

## Home and Away

*Text*  
Christina Ko

At first glance there's little to relate the practices of two of Korea's leading artists, Do Ho Suh and Kim Chong Hak. And why would one attempt this exercise in the first place? The art world's categorisation of creators by cultural demographic is arbitrary at best; we label artists by their countries of origin in order to encapsulate a collective experience as much as simply needing to assign them some sort of prefix adjective, to differentiate one from another.

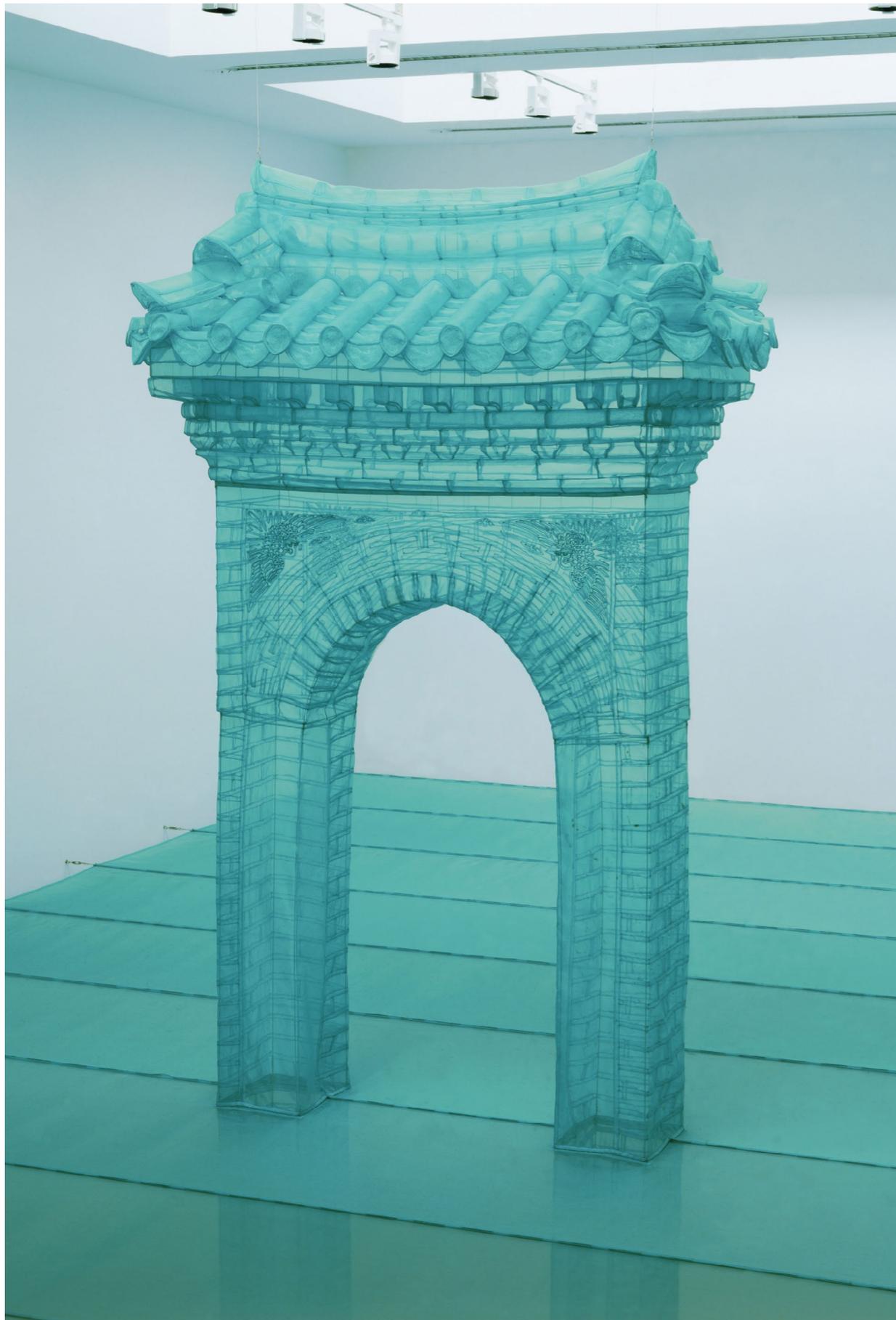
Known as the Korean Picasso, 82-year-old Kim has always worked in two dimensions: painting and sketching. Suh is known for his large-scale replicas of his past homes. The former hails from the school of abstraction, though his distinctive style lies somewhere between formless and figurative. The latter's recreations are strikingly realistic, though they're in a translucent fabric that gives them an otherworldly quality. One is motivated by the world outside and its natural order, the other by an internalised realm, the created construct we call 'home'. Where one works quickly, almost as if possessed by impulse, the other is necessarily meticulous and mathematical. Kim's paintings demonstrate a childlike innocence that transcends time, era or movement. A riot of colours that pulsate with vivacity and immediacy are boldly applied to canvas at a dizzying speed — a means of capturing essence over detail in a way that is thoroughly new, exciting and filled with exuberance. Suh creates ethereal, to-scale replicas of the places he has inhabited in Korea, Rhode Island, Berlin, London and New York, from their exterior structures to details as

