

LKFF X LUX: In conversation with The Stream and Meetingroom

Moderated by Sun Park from LUX

<https://lux.org.uk/event/lkff-thestream-meetingroom>

Sun Park: Hi everyone.

Welcome to In Conversation with The Stream and Meetingroom, presented by the London Korean Film Festival and LUX. For the past few years the LKFF organised Artist Video Strand in collaboration with LUX. This year we are very pleased to partner with the festival again and host online screenings and an event.

We are presenting two Artist-in-Focus screenings with Moojin Brothers and Seo Young Chang. Please take a look at our website for more information.

As part of the festival, especially for the occasion of the online edition I thought it'd be great to invite South Korean organisations that have been actively supporting contemporary art practice online for many years. Today we are joined by directors of two Korean online initiatives, Sera Jung from The Stream, and Jungin Hwang from Meetingroom. They've been advocating to cultivate an archival practice both on and offline that foregrounds sharing. As a person who have been living outside Korea and trying to connect with what's going on in the art world in my home country, I tremendously benefited from their platforms.

So I hope this conversation also becomes a gateway for those who want to research and have access to emerging artists and art practices in Korea. Also I hope talking about how these organisations are recording and archiving the present, putting it back out to the public, in the context of Korea can be a sort of provocation to rethink what's the role of an archive and different ways that an art can be shared. This conversation will be in Korea and will have English subtitles. So, without further adieu I'm going to invite Sera Jung and Jungin Hwang.

Jungin Hwang: Hi

Sera Jung: Hello

Park: Thank you so much for accepting LUX's invitation. It would be nice to take this opportunity today to learn about The Stream and Meetingroom and to talk about how we should prepare and respond to what is happening now. Shall we start with an introduction from the director of The Stream, Sera Jung?

Jung: Hello. First of all, thank you for inviting me to LUX and the London Korean Film Festival's online talk. It is my pleasure to be able to introduce you to the contemporary art and moving image scene in Korea.

I'm Sera Jung, the founder and director of The Stream. I used to lecture on contemporary art curating and art criticism. At universities, I taught contemporary art theory and media art theory. With these experiences, it took some time but I now run the Korean video art archive platform which I established in 2015. I continuously try to expand on the scope of work by experimenting with moving image/video art curating and criticism in Korean contemporary art museums.

To briefly introduce The Stream to people abroad, although we will discuss in the conversation later, to briefly introduce, it is an archive platform of Korean video art. While operating an online platform is our core aim, we also publish video art criticism under the same. We regularly organise artist screening and talk programmes offline, as well as planning series of video art exhibitions every year. In fact, we opened an exhibition two days ago, called Video Acts. We choose a theme around video as a series and make an exhibition every year. Many of these activities are planned to introduce contents on the online archive from various perspectives and expand the critical discourse around it.

Park: Jungin, it would be great if you could also introduce yourself and about Meetingroom.

Jungin Hwang: Yes hello. I'm Jungin Hwang. I run a curatorial research group in Korea called Meetingroom. First of all, thank you LUX for inviting us to this event. And I wish a great success for the Korean Film Festival in London this year. Meetingroom consists of a group of art practitioners. Our group started off as a small study meeting for curators, archive researchers, and various practitioners in the art industry, to share some practical information and knowledge that we need to know other than the process of making art. We've been active since we launched online in 2013, but it was not until we opened a physical office in 2017 that we were able to meet writers, audiences, collectors, and emerging producers face to face. By having discussions and conducting workshops, we had the opportunities to ask about the practical challenges and what needed most attention in practice. Focusing on educational programs, we were able to physically meet people in the field and expand our work to various activities such as exhibition planning and publishing. Right now, we're focusing on research projects.

Park: That's very interesting. I'm also curious about the motivation behind how the organisation began and what sort of awareness you had in mind when you started. It would be nice to hear about these.

Jung: As it's clearly explained on our logo, it is an archive platform for Korean video art. Many exhibitions and works from other countries are introduced in Korea but we began from this awareness that despite the fact that there are so many Korean media artists, Korean video and moving image artists, in reality it was difficult to bring together and archive their works. At the time of setting this up, I thought that archive platforms in Korea didn't really exist. Even the ones that were run by the public institutions were almost non-existent. Besides there were access issues with the archives at the national and public art museums. There were a lot of limitations for the public and the general users. While working as a curator for a long time, I too had a lot of difficulties when doing research especially for time-based, video art/moving images. And with these issues in mind, I launched The Stream in 2015.

