과 형태를 반영하여 도시 화면 및 건축물과 상호 작용하는 작업으로 확장했습니다. 이러한 장기 프로젝트를 계속 진행하면서 저는 디지털 아트가 물리적 세계와 어떻게 통합되고 반응할 수 있는지, 새로운 환경에 끊임없이 적응하고 성장하는 방법을 탐구하고자 합니다.

Coming Alive in the Gallery

SEY MIN I often work on digital screens, which can sometimes make me feel confined to that space. Bringing my work into a physical exhibition space allows it to feel more alive and tangible. It transforms the digital into something real and immersive, giving visitors a more embodied experience of the work. This transition from screen to physical space allows the audience to interact with the work in a more direct and meaningful way.

YALOO The theme of *as above / so below* resonates with my work, particularly in how it explores the interplay between different levels of reality. My work often navigates between the digital/physical, the virtual/real, and the conceptual/tangible, further, the gap between personal narratives and collective histories, and between speculative futures and present realities.

I hope that my work will engage in a dialogue with Sey and Hyo’s works in the exhibition, creating a cohesive narrative that explores the theme from multiple perspectives. Spatial design plays a crucial role, transforming the digital into something that can be physically navigated and interacted with, blurring the lines between screen and space.

For this project, I used Unreal Engine as my primary tool for the first time, along with Metahuman. I began by scanning my face to create the base model, and I collaborated with musician Yetsuby, who motion-captured herself while recording the audio track. Navigating these new tools came with its challenges, but it’s important not to be discouraged by technical setbacks. Having a network of friends and collaborators to assist throughout the process was invaluable.

SEOHYO *Shapescape Generator* (2024) explores the duality between control and randomness, order and chaos. The algorithm I’ve created follows simple, consistent rules, generating images that are constantly changing and evolving. This mirrors the concept of interconnectedness across different levels of reality—how a set of small, controlled decisions within the code can lead to an infinite variety of outcomes, much like how the micro influences the macro, and the individual shapes the collective. My focus on the process rather than the end result reflects the exhibition’s exploration of how deeper patterns and behaviors emerge from seemingly simple actions.

On Process

SEY MIN I start with research—technical research for visuals and contextual research for the story. Since this work is part of the series “non*Fictioning*Fiction,” which explores data realism and AI surrealism, I’ve conducted many experiments to enhance visual elements and to understand how tectonic shifts relate to my themes, particularly the generative processes. I primarily work with generative AI systems, using tools like ComfyUI to test various models, IPAdapters for consistency, AnimateDiff for smooth movements and camera controls, FiLM for interpolating frames, and various upscaling techniques to refine the final output.

I am always interested in how we can maintain balance in our perceptions. I appreciate data because it reflects our reality, which inherently possesses duality and diversity. From this perspective, *as above / so below* highlights that we live in a world with many different facets. Diversity is a crucial value for maintaining the balance of power in society.

SEOHYO Rather than trying to create more complex, innovative, newest, and largest works, I find inspiration in revisiting simple algorithms from the past, or finding interesting algorithms in everyday life. This approach allows me to capture the subtleties of everyday life, which sits at the core of my creative practice.

YALOO It’s been really enjoyable conceiving possible iterations of this group show. Most of our focus has been on rethinking the logistics of the installation as a three-person show and making the work site-specific to the Libby Leshgold Gallery. The emphasis hasn’t been so much on the differences between Korean and Canadian audiences, but I am genuinely curious to see how the community here in Vancouver will perceive and interact with the works.

저는 주로 디지털 화면을 통해 작업을 하기 때문에 때로는 그 화면 속에 갇힌 듯한 느낌을 받기도 합니다. 하지만 제 작업을 물리적 전시 공간으로 가져오면 작품이 더 살아있는 듯하고, 현실적인 느낌을 받습니다. 디지털 작업이 물리적 공간에서 현실화되면서, 방문객들에게 작품을 몸으로 체감할 수 있는 더 생생한 경험을 제공할 수 있게 됩니다. 화면에서 벗어나 물리적 공간으로 확장됨으로써, 작품이 관객과 더 직접적이고 의미 있는 방식으로 상호작용할 수 있다고 생각합니다.

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제 작품인 ‘Shapescape Generator’(2024)는 통제와 무작위성, 질서와 혼돈 사이의 이중성을 탐구함으로써 전시 주제인 ‘As Above So Below’와 관련이 있습니다. 제가 만든 알고리즘은 단순하고 일관된 규칙을 따르지만 끊임없이 변화하고 진화하는 이미지를 생성합니다. 이는 미시적인 것이 거시적인 것에 영향을 미치고 개인이 집단을 형성하는 것처럼, 코드 내에서 통제된 일련의 작은 결정이 어떻게 무한히 다양한 결과를 초래할 수 있는지, 즉 다양한 수준의 현실에 걸쳐 상호 연결성이라는 개념을 반영한 것입니다. 최종 결과보다는 과정에 초점을 맞춘 것은 단순히 보이는 행동에서 더 깊은 패턴과 행동이 어떻게 나타나는지에 대한 전시의 탐구를 반영한 것이기도 합니다.

저는 먼저 연구를 시작합니다. 시각적 요소를 위한 기술 연구와 스토리를 위한 맥락적 연구를 진행합니다. 이 작업은 데이터 현실주의와 AI 초현실주의를 탐구하는 시리즈 “nonFictioningFiction”의 일부이기 때문에, 시각적 요소를 강화하고 제 주제와 관련된 시각 변동이 어떻게 연관되는지 이해하기 위해 많은 실험을 했습니다. 저는 주로 생성형 AI 시스템을 사용하여 작업하며, ComfyUI를 활용해 다양한 모델을 테스트하고, 일관성을 유지하기 위해 IPAdapter를, 부드러운 움직임과 카메라 컨트롤을 위해 AnimateDiff를, 프레임 보간을 위해 FiLM을, 그리고 최종 결과물을 개선하기 위해 업스케일링 기술을 사용하고 있습니다.

앞서 말씀드렸듯이, 저는 항상 우리의 인식에서 균형을 어떻게 유지할 수 있을지에 관심이 많습니다. 데이터를 좋아하는 이유는 그것이 우리의 현실을 반영하며, 이 현실은 언제나 양면성, 다양성을 가지고 있기 때문입니다. 이러한 관점에서 “As Above, So Below”는 우리가 다양한 측면을 가진 세상에 살고 있음을 보여줍니다. 다양성은 사회적 힘의 균형을 유지하기 위한 중요한 가치입니다.

저는 더 복잡하고 혁신적이며 최신의 큰 작품을 만들기보다는 과거의 단순한 알고리즘을 다시 살펴보거나 일상 생활에서 흥미로운 알고리즘을 찾는 데서 영감을 얻습니다. 이러한 접근 방식을 통해 일상 생활의 미묘함을 포착할 수 있으며, 이는 제 창작 활동의 핵심입니다.

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