Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

siren eun young jung. resistant theatre

April 18 – August 2, 2026

siren eun young jung, *Sick Seoul*, 2026

Press Release (English)

An exhibition by the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart
Curator Nathalie Boseul Shin, Seoul
In collaboration with Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

siren eun young jung. resistant theatre

April 18 – August 2, 2026

With *resistant theatre,* the Württembergischer Kunstverein presents a comprehensive solo exhibition by the South Korean artist siren eun young jung.

jung, who was represented in the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019, is among South Korea's most influential video and queer-feminist artists. At the heart of the exhibition is the latest and concluding part of her *theatre* trilogy: the three-part, visually and aurally intense video installation *resistant theatre*, which is being presented outside of Korea for the first time.

The trilogy, shown in its entirety by the Kunstverein, is based on the artist's long-standing engagement with *Yeoseong Gukgeuk*—a musical theater genre popular in South Korea in the 1950s, in which all roles, including male characters, are played by women. Building on this, jung develops queer-feminist forms of narration and action in her performances, videos, and archive installations that move beyond Western discourses.

The first part of the trilogy, *trans theatre*, is dedicated to the earliest generation of performers of male roles in *Yeoseong Gukgeuk*, their experiences, and archives. *deferral theatre*, the second part, was created in close collaboration with contemporary artists from the LGBTQIA+ community and explores questions of performativity and representation as well as of the appropriation of tradition. jung liberates *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* from its patriarchal attributions and instead reframes it as an imaginary origin of queer cultural practices.

resistant theatre now brings the current political agency of marginalized individuals to the forefront and focuses on the movements, rhythms, gestures, and choreographies of bodies in resistance within public space: on fundamental forms of protest such as singing and shouting, flags and picket lines, rallies and marches. The installation interweaves documentation of demonstrations and their stylized reenactments—as well as bodies and the city, spaces of power and precarious spaces, music and sounds. The sound is defined by the beats of electropop musician KIRARA, with whom jung has been collaborating since 2016.

The background to the third part of the trilogy is the massive protests by the civilian population in South Korea in 2024 and 2025, which were directed against President Yoon Suk-yeol after he declared martial law on December 3, 2024. LGBTQIA+ and trans* groups played a significant role and were clearly visible in the protests. How can queer

and trans* politics be permanently inscribed into state processes and everyday practices? What might be possible models for a future queer, non-binary citizenship?

Conceived as a total installation, the presentation of the *theatre* trilogy is arranged around a deliberately left-open center reminiscent of an open piazza—a place of potential assembly. Curtains and a stage element emphasize the performative contexts of jung's artistic practice—but can also be read as a reference to the theatricality of cities as well as to the appropriation of public space as a stage for multiple voices. Not least, the exhibition space itself is negotiated between city and stage. Thus, the stage element serves as a platform for various artists, including KIRARA, as well as an open forum for multiple voices.

The platform is one of several venues within and outside the Kunstverein where the exhibition's extensive program of events takes place. Developed in close collaboration between the artist and the exhibition and program curators, it connects the international contexts of the theater trilogy with local issues and activities.

Yeoseong Gukgeuk

siren eun young jung's long-standing artistic research projects span the fields of visual art, film, and theater.

A central focus of her research is *Yeoseong Gukgeuk*, a musical theater genre that was extremely popular in South Korea in the 1950s, in which all roles—both female and male—are played exclusively by women.

Yeoseong Gukgeuk is based on the traditional music of Pansori, a vocal art form that was common in the 17th century. It was originally performed in public spaces or private homes and served to pass down traditional stories. Pansori singers were usually *gisaeng*—female entertainers similar to Japanese *geishas*—who received professional training in singing and dance.

The male characters in *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* are *nimai* (the hero, who embodies both bravery and romantic masculinity), *sanmai* (the clown), and *kadaki (*the villain). Through women's appropriation and embodiment of these roles, male and female attributions overlap, making the performativity of gender visible.

Yeoseong Gukgeuk originated in 1948, three years after Korea's independence from Japanese colonial rule. After great success, it disappeared in the 1960s amid the profound social and political changes in South Korea during the military government of Park Chung-hee. The goal was now to consolidate the national and cultural identity of modern Korea both at home and abroad.