Prior to this, when I worked at Asia Culture Centre (ACC) in Gwangju, Korea for their opening in 2014. Before launching The Stream, I began to work with the people who knew I was getting ready for this platform, I learnt a lot about the situations and the infrastructure of archive platforms at national and public institutions during this time. Starting with these cultural information centres, this is when a lot of issues around the necessity of archiving and digital archiving in Korea started to become more prominent. Of course, before ACC, when the digital information centre was opened in Seoul by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in 2013 institutions were beginning to recognize the need for digital archives and rapid digitalization were also beginning to take action.

However, there were limitations on autonomous research within the national and public institutions. From a localised view, the infrastructure of media/video art archives need to be a little different, but it was difficult to put all of this under one system. By identifying research purposes within The Stream, we got the opportunity to develop the archive in new ways from the scratch, such as adjusting the scope of the archive or the categorising the archive. During this hectic time of setting this up, the issues surrounding the archives in Korea were becoming more pronounced, and I think The Stream received a lot of spotlight from this.

Hwang: I really sympathise a lot with what Sera said. I think we also started with very similar issues in mind. We don't make archives ourselves, but you can think of us as a group that advocates for the need for archives and the importance of research on archives. With Leeji Hong, the director of our curating team, and Eun Ji Ga, the director of our art archive, we thought a lot about our connection with archives. Working as an art gallery curator, exhibition planning is not just about showing the work, but there are numerous complex processes behind it. Throughout these processes, there are a lot of information and knowledge that arises through the experience of meeting various people, but it is not easy to circulate this experience from exhibition archives. Similar to the limitations on autonomous research Sera mentioned earlier,

when you're planning a project, you begin to explore an idea, then shares it and activates it. And in the process of nurturing that idea, you shed light onto different perspectives.

In the absence of such communication network, we asked ourselves what kind of movement we can create. As practitioners, we came up with questions about exhibition planning, what an art archive is. Through conducting surveys on the public, looking at case studies, then publish and share writings and research we aimed to raise awareness. And this is how Meetingroom started. If we study by ourselves and continuously publish the outcomes even in a situation where that network does not exist, we can show how knowledge and research can still be shared. Likewise, we wanted to instill the idea that information or knowledge can be a medium in itself that has the potential to generate new ideas. Based on this, our identity as a research organization that conducts an in-depth and focused research was formed which led to various other activities too including exhibitions, education programmes. And this is what makes us who we are today.

Park: I think we can now move onto the three keywords Jungin suggested three keywords: archive, online platform, and alternative. I think we can talk about them one by one starting with archives. I think it would be nice to hear about how to define archives. It would also be great to hear about how organizations working in Korea think about archives, how we can define archiving in a country with a short history of archiving.

Jung: I didn't think that the work at The Stream's platform required a specialised degree in archiving. So as you mentioned earlier Sun, there are inevitably a lot of collaborative elements. I think I approached this platform with a lot of awareness on how to make an online archive platform that is suitable in Korea, and how to archive and publicly share moving images or video art that are time-based and non-material art.

On a basic level, I think a good attitude to have for an archive platform is the shareability. Another thing is partnerships and collaborations, because I think it should be a platform for professionals. Any of the general public can access the contents as it's shared online, but it's most valuable to the fellow practitioners working in this field including curators, researchers and artists. And they really shed light on the value and the need of the archives. I always thought about the issues of accessibility, particularly about the design of the streaming platform where the work is presented as its entirety, and the architecture of the online interface of the archive.

As a researcher myself when I research works from other institutions online, there are usually too many stages, and even when you get further, a lot of the times it turns out to be a waste of time as you are told to book an appointment to come to the offline archive. So I tried not to

create more than two clicks when accessing contents on The Stream. Another feature is that we include links to individual artists' webpages to show that we run this platform more openly, minimising limitations. So in the process of planning the platform we thought a lot about the value of such archives, particularly about what increases the accessibility to time-based, non-material art, and about the issues that people would have when researching from the archive. Also, we asked who uses the archive. Who can take advantage of this archive. I also thought about how I will use it if I was the user. We put a lot of effort in the design of the archive with our The Stream research team.

Hwang: First of all, you asked about how to archive the present, but the present is a very big concept. So when we were dealing with archiving and archival information, we never really thought about becoming an archive ourselves. Archives come together over a long period of time, and I don't think we can complete the archive of our present now we are somewhere along the timeline of what is 'ongoing'. And so what we are focusing on is the work that needs to be done with archives in Korea now, and also considering what can be learned from how archives operate abroad, and how these organisations abroad are reacting and going forward in this coronavirus era. This sort of thinking in the wider perspective is what we are focusing on. The way we have dealt with archiving until now has focused purely on art; about the artwork itself and how the exhibition was. But I think it's important to capture our present cultural and societal concerns and more importantly, what people think about the technical development when they start using the online platform, and how their thoughts change as a result of that. I think the way we archive the present is through articles and critiques on exhibitions and archives, as well as what is happening in the art world.