minute as a toilet seat or kitchen utensil; the results are as sophisticated as they are specific.

It's this all-encompassing dichotomy that invites the juxtaposition of the artists' oeuvres. And yet, while there are myriad reasons that artists are compelled to create, both Kim and Suh do so for motivations that are intensely personal and cathartic, both driven to explore the relationship between body and space, both literal and emotional.

While Kim pursues his practice with a vigour that exceeds that even of his youth, his 60-year career hasn't been easy. Trained in his hometown of Seoul, then Tokyo and New York, Kim made his start as an abstract painter in New York, though a spell of depression that lasted throughout the 70s led him back home to Seoul and onwards to Sokcho, where he isolated himself from the outside world and its culture — that is, until he discovered the region's Seoraksan mountain. In a time when South Korean art primarily dealt with themes of politics and society, Kim found his muse in the mountain and the nature that subsisted on and around it. This inspiration continues to move him now, some four decades later, with the same force it did when he first laid eyes on it. 'Nature is always open, even if I don't make an effort to approach and strike up a conversation with it,' he says. 'It changes by the minute, even by the second. The Seoraksan I saw in my forties looks different from the Seoraksan I see now in my eighties. Just as everyone looks different from one another, the seasons each have their own beauty and charm. Nature is my friend and teacher.'

*Facing page*  
One concerned with notions of home and identity, the other outward-looking and inspired by the majesty of nature, Do Ho Suh and Kim Chong Hak are both prominent figures in Korea's art landscape. Suh is known for his large-scale translucent sculptures of past homes, seen here in *Reflection*, a 2004 work made from nylon and stainless steel tube  
*Image copyright Do Ho Suh, courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong and Seoul*





Top and middle  
Kim's nature-inspired work is characterised by bold strokes and vivid colours, as in *Mt. Seorak*, 2001 (top; oil on canvas, 91 × 116.7cm) and *River*, 1987 (middle; acrylic on canvas, 194.5 × 313cm)  
*Images courtesy of Johyun Gallery*

Bottom  
Suh's exhibition at Museum Voorlinden marked his first solo presentation in the Netherlands  
*Image by Antoine van Kaam, copyright Do Ho Suh and courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong and Seoul*



It was Suh's nomadic life that triggered his philosophical interest, which lies in harnessing the limits of and relationship between space and body, specifically in the domestic domain. 'London is definitely my current home,' he mused in a recent interview. 'But I can't say that I would live in London forever. It could be another place, because life takes you to different places. I guess that's why I keep dealing with the idea of displacement, since the beginning of my career. I don't feel like I'm completely settled in one place, and I don't really know what's going to happen in the future.' Suh's installations thus deal with the ability of architecture to articulate the intangible idea of 'home', a concept that is as much psychological as it is physical.

As Kim meditates on the same scene, continually mining it for inspiration that seems boundless, so too does Suh seek solace in the constant state of 'home', recreating it from place to place no matter where his body takes him, endeavouring to rediscover memories and personal experiences of places long left behind, a sense of security and, ultimately, how the essence of home can be a moveable construct, rather than a geographical destination.

For both, home is something that cannot be found with a compass, but might be found through process, practice and recollections from the heart.



Top  
In the foreground of this installation, part of Suh's 2019 solo exhibition at Museum Voorlinden, is *Uni-Form/s: Self-Portraits/s: My 39 Years*, a collection of uniforms worn throughout the artist's life  
*Image by Antoine van Kaam*

Bottom  
An installation view of Suh's 2011 exhibition *Home Within Home* at Lehmann Maupin New York  
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