In approximately 30 individual works—including video works, graphics, collages, archival installations, and performances—jung explores the historical and political contexts of *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* as well as the stories of its protagonists. In doing so, she focuses on deviations from social, gender, and artistic norms associated with this genre and positions *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* as the imaginary origin of queer cultural practices in South Korea to this day.

The various works form a polyphonic and ambiguous counter-narrative to the patriarchal, heteronormative, and nationalist narratives of modern South Korean society. In a continually renewed process, tradition, history, and archives are subjected to a queer rereading. jung renders history visible as a fluid construction that also contains alternative possible presents and futures. jung reveals history as a fluid construction that also holds the potential for an alternative present and future.

Her work is based on close, long-standing collaboration with both former *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* actresses and queer-feminist, trans*, and vulnerable artists, activists, and groups. In the process, queer spaces of discourse and action emerge beyond Western narratives and models.

Works in the exhibition

The numbers correspond to the floor plan (at the very back)

resistant theatre

Co-produced by: Art Sonje Center; Sunpride Foundation; SBS Cultural Foundation

4 | *Sick Seoul*, 2026

2-channel video, 4K, surround sound, 21:05 minutes

Music: KIRARA; Performers: Jangpung, Minority Solidarity Pungmulpae; Choreography: Yoon-jung Lee; Camera: Yunejeong Jee

Video stills

Details

Details

resistant theatre brings the current political agency of marginalized individuals to the forefront and focuses on the movements, rhythms, gestures, and choreographies of resistant bodies in public space.

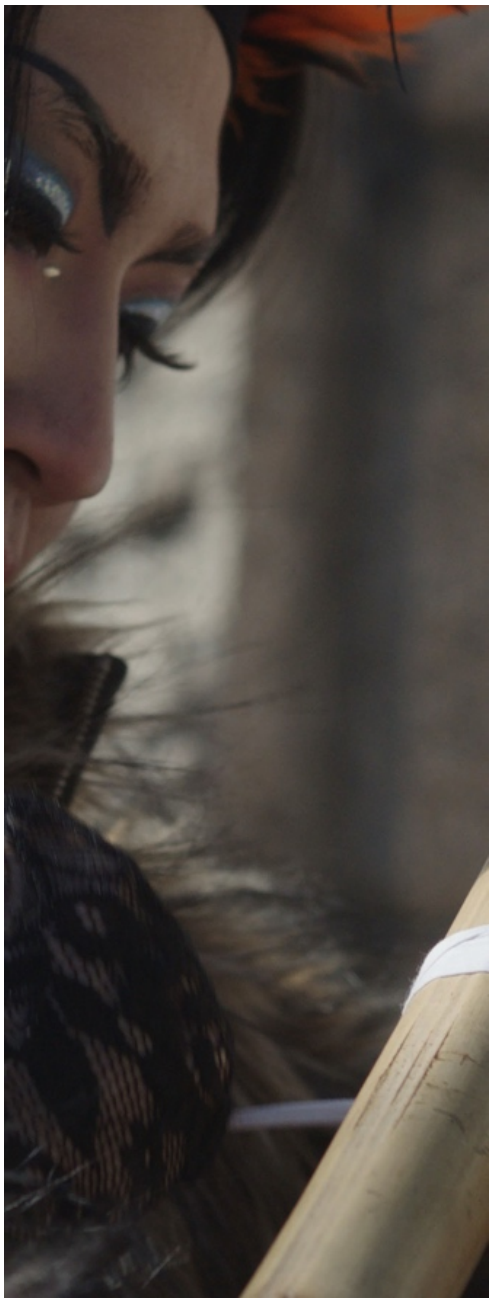
In the winter of 2024, the declaration of martial law triggered a strong politicization of civil society as well as far-reaching demands for change in South Korea. LGBTQIA+ communities were more strongly involved in the protests than many other groups. Solidarity, a willingness to reach consensus, and the insistence on their own concerns were central themes. What queer, non-normative models of citizenship can be derived from this?