Park: Following from this, it would be nice to move onto the discussion about the online platform now. Could you tell us more about how archives are utilised and used as an educational resource through the online platform?

Hwang: For me, the members are all spread out in different countries. The benefit of the online platform is that anyone can access it anywhere. In fact, a lot of the members are female researchers, and sometimes people go through phases of career breaks. I chose the online platform so that we can still keep our expertise and continue to research the areas of our interest. Following on from this idea, I wanted to find out more about what kind of people we could meet, and how the information and knowledge we provide are used by those people who access it, as well as their reactions to it.

For example, when we were asked to talk about public art, instead of the typical approach of thinking of it as simply a physical space in the public, we thought about how we can expand the

notion of 'public' like what happens when we extend it to the online space. With this in mind, I have come to deal with issues like the need for offline education and the 'publicness' of art. I do think that for those people who have only seen our activities online, the place to hear first-hand what we think is offline, as the organisers of the platform. Of course, online streaming is available but the benefit of meeting face-to-face is quite substantial. I think it's very important to have a balance between online and offline activities. This also depends on the person to accept it or not. When the person accepts this as an educational function, we can provide this role, but I don't think we are trying to educate people about this.

Park: I think this is a very important point because even though we are talking about the online platform, it's not to say that this is better than the offline, but rather it's important to think about how the two spaces can balance and complement each other. I wonder how the on/offline activities at The Stream is different and how the online platform is run and complemented by offline events.

Jung: At The Stream we're not trying to focus on storing, confining and preserving various contents that we call archives. We think about how we will deliver these contents and how we can use this archive in a different way that expands curatorial practice and critical discourse. Essentially, we place a lot of value on the extensibility of the online archive, and we try to make both online and offline activities to complement each other and continuously create a synergy.

On top of that, we operate with the anticipation that the addition of publishing art criticism will make a great synergy. Because there are so many artists and so many works, people often approach the archive without knowing what they are looking for. I hoped that people would browse through what kind of works exist within a certain category rather than approach it with specific artists and works they know already. As you can see on our website, we've equipped it with a search function and categories and tag functions. You can also click like. Each user can recontextualise the archive. If I clicked like on something before, they may appear in different orders later on after it has been recontextualised. With the randomise function - We have about 400 archive contents so on that main page, our aim was to allow for infinite scrolling. But because each browser has different specifications, the infinite scrolling didn't really work well with some browsers. but that means the works from the past continues to accumulate. I hoped that the contents would be circulated through this randomise function.

In the end, the contents that accumulate online need to be engaged and contextualised through curatorial practices offline. I personally think that an archivist should be able to critique as well. In particular, the reason why I write and publish criticisms is because the history of video and moving images in media art is really ongoing. We are still continuing on this journey so it's

difficult for someone to just arrange and summarise everything now. But before it's arranged, if there weren't even any writings, not even one single archive, there will be no resources for someone who tries to organise it in the future. I'd like The Stream to make archiving this ongoing history possible. By experimenting with publications and criticisms I'd like The Stream to take the role in expanding and critically examining the genealogy of video artists or art histories within the wider framework of Korean contemporary art. Personally, I think the discussion on which one (on/offline) is of higher value or lower value is actually becoming meaningless these days.

Hwang: In 2017, when I was travelling around Seoul, Gwangju, Daegu and Busan, I recognised that the needs of each region was very different around specific topics of art market, conservation, distribution and curating. I'm sure it's the same in London. As Seoul is the capital city, a lot of the activities and infrastructures are focused there. Of course, there are infrastructures in other cities too, but I found out that a lot of people had difficulties planning partnership programmes that could bring a synergy effect, or even establishing partnerships between different spaces. They were also lacking in opportunities to gain experience and knowledge in the field. If you think of what we publish online as a one-way communication the benefit of the offline is the mutual interaction from which you can learn and come up with new ideas and directions.

