

About Speaking for Myself

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Jeong Ahram's solo exhibition entitled *Speaking for Myself* held at Space Willing N Dealing in October 2018 can be read as a powerful feminist message because its objects and themes are directly related to women's issues. Topics Jeong deals with include the Gangnam murder case of 2016, the public restroom spy camera phenomenon that caused social uproar and in the artist's documentation of performances that took place in public places where only women appear. However, one cannot simply define her as a feminist artist. In fact Jeong Ahram aims to show the relationships amongst those who engage in the media, its targets and those who respond, and the inverse of this relationship as well as the complicated matrix of reciprocal influences. Such tendencies are strongly reflected in Jeong's early works. For example, in *No More Picture with a Dead Body* (2011), a work she presented during her stay in America, Jeong's orientation to deal with such a network of relationships is more apparent. A performer who lies in the exhibition space becomes an apparatus that activates the shutter of the camera that is connected to the performer's heartbeat and captures images of the audience. The artist herself, in a role outside this apparatus leads a series of moments in order to mediate the situation, presenting a live performance in which the photographs are projected onto the wall so that the interventions made on the site are visible. The results produced from these reciprocal interventions become the proof of a network of relationships, positioning the subject and the object as reversed in the course of the interactions of each role in this particular place and situation. In other words, the roles of the artist who directs behind the camera, that of the performer whose movements are captured by the camera through the artist's eyes and that of the viewers observing this whole process are reversed by the responses of the apparatuses placed inside the exhibition space.

Jeong Ahram, who focuses on interpreting the views at the intersection where the roles and positions of individuals interact with each other, has expanded her interest into the social context after returning to Korea. A good example of this is her video *Are You Happy* (2014). Presented in 2014 the work is based on the shocking suicide case of the happiness lecturer Choi Yoonhee, known as the Happiness Evangelist. This work questions what individual happiness means in society by associating the suicide case with the then 'How are you all doing' movement with hand-written posters, illuminating similar points between the two by addressing the somewhat unfamiliar job of the happiness evangelist and a manifestation of concerns about the gloomy life of individuals in the social context that appeared in the poster movement.

As mentioned above the exhibition that took place in 2018 covered a number of real incidents. These cases are not simply approached from a feminist perspective only because the targets of the attacks were 'individuals' — even if the incidents were oriented toward a certain gender —, and have led towards social ramifications within gender issues because of interventions in the media. Here, the artist focuses on the 'media' itself that plays a role in widely delivering and spreading these incidents. This tendency is most obviously seen in her work *Peer to Peer, Woman to Woman*. This installation presents small holes that remind us of the phenomena we often encounter in the public restrooms of women, evoking a fear that hidden cameras might be installed somewhere. Furthermore, by plugging the holes in the restroom with bits of toilet paper the installation becomes a place where a bond between individuals is formed. Small monitors are also attached to the outer walls of this restroom installation. Here, the artist takes a video from the monitor as it plays videos and photographs circulating on YouTube. This act of recording places the artist in the position of the media itself. This act appears to be about choosing, delivering and spreading the incident while not being involved. In this way the artist allows us to

reconsider the influence of media and its intervention process, which is more commonly considered in its terms of delivering objective facts.

Public Body Protocol, a work based on the similarity of an action manual between 'suppression' and 'rescue,' presents Jeong's perspectives on how the individual's body is situated in the public realm with a focus on social context. Similar to the way media functions the work also portrays the process of the recontextualization of an individual by the collective in a different form. Another work, Accidental Survivor, sources messages of mourning in tribute to a woman who was killed with no specific reason. While a foreign woman somewhat awkwardly reads the comments of post-it notes written by mourners in the video, a stage for speaking is offered. In this work an issue that seems to be a tragic incident for 'Korean women' as a specific group can be regarded as a case which expands towards all individuals to speak, without distinction of gender and nationality. Furthermore, including the foreign woman reciting the script in the video on view in the exhibition, 5 other individuals from different genders, occupations, nationalities and ages participated in the filming.

Maybe we might have an idea that if just one person feels good about something, everybody feels the same way, which is a uselessly amicable, romantic and ignorant attitude. Such relations in which some feel good while others feel bad, beyond the rules of behavior and as a manner to be observed between individuals regardless of gender are inappropriate and unsound at both an individual and social level. However, there are so many things that have not been voiced because of social stances, one's own circumstances and various other conditions. Under the current situation in which so many things have been revealed and have become serious issues to the point that we have become disillusioned by a corrupt society, we might hope that we are now suffering from growing pains and are heading toward a more positive direction. Jeong Ahram's message is read as a reflection (with feminist issues added) on a few circumstances a vulnerable individual (both genders, male or female) faces. It also advises us to confront the intentions of the numerous forms of media that are leading us.