Amid the political upheaval, queer art in Seoul boomed to an unprecedented extent—a stark contrast to the legal restrictions imposed on this group. The video installation, however, treats queer citizenship and queer art equally as the basis of political subjectivation. It honors and draws upon the cultural techniques of street protest: objects such as flags, candles, and glow sticks; the affective power of sound, carried by chants, shouts, choral voices, and percussion; as well as physical performance: raising fists, dancing, marching, waving flags. All these elements merge into a powerful sense of collective presence.

The video installation interweaves documentation of the demonstrations in Seoul and their stylized reenactments—as well as bodies and the city, spaces of power and precariousness, music, and sounds. The sound is defined by the beats of the electropop musician KIRARA, with whom jung has been collaborating since 2016.
The title of the work refers to the 1945 poem of the same name by O Jang-hwan, who served as a critical voice during the Japanese colonial period in Korea:

> Yes. sick Seoul,
> In bygone days, you, with this rascal and that rascal,
> With rascals, all drunk, late into the night, almost shoulder to shoulder,
> Ah, tender Seoul,
> Shaken out to the bottom, I'm one such rascal after all
> Bitter at being without a nation,
> Damn, such was the rebellion of us youths, without a nation.
> Rebellion! Rebellion! How tearfully exhilarating is this?
>
> — O Jang-hwan, Sick Seoul (1945), excerpt

5 | *People, Not-Yet Here*, 2026
2-channel video, 4K, silent, 2.39 minutes



The video installation focuses on a person who waves a giant *Progress Pride* flag in a dance-like manner: a variation of the rainbow flag expanded to include the colors of the trans*, inter*, Black, and PoC communities. The wedge-shaped stripes refer to the changes and progress that still need to be achieved. The performance took place in front of the parliament building in Seoul: as a reminder of those who are not yet represented there.

2 | *Therefore, We Sing and Dance Again*, 2026
2-channel video, Full HD, stereo sound, 9:50 minutes

The video shows excerpts from studio-recorded reenactments by dancers and musicians of a protest march, which can also be seen in *Sick Seoul*. The excerpts are edited here with alternating monochromatic panels whose colors correspond to the rainbow flag.

deferral theatre

***A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity, and Noise*, 2019**

1 | Part 1: Single-channel video, 4.5K, silent, 10:22 minutes

8 | Part 2: 1-channel video, Full HD, stereo sound, 5:07 minutes

9 | Part 3: 1-channel video, 4.5K, stereo sound, 2:55 minutes

7 | Main part: 3-channel video, Full HD, stereo sound, 27:36 minutes

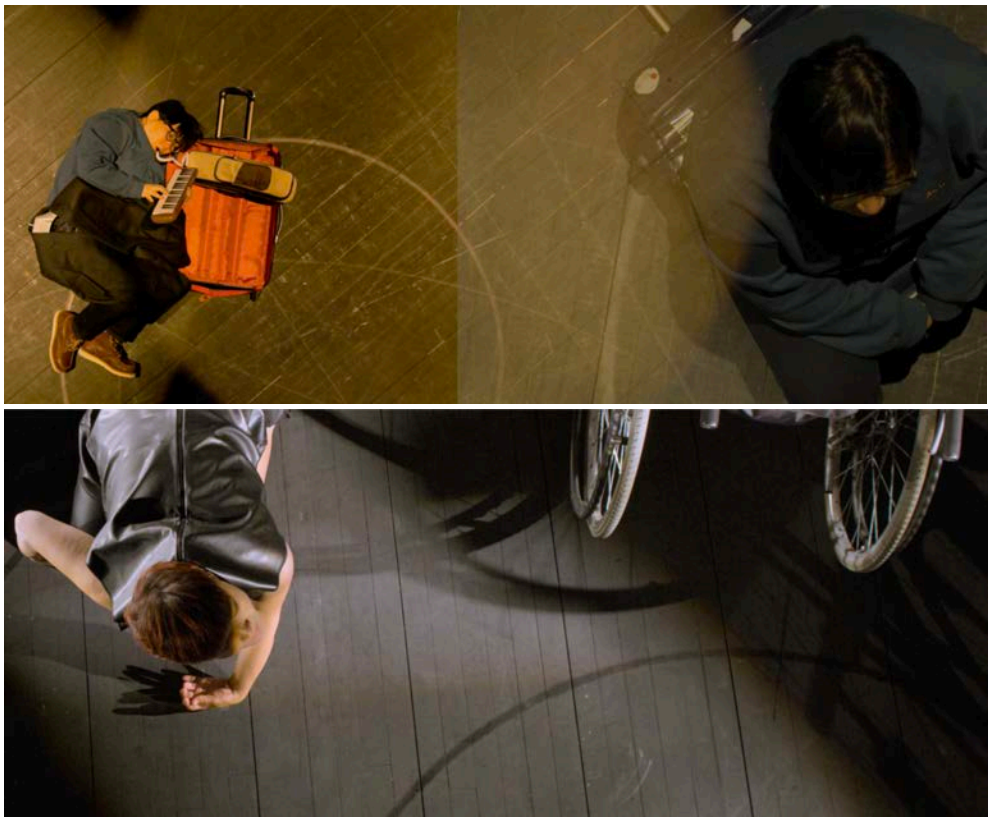
A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity and Noise, from top to bottom, left to right: 1, 2, 3