When you mentioned about LUX also contemplating about online vs. offline activities, I think it's the same for both LUX and The Stream in that perhaps the most frequented audience are experts in this field or researchers. When you meet in an offline situation, questions are raised by a variety of individuals, all with different cultural backgrounds. So you understand what the current needs are in real world from which these outcomes can be converted to other offline events and other online contents. There are definitely limitations with one-way communications in group events. When you're trying to get information there is a limit as to how far you can go. So offline events are very important as the discussions become richer and less limited through contributions from the audiences and participants. Vice versa, you can also benefit by changing your target audience. If you expand your audience to target people from different regions and countries, and increase the interaction between different regions and countries, you can really expand the scope of what we need today and what needs to be done.

Park: I don't think online is necessarily an equal space, as there are people who get left out in that space. But there are also those who get left out in offline situations. Particularly in this coronavirus era I think it's important that we find a way to make use of both online and offline spaces. The idea of recontextualising the archive that Sera mentioned and the circulation of information at Meetingroom were memorable to me. It feels like Meetingroom's research that

culminates in books and activities never reaches a conclusion but continues to develop and change. From those ambiguous conclusions accepting and responding I had an impression that the two organisations are accepting, responding and evolving rather than just presenting the output.

Hwang: I think we accepted that there will be limitations as to how much both our organisations could do. That's why when we first accepted that we could not digest all the large concepts like the archive, contemporary art, the contemporaneity and online, we were able to find what we could do within that. Because we started off with an awareness of our limitations, we were able to find our specialisations

and what we could do. As Sera mentioned earlier, publishing is very important. We were in a situation where we could publish a book from the articles online. When meeting offline, by receiving feedback from others we think about the limitations of the information we gathered and try to think objectively about what the issue is. We unpack those limitations and when we've come to a point where say 'okay these are our thoughts in this present moment', we make this into a publication from which we think about the next step.

And I think this is the role of publishing. Our latest publication 'Share Me' is a result of that process as well.

Park: I think it would be good to discuss the key word 'alternatives' now. It would be great if we could talk about how alternative spaces sustain themselves and why it's important to maintain independence.

Jung: These alternatives we're talking about are not sub-concept of something that already exists and that is insufficient It's rather about starting something new because it does not exist yet. I think if The Stream continues and tries to maintain the characteristics of an (art) organisation, in the end it is necessary to do a lot of research internally and develop the internal strength further to maintain that value. Particularly for independent curators or independent art organisations Meetingroom is also a non-profit organisation and it's inevitable for non-profits to have different characteristics to commercial organisations. I believe LUX is also a non-profit art organisation but just because it's non-profit, that doesn't mean that there are no budget or costs for staff and maintenance. In fact, in non-profit organisations, each member has to have a very high expertise, and as they become more recognized as experts in their field, the organisation also becomes very solid.

After about 2 or 3 years into the organisation, a lot of people started to approach us. In the beginning, we thought internally about how we were going to continue this organisation. but with

the research we had done, we had the drive to prepare this. At one point we started to see the path as public institutions with a much bigger budget and run large-scale projects started to call us. We continue to have relationships with those institutions through meetings and discussions. Thanks to our researchers at The Stream we are able to grow bigger as an organisation. And most of all, I'm grateful to the many artists and researchers who participate in our archive platform. To be honest, I believe our platform grows together with these people – 'co-evolving' in a way. And we're really trying hard to do this.

Hwang: When I heard that a lot of people think that we are an 'alternative' organisation, I thought about whether we really are an alternative organisation because it's something that someone would need to do one day. That's why the group was formed and became active. What Sera said really resonated with me as we had various shared concerns when we first started. So I would like to first say that there are many parts that I can relate to. Meetingroom has a motto which is on our website too. 'Stay independent. Think collectively. Act cooperatively'. It shows both possibilities and limitations at the same time, and Meetingroom was an alternative to an institution, showing in practice you can be independent and co-exist at the same time. We could see that it was not easy to make it happen. That was the start of our 'alternative', as we wanted to demonstrate that it is possible to work together and independently.

The number of people who throws new questions to us has been increasing as people think that Meetingroom is an organisation that can recontextualise and reinterpret whatever topic that is given to us. As more and more groups are able to freely propose questions and ideas asking, 'don't we need this?' The art industry in Korea will prosper more. Some people might have thought that we were alternatives when we started as there are more emerging independent curator collectives and study groups that are thinking of other ideas with a similar model as us I do think that they are alternatives when they do things that we could not do. I think it will be better to see them as movements that began after a lot of alternative thoughts.

When art practitioners and professionals all come together with the audience that is what makes culture. In order to enrich that culture, there needs to be more alternative movements in the future. There is also a problem when new alternative movements become an establishment and how it acknowledges new ideas. Becoming established isn't necessarily bad if they are willing to change their directions. It would be nice to think that being established and exploring alternatives go hand in hand. And influence each other in a positive way.

