

TAP Art Space

3333 Boul Crémazie Est, Door 201, Montreal, Canada

Energetic Maps

John Hee Take Chae & Petra Szilagyi

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Essay by artist and curator Alex Y. M. Kwok.

While we are inundated with writing our own narratives, we become poor, undisciplined listeners of our own bodies. By way of providing visual generosity, John Hee Taek Chae and Petra Szilagyi call attention to ourselves as conduits of energy. The mapping of these bodies, or the lack thereof, posits the interwoven tissues of histories, empathy, and psychology. How are we to track the thoughts that are produced, stored, and enabled to continually construct our existence?

The unquestioning acceptance of order and chaos that is fundamental to the formation of our histories is placed firmly in their materials, both in the softness of Chae's diaphanous garments, and in Szilagyi's carved, rigid timber. It is with this conviction that these artists wrestle to make sense of the space which our bodies occupy, and how its mutations empower the ways one navigates through personal experiences.

Chae engages with quintessential American mythologies and their ideological forces in his work, while revealing the intricacies of his personal narratives in response to the idea of autochthonophilia - in reference to "a settler colonial desire for and identification with Indigeneity." The romanticization of seemingly unconnected motifs are reconstructed and mutated to indicate conflict points amongst them, seen in the pastoral allure of traditional Korean commoner's textiles in conversation with the cuts of military bomber jackets. This ignites a continuous involution of dialogues in the work and it in turn reflects the repositioning and recycling of histories and influences. Chae uncovers the politics of whiteness invested in the depiction of empowerment and appropriates its language to create his own rhetoric. The mixture of patches, natural dyes, and fabrics captivates a sense of curiosity that reflects a language of non-orientable and fractured representations. The absence of the physical body, along with the works' invitation to be touched, has made a habit of looking outside itself to derive its sense of time and space.

Szilagyí's work inverts this relationship by looking inwards into the body. In contrast to Chae, their sculptural pieces seek comfort in the scientifically unexplainable which relies on intangible energies, rather than traceable deductions, to map and witness memories. In carving out anatomical landscapes as bases of placing energy, Szilagyí deploys a different spectrum of materials in their work: from Hickory root to Australian Red Mallee, once living entities themselves, as guidelines in reference to the body's energy flow. The texture and markings of the wood capture the tension of the depicted bodies, creating an enclosed ecosystem of energy transference. The mapping of communication, of empathy, and of power invokes the ability to abide one's own experiences and to recognize the unsubstantial throughlines between the mental and the physiological. In ways that one cannot reach one's own back with their hands, the questioning of the visualization and semantics of physical sensations functions as the focal point for contemplation.

More often though the artists' pacing, framing, and textures, along with their tenuous mixture of tenderness and commentaries, draw us into their ways of looking at a world of unending complexities. The connections "Energetic Maps" see between external and internal worlds can often be frustratingly opaque, but it is with this covert optimism that lingers beyond the beauty and humour of the work. The sense of magnitude of inner being, and the unadulterated faith in the ability of art to transform and improve our sensitivities to our bodies, set these two artists apart from those who make work with its identities being endpoints. If there is meaning for us to rediscover in these artists' work, it lies somewhere between the richness of our minds and the flawed bodies in which they exist.

- Alex Y. M. Kwok