At the center of the first through third parts of the multi-part video work *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity and Noise* is the actress Lee Deungwoo, who belongs to the second generation of *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* perfroming the heroic roles (*nimai*). We first

see her applying makeup, or rather undergoing her transformation into a male character. In parts two and three, dressed in traditional Korean men's attire, she stands on a stage and performs a Pansori: a form of chant common in the 17th century that was originally performed in public spaces or private homes and served to pass down traditional stories.

By drawing on this pre-modern singing tradition within the *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* genre, the boundaries between tradition and modernity are rendered permeable, and this permeability is simultaneously situated at the level of fluid, performative gender identities. jung intervenes precisely at this point in order to detach traditional Korean culture from its patriarchal and pre-modern ascriptions and instead to negotiate it as a possible origin of a queer genealogy of cultural practices. In the main part, this genealogy is intertwined with the present.

Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity and Noise, 4



Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity and Noise, 4 (Details)

The main part of *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, Velocity and Noise* is a multi-channel video installation that, set to the hard beats of electro-pop and trans* musician KIRARA, introduces four central figures from South Korea's contemporary queer, non-normative communities: the lesbian actress Lee Yii, the Drag King Azangman, the director of the anti-ableist women's theater group Dancing Wais, Seo Jiwon, and KIRARA herself. Each in their own unique way, the four protagonists articulate their struggles and concerns: Lee Yii's confrontation with the lack of understanding from family and society, Azangman's desire to expand the South Korean drag community, and KIRARA's music, which reflects her experiences as a trans* person. Seo Jiwon transforms the physical limitations and flaws assigned to her by normative society into an impressive performance that draws its aesthetic power from the rejection of these supposed limitations and flaws.

6 | *Anomalous Fantasy. Korea Version*, 2016
1-channel video, HD, stereo sound, 85 minutes, performance documentation

Anomalous Fantasy is an open, participatory performance series that reinterprets *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* from the perspective of contemporary art. It was and is being developed in collaboration with the artist Nam Eunjin, one of the youngest and last professional Yeoseong Gukgeuk performers, for various Asian locations where the rights and freedoms of queer people remain severely restricted. The performance is created at every place in close collaboration with local queer chorus groups.

