

Sympathies, Producing, Experiencing, Interpreting Art

Diane Mullin

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Eun-Kyung Suh was invited to work with the Korean furniture collection. Born in Seoul, she is not a professor of art at University of Minnesota, Duluth. Although the geographical and cultural connection seems obvious, Suh was invited to consider the works in the context of her interest in memory, human emotion, and artifacts, which is often the central concern of her installation work. For *Sympathies*, the artist worked with an assistant to engage the Twin Cities' Korean immigrant community. They asked about the ways in which traditions were kept and solicited personal photographs to be included in the new artwork. For the first stage of the project, Suh visited the Weisman to view the furniture collection in storage.

After considering, researching, and one more visit, she decided to choose two objects to display as a part of her gallery-sized installation—a kitchen cabinet and a unique wedding carrier. Procuring dozens of yards of silk shipped with the help her mother in Seoul, Suh transferred the borrowed photographs to the fabric and designed an environment that at once recalls a processional space and a domestic interior. Musing on traditional ceremonies, narratives of a life, and how objects evoke experiential memory, Suh's installation engulfs the viewer in graceful silk rooms that suggest the constraints and fluctuations experienced by the peoples of immigrant communities. In its simplicity and quiet beauty, the installation not only commemorates the Korean immigrants in Minnesota but also, by bringing us in close to its details, asks us to ponder our own lifeways and passages.

Sympathies is the result of a multi-yearlong working relationship between the museum and the artists. The process began with consideration of artists and particular WAM collections. Over the course of about a year, Weisman Curator Diane Mullin developed possible pairings and began approaching artists with the proposal. Mullin says that she was often pleasantly surprised by unexpected connections between the collections and the artist—Eun-Kyung Suh, for instance, studied at Seoul's Ewha Woman's University, which is home to other significant pieces collected by Edward Reynolds Wright Jr. donor of the Weisman's Korean furniture collection—and by the manner in which the artists proposed to curate the collections. In both cases the new, commissioned works meld with the collection, something she points out she could never do as a museum curator. It is precisely this difference in viewpoint and available working practices that the *Sympathies* exhibitions were meant to highlight. Along with new programs to engage audiences in productive partnerships with WAM and the new Target Studio or Creative Collaboration, *Sympathies* represents one of the new interpretive strategies being embraced by the newly expanded WAM