

Junghun Kim  
BREATHE  
A MENDING  
SONG  
INTO THESE  
EARTHLY  
WOUNDS

EN



RADIUS  
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The work of Junghun Kim addresses the scope of man-made ecological wounds on the planet's interspecies relationships. As a response, Kim aspires to overstep the physical and spiritual thresholds towards more embodied and regenerative ways of living on Earth. Informed by research on evolutionary biology—including molecular DNA, comparative embryology, fossil records, and anatomical evidence—cosmologies, and technologies of extraction, the exhibition BREATHE A MENDING SONG INTO THESE EARTHLY WOUNDS cultivates a practice of attunement and resilience, to address narratives around the critical state of the planetary ecologies. Encompassing ceramic, painting, sculpture, installation, and meditation, Junghun Kim's work is an invitation to sharpen our senses in imaginative, meditative, and spiritual ways in order to navigate anthropocentric wounds. This exhibition is a proposition to re-situate ourselves within a planet that is relational and contingent, for what we make of it is woven with larger systems of reciprocity and responsibility.

The works in this exhibition are poetic, spiritual, and political instances revealing the scope of ecological causalities which have been deliberately placed outside the vision of anthropocentrism. Kim's works reflect on the systematic ruination of capitalist development, whereby interspecies relationships are continuously being wounded by exhausting and nonreciprocal interventions in the biosphere. Through an acute sensitivity and imagination, Kim seeks ways to spirit through these wounds to foster more sustainable and spiritual adjustments to the world, towards the apprehension of ecological wisdoms of care. Reckoning with the Earth's critical drift, he raises awareness of the planet's vital interdependencies so as to interrupt harmful anthropocentric patterns and recalibrate humanity's ecological compass. In this exhibition, Kim assembles physical and spiritual thresholds to apprehend the complex and unbalanced state of our interspecies relations, steering towards more embodied and regenerative ways of living on Earth.

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The hurtling pace of development in technological systems, with a long and chronic dependency on the extraction of natural resources and the totalising management of the living, hinders possibilities of setting and distributing sustainable and reciprocal perspectives. The internal logic of seemingly smoothly functioning capitalistic systems is articulated on overriding any kind of existence but the human one. As Timothy Morton argues, this supremacy of human existence—with its own arbitrary hierarchies based on categories like gender, race, class, sexual orientation, etc.—is both a default ontology and a default utilitarianism that was built into the social space, which presently encompasses much of the entire surface of the Earth.<sup>1</sup> As explored in RADIUS' NATURECULTURES year-programme, modernity, hand in hand with technological progress, was built on a severance between nature and culture, eroding the social, philosophical, and physical ties with all that is not human. Mending that severance is an intrinsic goal of Kim's practice, as he navigates the wounds of modernity through a holistic practice that seeks to establish solidarity, empathy, care, kinship, and love.

Kim has been attentive to ecological entanglements since his upbringing in the mountainous, small rural communities around Gyeongju, South Korea. Growing up, he became a keen observer of plant and animal behaviour and emotions, acquiring a comprehension on the physical and spiritual interconnectedness between species in an ecosystem, understanding that any degradation of nature entails a degradation of the soul. The literary work of Chicana feminist and scholar Gloria E. Anzaldúa resonantly connects with Kim as a spiritual artist. In line with Anzaldúa's ideas, Kim's practice inscribes art as a spiritual discipline, in which spirituality is a different kind and way of knowing that aims to expand perception and to become aware of the interconnections between all things by attaining a grand perspective.<sup>2</sup> For Kim, just like for Anzaldúa, spirituality is a web of symbols, a philosophy, a worldview, a perspective, a perception; in other words, it is an intrinsic element in the human constructions of the world. Kim's artistic gestures are always informed by what Anzaldúa describes as *coming to terms with spirit*: bringing yourself into harmony with the world within and around you.<sup>3</sup> Through his meditative pathway to creativity—informed by a meditation practice that underlines similarities between objects that reveal the boundless interrelations in an ecosystem—Kim empowers his imagination to bypass customary ways of thinking and behaving that are reinforced by a nonreciprocal relationality with the world.

1 Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological* (London: Pelican Books), p. 66.

2 Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark, Luz en lo Oscuro*, edited by Analouse Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 38.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 40.



Kim bridges his artistic practice with biological and ecological knowledge to provide ways of understanding the holistic relations between everyday life and planetary conditions, voicing non-human narratives and multi-species genealogical scenarios. This is particularly noticeable in his paintings, where an abundance of references and elements from his research coalesce. In Kim's paintings, the technological violence onto nonhuman organisms and systems is counteracted by the myriad of anatomical and biological similarities across species, pointing out to millions of years of co-evolution. Multiple movements of time, circulation, gravity, balance, resistance and collectiveness coexist in the paintings. Vibrant and kaleidoscopic interspecies relations unfold, exalting the plurality of earthly life on the one hand, addressing the violence it is exposed to on the other.