3 | *Deferral Theatre*, 2018
1-channel video, HD, stereo sound, 35:05 minutes

Deferral Theatre explores gender performances ranging from the historical *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* theater to contemporary drag performance. The work interweaves the voices and body movements of four artists who, through their stances and practices, challenge common normative, patriarchal, and Western notions of tradition and gender identity: Nam Eunjin, the only Yeoseong Gukgeuk actress of the young generation; Park Minhee, a singer of traditional *Gagok* songs; Drag King Azangman; and Cho Youngsook, who belongs to the first generation of *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* actresses.

trans theatre

12 | *Act of Affect*, 2013
1-channel video, HDV, stereo sound, 15:36 minutes

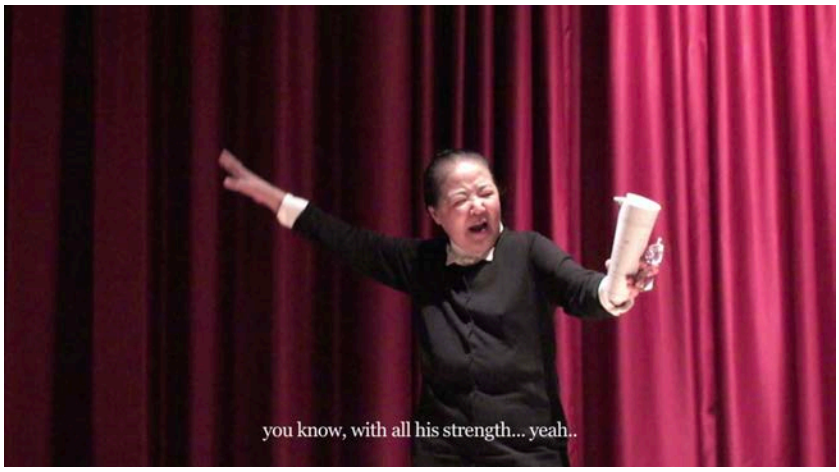
The video shows the contemporary *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* performer Nam Eunjin rehearsing the gestures and movements, as well as the voice and singing, for her role as a male character.

11 | *Lyrics1*, 2013
1-channel video, HD, stereo sound, 2:39 minutes

10 | *Lyrics2*, 2013
1-channel video, HD, stereo sound, 6:12 minutes

The videos are dedicated to first- and second-generation *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* actresses who were known for the male characters they performed. Their affection for and connection to *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* become evident through their everyday activities offstage. In *Lyrics 1*, we encounter Cho Youngsook at the grave of the legendary *nimai* actor Im Chun-aeng, who passed away in 1975 and in whose troupe Cho had performed. *Lyrics 2* shows Lee Deungwoo, a second-generation actress, while she is giving singing lessons.

14 | *Directing for Gender*, 2010
1-channel video, HDV, stereo sound, 10:15 minutes



In 1987, on the anniversary of Im Chun-aeng's death, the play *Mooyoungtab*, which had premiered in 1955 and whose script had been lost, was revived. Kim Hyeri reconstructed the script from memory. In the video, we see Kim standing in front of a red theater curtain, speaking about the character of the male hero in the play.

13 | *A Master Class*, 2010
1-channel video, HDV, stereo sound, 10:03 minutes

In the video, Lee Deungwoo, a second-generation *nimai* performer, speaks about the adoption of male role patterns.

15 | *Masquerading Moment*, 2009
1-channel video, HDV, stereo sound, 8:16 minutes

In *The Masquerading Moment*, the camera observes the faces of three formerly renowned *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* actresses known for their male roles as they apply their makeup: Cho Geumaeng, who played the hero (*nimai*); Cho Youngsook, who portrayed the clown (*sanmai*); and Lee Soja, who performed the villain (*kadaki*). As they put on theatrical makeup, false beards, and eyelashes, they appear as figures fluid in both gender and age.

Archive

jungs's archival installations emerge from a critique of the hierarchical structures and hegemonic discourses inherent in archives. Historical documents are artistically reworked and subjected to a queer reading that continually rearranges the constellations of materials in the spirit of an open archive.

17 | *Deferral Archive*, 2018
In collaboration with the design collective dl.tokki.dl
4 pigment prints, each 102,3 × 136 cm; 2 pigment prints, each 85,6 × 120,4 cm

The series of six collages is based on historical documents related to Yeoseong Gukgeuk.

21 | *The Wedding*; *The Sword Fighting*; *The One-eyed;* 2011
3 pigment prints of photographs and text, black and white, each 84,1 x 118,9 cm

The three-part series combines historical photographs from the world *of Yeoseong Gukgeuk* with anecdotal commentary from the actresses. *The Wedding* is based on a photograph of the staged marriage of Cho Geumaeng, a renowned performer of male heroes (*nimai*), to a female fan. The *Sword Fighting* refers to the physical challenges of *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* theatre. The One-eyed reveals the true background behind the use of an eye patch.