Jung: There are a lot of online archives and immaterial art platforms being formed. They are run by curators or artist collectives. They establish and run the platforms together. The Stream also becomes part of that ecosystem through the online platform and research groups, and you can

say that Meetingroom also has the same nature. This ecosystem that allows for possibilities of partnerships and networking is what I think is the situation in the Korean contemporary art today.

Park: It would be really nice to end it here on the positive note, but I don't think we can leave out the discussion around COVID-19. It's a little bit depressing, but I think we should end by hearing your thoughts on what kind of changes are taking place, how you view it and what kind of plans you have.

Hwang: I think the most common discussions in organisations in Korea is that it is very limiting when offline activities have stopped completely, and they have to find an online alternative. I thought about why this is the case, they're now faced with the situation where they have to change from being archives that stores physical records of activities to a sort of a live streaming channel. The organisations that didn't anticipate that are in a panic mode, whereas those that were originally getting ready for a live channel already have the infrastructure in place to produce a lot of contents despite the lockdown. Even if we go back to the offline, I think moving between channels (both offline and online) should become more fluid rather than cutting out the online channels. For a long time, the official websites of the organisations in Korea has been focusing on the artworks in their collection with just the descriptions of the work. The way the contents are delivered has been centred around artist/artwork, illustrative and one-directional I think we need to find alternatives to this and think about how we can diversify the channels.

Jung: In Korea, the government is controlling the virus very well, so there aren't really any confusions because the citizens and the people trust the government's quarantine system and follow it well. We are adjusting well to the situation, but there have been a few problems in the contemporary art sector. All the offline programmes were cancelled earlier and the upcoming ones needed to be cancelled too. Given these situations – artists, museums, organisations, participants – everyone had to sacrifice a little bit.

To talk about what The Stream is thinking about currently. Normally what we did online was to archive the original artwork. The Stream's online space has showcased the unmediated work. What we call streaming base in this virtual era are mostly processed versions. There are things that can only be experienced when you confront it offline. we've been thinking about what kind of sensations video art can bring about when it's shown online. We're also thinking about what kind of elements we can emphasize that can recover certain sensory experience.

We had the time to really reflect on how we have been consuming art previously. Our reality now is that there are so many biennials, exhibitions, alternative spaces and online platforms.

There is this sense of fatigue from the online contents. In Korea, there are a lot of alternative spaces offline. If you just look at Seoul a lot of new spaces are emerging, being filled with exhibitions. These offline spaces are all moving to the online space at the moment as they think of alternatives to offline activities. But there's something that we really need to consider when we move online. When appropriate contents are transferred online, we think of that as a new experience. It could propose a new vision while receiving affirmations. I think we need to move away from the belief that everything can be replaced by online. It's not like one stops and the other is activated, but rather the two spaces coexist. I think we need to think about how we will maintain the balance between the two as they coexist.

Eventually the lockdown measures will be lifted, and we will all have a chance to come to Korea you will be able to visit Korea to see art without worrying so much. In the meanwhile, I think we still have the opportunity to research through the online platforms like The Stream and Meetingroom.

Hwang: Meetingroom deals with various things other than archives and actually I think we ran out of time even if we just talked about archives. Fundamentally we are concerned about what's happening outside of the creation of an artwork, including archives and the artists' environment that affects their creativity. We are taking great interest in various areas and are planning activities like publications on areas that need improvement. I hope I will see more groups like us to create a better environment where we can speak out about our concerns and interests without any restrictions. People say that everything is on a standstill because of the coronavirus situation but I think it gives us an opportunity to think more deeply about what it is that we need to prepare for the future. A crisis can lead to an opportunity.

I'd like to seek out ways in which people can share ideas and find ways to go forward together. I do think that small-sized non-profit organisations like Meetingroom, The Stream and LUX play a really important part in the art sector. There are difficulties with sustaining such organisations but it's really motivating to know that there are groups and organisations you can share the difficulties and issues with. I hope that LUX, The Stream and Meetingroom, continue to co-run both offline and online events, and also maintain our identities and continue on our journeys.

Park: I don't have much else to say because you gave such a beautiful ending statement. Thank you for accepting our invitation from LUX and LKFF. I've learnt a lot that I didn't know before. I think it was a discussion that allowed us to think from different perspectives about the concerns we also had. Thank you very much. Please check out The Stream and Meetingroom's websites until or even after we can visit Korea again. Thank you.