In the same vein, the two main sculptural installations at the core of RADIUS could be experienced as multi-species assemblages, which, in the words of anthropologist Anna L. Tsing, are 'open-ended gatherings' that allow us to ask about communal effects with assumptions, revealing potential histories in the making.<sup>4</sup> An intricate amalgamation of human, animal, and plant elements make up a hybrid compound of thousands of years of interspecies co-evolution. Kim re-composes the human-non-human nexus in vaster scales of time, thinking in magnitudes that defy the human lifespan and that trigger us to grapple with the depth of human impact on Earth in a minuscule timeframe within planetary life.

How can a responsible and responsive discernment to the present ecological emergency be developed? Kim's work strives to reach answers by inviting visitors to experience it in a reflective manner, often allowing them to physically take part in the work. This is particularly characteristic of the other sculptural installation made for this exhibition. Conceived as an architecture for contemplation, visitors are invited to enter the structure and rest under the man-dala-inspired paintings on the inside of the crowning domes. The five domes correspond to the five elements from Wuxing, an ancient Chinese cosmological theory that theorises earth, wood, metal, fire, and water as the five elements or phases that explain change in the cosmos. In its traditional doctrine, the five elements are connected in two cycles of interactions: a generating or creative one, and an overcoming and destructive one. Present in many fields and disciplines, Wuxing is exemplary of a cosmology rooted in the sensing, relating, and imagining beyond the physical borders of the human body and mind. Within Kim's practice, just like other philosophical references like yingyang, different kinds of attunement are encouraged so as to get rid of modernity's frameworks of sense-making and relationality based on human exceptionalism.

For this exhibition, Kim has produced a film where he, dressed up in a costume made of painted paper, performs a choreography of attunement across different landscapes of Jeju Island, South Korea. From plastic dumps to war caves, from the island shores to its farmland, Kim connects to the ecologies of the island in an intuitive ritual. We hear Kim singing in the style of pansori (판소리), a traditional Korean music genre composed of a singer and a drummer characterised by expressive, emotional singing. Channeling ecological grief, Kim sings for and through the island, utilising his body as a vehicle of expression for nonhuman sensitivities. Alike many other folkloric singing around the world, such as the joik of the Sámi peoples, the throat-singers of Tuva, or the cantu a tenre of Sardinia, as well as the different kinds of chanting in Native American and Siberian shamanistic cultures, the sounds of nature are mimicked and embodied, as if the world is singing through the singer. Thinking about how humans express the world through sound, James Bridle phrases that "we speak first and foremost not as disassociated individuals or an exceptional species, but about, and through, and with the world".<sup>5</sup>



Still image from Junghun Kim's film *From the cells of the Mother* (2023).

4 Anna L. Tsing, 'When the Things We Study Respond to Each Other. Tools for Unpacking "the Material"', in *Anthropos and the Material*, ed. Penny Harvey, Christian Krohn-Hansen, Knut G. Nustad (Durham: Duke University Press, Duke 2019), p. 229.

5 James Bridle, *Ways of Being. Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence* (London: Penguin Random House, 2022), p. 150.





Junghun Kim's work calls for kinds of being in the world that are committed to notice interdependencies and act upon them responsibly. To attain a broader panoramic wherein to situate our vital experiences within larger webs of relations, spaces, and times.<sup>6</sup> His artistic practice echoes Alexis Shotwell's call for the cultivation of practices of perceiving interdependence, nourishing an ethical relation to complex ecologies in which we are implicated and through which we are formed.<sup>7</sup> Precisely this juncture of attentiveness and altruism is what makes Kim's work a dutiful reminder of our shared responsibility as non-exclusive dwellers to a multi-scalar planet.<sup>8</sup> While we experience his work, he keeps on breathing, adding his exhale to the millions of years of breath and time shared with all kinds of earthly inhabitants that have preceded us and that will survive us. All the while, he tries to mend the severances that alienate us, for these earthly wounds of ours can still be a stitch away from mending.

6 Carolyn F. Strauss, 'Seeking Radical Affection', in *Slow Spatial Reader. Chronicles of Radical Affection*, ed. Carolyn F. Strauss (Valiz: Amsterdam, 2021), p. 15.

7 Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity. Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 79.

8 The term "multi-scalar" is a paraphrase of what author Gabrielle Hecht coined as "interscalar vehicles". This term was used in her paper 'Interscalar Vehicles for an African Anthropocene: On Waste, Temporality, and Violence', which appeared in the journal *Cultural Anthropology*, volume 33, no. 1 (2018). In her own words, interscalar vehicles are "objects and modes of analysis that permit scholars and their subjects to move simultaneously through deep time and human time, through geological space and political space."





Junghun Kim, *Integrative Breathing*, *Geological Meditation Series*, 2022. Picture by Steven Maybury.





Junghun Kim  
BREATHE A MENDING SONG INTO THESE EARTHLY WOUNDS  
2 December 2023 – 11 February 2024

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#### **This exhibition has been made possible with the support of:**

Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds  
The Municipality of Delft  
Mondriaan Fund  
Iona Stichting  
Stichting Stokroos  
Arts Council Korea

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Junghun Kim would like to thank the warm support of those who helped this project to be realized: the generous support from the curator of this show Sergi Rusca, the RADIUS team, his parents Jeongsil Moon and Young Jung Kim, and María José Crespo. Thank you for all the help to Clay Cool Collective and EWKC team and friends, and to Steven Maybury, Maja Wachowska and Miriam del Seppia for their assistance