19 | *I am not Going to Sing*, 2016
Performance documentation
1-channel video, HD, stereo sound, 15:40 minutes

In this performance, Lee Soja talks about why she was never able to take on the role of the *nimai*, the hero in *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* plays, but was always cast as the villain instead. She lacked the necessary vocal training. She had deliberately avoided this training, since in the 1950s women with such training were often considered *gisaeng*—comparable to Japanese *geisha*—and were regarded as being sexually too permissive.

18 | *(Off)Stage/Masterclass*, 2013
Performance documentation
Single-channel video, HD, stereo sound, 85 minutes

(Off) Stage/Master Class is the first theatre piece jung developed as part of her *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* studies. It focuses, on the one hand, on Cho Youngsook, a first-generation performer known for her portrayal of the comic *sanmai* character. On the other hand, it features Lee Deungwoo, an experienced second-generation performer of the *nimai* role—the male hero.
In the first part, Cho recounts the history of *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* through a lecture-performance, drawing on her personal perspective and experiences. In the second part, Lee gives a lesson on how to refine the embodiment of the *nimai*.

16 | *Dust*, 2023
1-channel video, 4K, stereo sound, 14:46 minutes

The video explores Cho Youngsook's personal *Yeoseong Gukgeuk* archive, which gradually emerges on the table during her conversation with jung. The nonlinear arrangement of the material follows the flow of the narration.

20 | *Flags*, 2023
14 of 15 embroideries on fabric, each 20 x 30 cm

The 14 flags show signatures and handwriting of former actresses of *Yeoseong Gukgeuk*. They were collected by jung during her research and later embroidered. The flags function as a tribute to the performers and preserve traces of an almost vanished theatrical practice—only two of the actresses inscribed here are still alive today. Moving between archive and memory, the flags act as textile testimonies that mark both presence and absence.

Reference materials
Newspapers, advertisements, articles, images, moving images in display cases

Advertisements and newspaper articles on the main productions (*Flower in Prison*, 1948; *Sun and Moon*, 1949; *The Golden Pig* ...) and other topics related to *Yeoseong Gukgeuk*; materials on its contemporary reception; photographs from the 1950s and 1960s; essays and more.

Credits / Works

Production support
Imzizi; Lee Heein; Lee Younjeong; KIRARA; Jee Yunjeong; Designer Collective dl.tokki.dl

Performers
Cho Geumaeng; Kim Hyeri; Lee Soja; Cho Youngsook; Lee Deungwoo; Nam Eunjin; Park Minhee; Lee Jeun; Jeong Eonjin; Drag King Azangman; Lee Yii; Jiwon; KIRARA; Jangpoong, Minority Solidarity Poongmul Pae; G-Voice, Seoul Gay Men's Chorus

Economical Support
Sunpride Foundation; Art Sonje Center; Korea Artist Prize Promotion Fund

References Support
Cho Geumaeng; Kim Hyeri; Lee Soja; Cho Youngsook; Lee Deungwoo; Yeoseong Gukgeuk Preservation Association; Seoul Queer Culture Festival

Biography: siren eun young jung

http://www.sirenjung.com

Born in Incheon, South Korea, in 1974, siren eun young jung is one of South Korea's most influential video and queer-feminist artists.

She lives and works in Seoul and teaches artistic research at the Sungkyunkwan University, and Seoul Women's University.

Jung studied fine arts and feminist theory at Ewha Womans University (BFA, MFA, and DFA) in South Korea and at the University of Leeds (MA) in UK. In her work, she explores the power of desire among marginalized groups and its transformation into practices of resistance, history, and politics.

