Dear Objects,

Jee Young Bang
jb8929@rit.edu

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Dear Objects,

By
Jee Young Bang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Imaging Arts

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
College of Imaging Arts and Science

Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester NY
May, 2017
Signature Page

Christine Shank  
MFA Director  
School of Photographic Arts and Science

Roberley Bell  
Professor  
School of Photographic Arts and Science
Dear Objects,

BFA Painting, Ewha Womans University, Seoul, Korea, 2001
MFA Imaging Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY, May 2017

Dear Objects, is a personal, diaristic documentation of everyday life that combines brief stories and still-life photographs. Experiencing everyday moments as a single parent in an expatriated situation, this body of work collects personal memories through temporary or worthless things. Capturing everyday objects of little value from around the home is for remembering and holding indelible memories of daily occurrences. By using domestic settings with objects in a given natural light, this photo/text work depicts ephemeral moments and shares nostalgic memories by taking the viewer on a journey through time. The Korean texts, accompanying the photographs, are written by hand with a grey, metallic pen as a metaphor of intimacy and value. Applying translated texts in English on vellum paper conveys nostalgic sensitivity through its translucent trait of the material while Korean and English texts are overlaying each other within the book form. The impression of vanishing or fainted memories along with the impression of unobtainable stories are both intended by overlapping the texts. Using soft natural light for photographing still lifes creates a quiet ambience. These still-life images and succinct texts explore the process of remembering, forgetting, and holding onto the intangible reminiscences. Dear Objects, not only tells a story of a personal journey, but suggests universal experiences through thoughtful reflection.
Dear Objects,
Jee Young Bang
2016년에 색인 라운드 일원일

존스가 아마존 Amazon Prime Action 품질 훌륭한 사진을 제공했다. 함께촌 색인 세부

문장은 적절하게 빈간 기술과 영감을 얻었다. 주의 깊은 희망과 모직기로 새로운 전제가 되었고, 평가에 영감을 얻었다.
2016년 03월 01일

눈이 20분 동안 흐르고 싶어서, 식사 준비를 맡은 누님에 의해 끝났습니다.
2016년 10월 28일

종이 조각들을 놓고 다 떨어진다. 이로 인해 꼬투리 조각들 간의 관계가 바뀌고, 새로운 관계를 형성한다. 이 조각들은 새로운 모양을 만들어낸다.
2016년 10월 23일 오전

월요일: Farmer’s market on Sunday. 미안, (공개성은) 계획했다.

출산 준비작으로 준비한 사탕을 각 관객에게, 여러 말은 알보 사람들에게 말해준 후에 약 10분 동안 미안해요.
2016년 2월 16일

폭풍으로 말려들어온 눈이 깔리며, 닥쳐왔다. 눈에 피를 흘리고, 하 nowrap 문득 닦쳤다. 난 외부로 갈 수 없을 뿐, 너무 오래 지내자, 몸이 부드러워졌다. 눈 덮인 땅에 덤mage 하며 "감사하는, 'Best day ever!'" 고 오랫동안 눈에 묻은 은은한 햇살이 닿았다.
2016년 8월 11일

이 날은 하루가 되어도 나는 그 일을 잊지 않을 것이다...
Extended Artist Statement

Dear Objects, is a personal, diaristic documentation of my everyday life that combines brief stories and still-life photographs. It uses everyday objects to recall and explore my memories. Living the life of a single mom, away from my home in a different country, has been the most precious and challenging time in my life. This is at once an adventure and a journey of self-reflection and self-examination in which I find myself photographing my belongings as I observe them around me in my home. As I bring objects in front of the camera, I associate them with special emotions and memories that I want to hold near and dear.

In the summer of 2013, my family moved from Seoul, South Korea to a small town surrounded by large cornfields in downstate Illinois. I was captivated by the open spaces, clean air, and verdant surroundings in my new American life. The view from the window was the polar opposite of that from my Korean urban high-rise that had become so familiar to me. City life in densely populated Seoul was crowded and hectic around the clock. The cramped apartment buildings, suffocating air pollution, and unstoppable pace left me yearning for a different world. In our new life, my husband was no longer obligated to join colleagues for after-hours socializing, routinely returning home inebriated in the middle of night, as was the experience back in Seoul. Here in the heartland of America, I spent every day with my family. This quiet life made me contemplate expatriation as the path with the greatest possibility for future contentment.

After living for two years in Illinois, my family moved to Rochester, New York. Later that summer, my husband was called back to Korea and we became what is known in
Korean as kirogi kajok (기러기 가족), translated as a “goose family.” This is a new term used in Korea to describe an increasingly frequent arrangement where a family is separated by a great distance, most frequently with the mother and children going to English speaking countries to educate their children, with the father providing support from Korea. The geese reunite seasonally, the analogy being to geese migrating each year. “It is estimated that half of these families, about 500,000, are so called ‘goose families.’ Overseas students’ statistics from the Ministry of Education say that there has been an estimated increase of 20,000 cases of new ‘goose families’ each year from 2004 to 2011.” ¹ When this Korean social phenomenon became my reality, I felt embarrassed, nervous, and excited all at once. As all Korean goose families do, my family has also sacrificed a more traditional family life for a better future. For me personally, this required looking inward to find unprecedented courage. I had a heightened sense of responsibility for my son and myself, and even my mom, who came here to stay with us. I was now the head of my goose family, and I felt compelled in this new role as a “goose mom” to keep records of my everyday life, documenting the experience of life in my husband’s absence.

