

TEXT /

SARAH NESBITT

EXHIBITION TEXT /

Dear Ahreum,

Thank you for trusting me to write about your work. There are many ways that I relate to the questions you are asking and the sensibility towards those questions, and of course there are probably as many questions and signifiers that will remain opaque to me. Each time I read the title, *Hopping for Hope* I have to remind myself that it is hopping and not hoping, and then I laugh a little at my error and the subtle humour your work relies on.

I am not entirely sure what the hope is that you are referring to— Hope that the pebble lands on ‘unoccupied’ territory? Or is it a personal kind of hope— the kind one needs when deciding to hop countries, to skip town, to move from one place to another. I guess it’s an easy enough question, I could’ve just asked you directly, but sometimes misunderstanding has its own place.

We spoke about your desire to leave Korea when we met for lunch. I love the story you told me about your all-girl noise band and the way you gradually embraced the ‘scary girl’ aesthetic imposed by the culture because you were acting outside the normative bounds of gender performativity. It seems you have been navigating borders of many kinds your whole life.

I played hopscotch with my three nieces two summers ago, it was the first time since I was a kid. The version we played didn’t incorporate ideas of occupation the way the Korean one does. Apparently there is a circular version in France that also involves claiming space on the “court.” In that iteration, the game ends when all spaces are captured, and the person who wins is the one who holds the most territory. I remember looking for Jordan on Google Maps on my phone about a year ago and the horror of realizing that it doesn’t recognize Palestine at all. It’s just not there. The impact of that was so succinct. How can a map ever be neutral when each line represents untold displacement, dispossession, and death. Of course we know it can’t, we know that the presupposition of neutrality is another layer of violence.

It seems highly fitting that you are showing this work in Calgary. I split my time between Calgary and Northern Saskatchewan as a kid. My dad and uncles all moved there in the ‘80s from Saskatchewan to benefit from the oil and gas boom. Calgary always felt uncomfortably slick. At that time I remember the sense that no

one was from there, which made my being born there seem like an original sin of some kind. I always felt alienated in Calgary, maybe a bit like you felt in Korea. I didn't have the right mannerisms, I didn't dress right, I rejected the industries that everyone, including my own family, depended on.

Calgary's central industries are built on mapping. While doing my undergrad, I asked my dad for copies of geographical surveyor maps from work. He took me to the offices of one of his pals in geology, where I was immediately drawn to the colourful maps covering the walls. As the geologist explained which colours represented the presence of particular minerals, and pointed out other indicators predicting the likelihood of buried resources, the quality of his voice and excitement reminded me of the way my younger cousin talked about playing video games. Was the land being reduced to a geological video game? It was definitely abstracted. Of course it was, how else does violence justify itself? Living in Montreal now, it is easy to place Alberta somewhere in our own mental map, but if we believe that lines are violence, maybe the social ones we uphold deserve their own reckoning.

I think I understand your title now, it's the neoliberal dream, the commodified trading of our life, habits, movements, geographical positions. It's soft power. It's hopping for hope, biking for the cure, the power of positive thinking. It's being told we can't demand a cleaner future because we are dependent on fossil fuels. It's the promise of business as usual that exists alongside the sincere hope that someone might change the rules, step on the line, break the code, learn how to fly.

– Sarah Nesbitt

BIOGRAPHIES /

Ahreum Lee is a musician and interdisciplinary media artist from Seoul, South Korea and is currently based in Montreal. Lee began her career as the co-founder and frontwoman of experimental art-rock band Juck Juck Grunzie. After spending nearly a decade producing records and touring internationally, she extended her practice into video and multimedia installation work. She was a finalist for the Emerging Digital Artist Award held by EQ Bank and Trinity Square Video (Toronto) in 2019. She has exhibited and performed in Montreal at the Darling Foundry, Studio XX, Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, as well as Third Shift Festival (Saint John), and Axis Lab (Chicago). Additionally, she has participated in the *Intersections | Cross-sections* (Toronto) and *In Motion: Performance and Unsettled Borders* (Chicago) conferences. She is currently pursuing her MFA at Concordia University.

Sarah Nesbitt is a writer and curator based in Tio'tia:ke (Montréal). From 2016 to 2018 she was the Assistant Curator at Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art on Treaty 1 Territory, Winnipeg, where she curated Blinky Is Reading (2017), a site-specific vinyl installation by Walter Scott, and co-curated two major international group exhibitions: *Entering the Landscape* (2017), and *Days of Reading: beyond this state of affairs* (2018). Her writing has been published in *esse arts + opinions*, PaperWait, The Eastern Door, Public Parking, Canadian Art, and Border Crossings. Sarah is co-curator of window winnipeg, a 24 hour project space in Winnipeg Manitoba.

Hopping for Hope by Ahreum Lee will be on view at The New Gallery Main Space (208 Centre St SE) until February 22, 2020.