Her major works and artistic research projects include the *Dongducheon Project* (2007–2009) and the *Yeoseong Gukgeuk Project* (2008–present). In 2013, she received the Hermes Foundation Art Award; in 2015, the Sindoh Art Prize; and in 2018, the Korea Artist Prize. In 2019, she participated in the exhibition at the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Her works, developed in collaboration with the musician KIRARA, were co-produced by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul and were first shown there in 2024.

siren eun young jung has participated in numerous exhibitions and biennials, including, in addition to Venice, the Shanghai Biennale (2018), Taipei Biennale (2016–2017), Gwangju Biennale (2016), Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2015), and Mediacity Seoul Biennale (2014). Institutions such as the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery in Montreal (2023), the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen in Düsseldorf (2020), and the NTU Center for Contemporary Art in Singapore (2017) have dedicated solo exhibitions to her. She has participated in group exhibitions at institutions such as the Art Sonje Center (2026), the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2023), the Arko Art Center, Seoul (2020), the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2017), the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (2016), the Kuandu Museum of Fine Art, Taipei (2015), MAXXI, Rome, the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart (2014), and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2008, 2007).

Biography: Nathalie Boseul Shin

Nathalie Boseul Shin studied philosophy at Ewha Womans University and aesthetics at Hongik University, where she also completed her doctoral dissertation. She has curated numerous exhibitions and projects in Seoul and at other international venues.

In 2000, she began her career as a curator at the Art Center Nabi in Seoul. In 2004, she served as head of the exhibition team for the 4th Seoul International Media Art Biennale, *Media City Seoul. Digital Homo Ludens*, and in 2005 served as curator for the Uijeongbu Digital Art Festival. She has been invited as an expert to numerous international events such as Transmediale in Berlin, *Creative Evolution* at Goldsmiths, University of London, and *CeC & CaC* in Delhi, India.

Since 2007, Shin has worked as a curator for the Total Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul, where she has curated solo exhibitions by artists such as Antoni Muntadas, Ines Doujak, Gary Hill, and Dan Perjovschi. Extending beyond the museum space, she has led interdisciplinary projects such as *Road Show*, *The Show Must Go On*, *Three Frogs Restaurant,* and *10^n*.

In 2018, Shin served as an advisor for Photo Macau, curator for EMAP 2018/2019, and a contributor to the Bergen Assembly 2019 in Bergen. During the pandemic, she expanded her curatorial scope to include projects incorporating technologies such as NFTs and the metaverse.

Shin has increasingly explored the social role of art through initiatives such as *Batik Story* and *Dream Blossom Academy*, a program for people on the autism spectrum at the Jung-gu Welfare Center.

siren eun young jung

April 18 – August 2, 2026

CREDITS

An exhibition of the
Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curator
Natalie Boseul Shin
in collaboration with
Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

Curatorial Assistant
Anne Volk

PRESS + MEDIA

Press Tour
Thursday, April 16, 2026, 12:30 p.m.
Press Contact
Iris Dressler
Phone: 0711 22 33 710
dressler@wkv-stuttgart.de
Press Kit (updates) + Press Photos
www.wkv-stuttgart.de/presse

DATES

Opening
Friday, April 17, 2026, 7 p.m.

Tour with the artist and curators + panel discussion
Saturday, April 18, 2026, 1–4 p.m.

KIRARA
Music and video performance
Friday, July 10, 2026

Upcoming Events
www.wkv-stuttgart.de

ART EDUCATION

Curator-led tours
Wednesday: May 13, June 17, July 15, 2026, 7:00 p.m.
Sunday, August 2, 2026, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday Tours
German: Sundays, 3 p.m.; English: First Sunday of the month, 2 p.m.

Guided tours by appointment + Art education
Info: Anne Volk, volk@wkv-stuttgart.de

INFO

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70173 Stuttgart
Phone 0711 22 33 70
zentrale@wkv-stuttgart.de

Hours
Tue, Thu–Sun: 11 a.m.–6 p.m.; Wed: 11 a.m.–8 p.m.