My photographic objects are ephemeral things of little value, such as plants, toys, and papers. They are motionless and silent. The stillness of these things draws me in to observe and contemplate them. The objects represent the quiet solitude and freedom of my new position in life. The story that I tell with my objects is mostly about my son’s everyday life and mine, rarely about my husband. What I found through my writing practice is that my life is occupied by my son’s everyday life. Through the time with my son, I look at and picture myself from the standpoint of an outside observer. The objects that I choose are not only

special but also meaningful to me because of their connection to memories from my new life with my son. While observing these objects, I am sometimes transported into my past in both time and space. One of my images is of a shipping box where my son spends a lot of time: it brings up an old memory of me playing with my brother, making a similar childhood refuge out of umbrellas. I have pondered Susan Stewart’s thoughts on longing, where she argues that the “double function of the souvenir is to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present.”² I am aware that my present is slipping away from me, becoming remote. I seek not to discredit my present, but to hold onto it. My work uses objects to create documentary evidence of my experience and journey into my memories. Throughout this process, I look back on myself, accumulating my history, and cataloguing the memories that keep me in touch with my very existence.

I observe everyday occurrences around me, sometimes finding them by chance. I begin by writing a journal entry about a moment that I want to keep as a memory, and I then find an object connected to that memory. For example, I had an unforgettable memory while battling with snow during a snowstorm. I kept a journal on that day and I picked a snow shovel as my photographic subject to illustrate the story. I photographed the snow shovel and wrote a refined journal entry on the print itself. To me, these objects function as a medium where my experiences and memories connect and intersect. Each object can evoke multiple memories and emotions. I experience nostalgia from these objects, which embody my feelings and reminiscences.

In my photography, I prefer to use a natural, diffused light source rather than artificial light. Natural light is ephemeral, and diffused light lends a quietude that brings out those qualities in the objects, more accurately representing my thoughts and memories.

² Susan Stewart, *On longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 139
Laura Letinsky’s photographs explore still life within a white ambient space with soft lighting. I aim to bring her delicate color tones and subtlety into my photographic works. I like the ephemeral quality of natural light, varying as it does with the weather each day and the changing seasons. The emotions evoked by natural light are different: sunny daylight brings out a pleasant feeling, and clouded light elicits a melancholy mood. I am seeking to discover how my feelings, memories, and experiences are harmonized in a given light within the domestic space of my home. I compose the objects in the daylight until they fit in with my feelings. I arrange my still lifes to look simple, and prefer to put them on a tabletop with a white tablecloth. While I am organizing my objects, I feel calm and tranquil.

My body of work, *Dear Objects*, is accompanied by concise Korean handwritten texts. As these are my personal stories or the memories that I experienced through the objects, I speculate and write a story related to a particular object, along with any thoughts that surface in my memories. When I experience joyful memories, or noteworthy events, I record them in my journal. I then summarize my story briefly as part of the work. I try to make my text succinct and poetic, opening up a space of thoughtfulness. In my book, I also intersperse blank pages, leaving room for imagination.

Since my native language is Korean, I have always felt uncomfortable with English. Having language difficulties frustrates me and often leaves me feeling alienated, which is why I chose to leave my stories in handwritten in Korean within the work. I feel free and comfortable with Korean language. I feel that I am in a safe space, surrounded by the shelter of diary writing, which I have practiced for nearly twenty years. Looking at my diary from a few years ago, I sometimes find that an incident has already disappeared completely from my memory. The disappearance of my memories is a warning that my past is getting away from me, and along with it the vanishing of my existence. This is the reason why I keep a journal
and am bringing this act into my work as an act of preserving my history, my path, my self. For the Korean texts, I use a silver gel pen as a metaphor for intimacy and value with the grey and metallic tonality of the silver color.

Along with the Korean text, I included English translations for my book and for the show. In the book, a translated page is printed in English on vellum paper and added for each photo image. The use of vellum paper is to create an impression of vanishing or faded memories through its translucent quality. When English texts printed on vellum paper are superimposed onto the Korean handwritten texts, the two different languages become illegible. This conveys the same feelings and emotions that I have when I am translating Korean text into English. The disconnection between the two languages is another way of thinking about distance and differences in time and space. Within the exhibition space, all images contain a small white vinyl number attached to the wall, this numbers correspond to a guide which directs the audience needing English translation for the work. The English text is printed on vellum page in guide format for the audience to navigate the exhibition work.

I want to capture the precious moments from my daily life and keep them with me forever. I have been inspired to make this work by the desire to hold on to the ephemeral moments that encapsulate my emotions. I have created new stories from my experiences here in the United States, which I want to collect for myself and share with my family as well as other “goose families.” Dear Objects, not only tells the story of a personal journey, but suggests universal experiences of motherhood, distance, and memory.
Bibliography