Regular admission prices
5 euros / 3 euros (reduced)

Free admission
- for members of the WKV and other art associations affiliated with the ADKV (Association of German Art Associations)
- for school and college students from Stuttgart
- available on a case-by-case basis at our discretion

Free admission for everyone
Wednesdays

Building: Accessibility and Services
Barrier-free access, wheelchair-accessible restroom, wheelchairs, portable folding chairs, changing table, WiFi, self-service bar

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KAMS
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SBS Cultural Foundation
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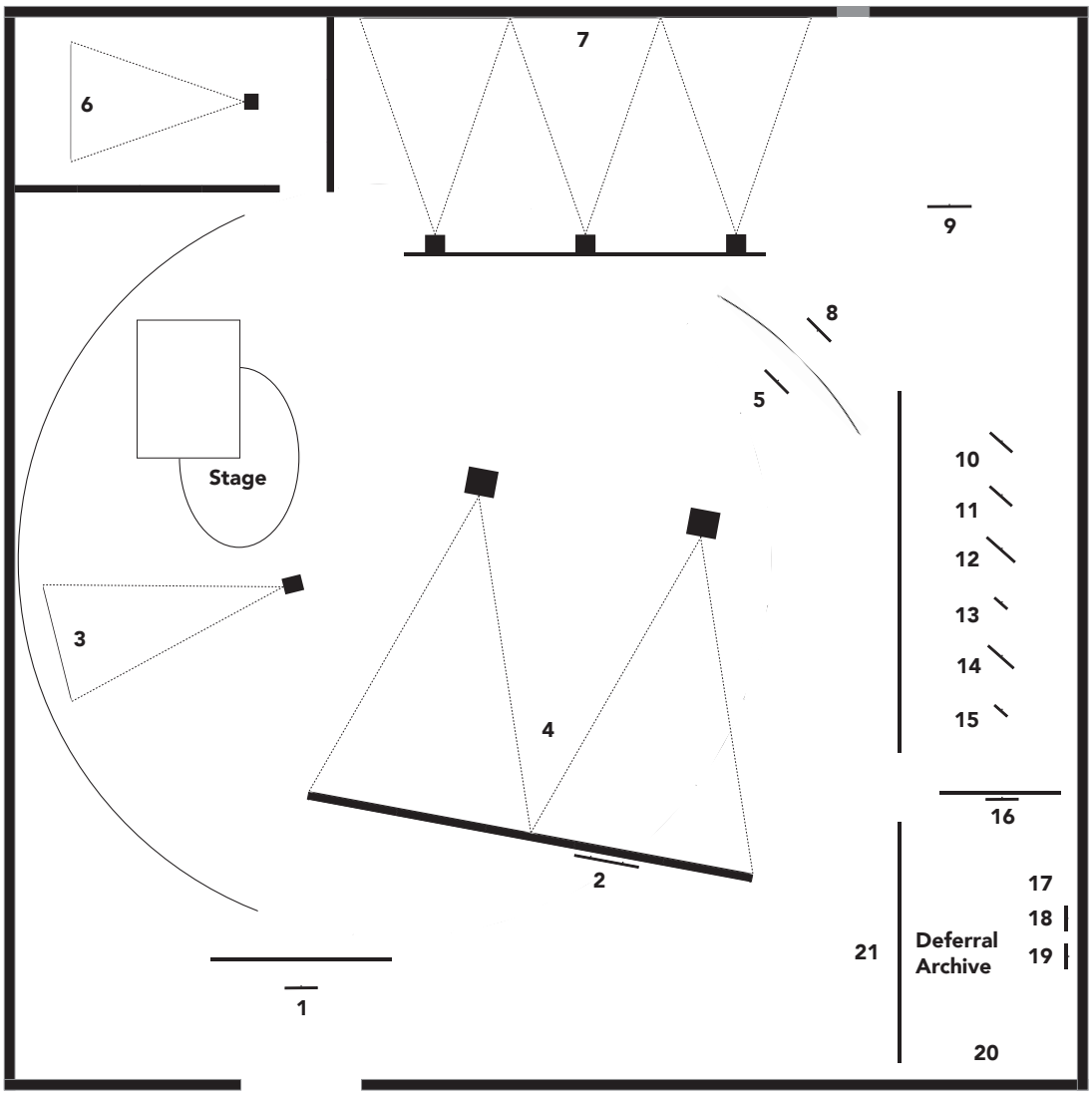
Floor Plan

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