

Teaching

Do Ho Suh

ARTIST

Do Ho SUH

(do ho suh)

서도호



Do Ho Suh, 2013

BORN

1962, Seoul

LIVES & WORKS

New York, London, & Seoul

THEMES

Identity
Materials and Process
Place

ART MEDIUMS

Architecture and Design
Installation
Sculpture

“From the shower, being naked, to outside, fully clothed, from my bed to studio, from yesterday to today, from Korea to the States then London: What is the continuity or the discontinuity of the space, both in time and space?”¹

ABOUT THE ARTIST AND WORK

Born in 1962 in Seoul, Do Ho Suh believes he was destined to leave home. His father was a successful painter, and Suh said, “Somehow I felt that his fame overshadowed me, and I wanted to do my own thing.”² After earning degrees in painting in South Korea and completing mandatory military service, Suh moved in 1993 to the United States, where he pursued further studies in fine art.

This move to the United States was one of the most difficult and important experiences of his life and led him to explore the idea of displacement in his artwork. Upon moving to New York, he couldn’t sleep well. The city was too loud and frenetic. Suh thought back to the last place he’d slept soundly: his family’s home in South Korea. To bring that space to him, he made a replica of his parents’ traditional Korean house using transportable, translucent, celadon-green nylon. It was measured exactly to match his home and could be folded to fit in a suitcase so he could bring it with him wherever he went. In this way, he was able to make sense of his new life in another country and culture.

Since then, Suh has continued to create facsimiles of the homes in which he has lived in New York, Berlin, and London. It is essential that the likeness is precise down to every detail—from toilet seats and ovens to light switches and door knobs. The transportability of his houses are significant, since they remind the viewer that the home is not just a material construction but the histories and

cultures people carry with them, often beyond geographical boundaries.

Closet-I (2003) is a reproduction of Suh’s closet in his New York townhouse apartment. Unlike his large-scale home installations, it is made of white translucent fabric and cannot be entered. Within this replication of Suh’s intimate private space are duplicates of Suh’s shirts and jackets that hang like molted skin. Their ethereal presence reminds the viewer of the intangibility and transient nature of memories and experiences. Suh said about his work, “Everything starts from an idea of personal space.”³

1 *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, season 2, “Do Ho Suh in ‘Stories,’” September 9, 2013, <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s2/do-ho-suh-in-stories-segment/>.

2 *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, “Do Ho Suh in ‘Stories.’”

3 Julie L. Belcove, “Artist Do Ho Suh Explores the Meaning of Home,” *Wall Street Journal Magazine*, November 6, 2013, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/artist-do-ho-suh-explores-the-meaning-of-home-1383784860>.



Do Ho Suh, *Closet-I*, 2003. Translucent nylon and stainless steel tubes, 256.5 × 150.5 × 64.1 cm, edition 1/3. Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, Purchased with funds contributed by the International Director's Council 2016.21

View and Discuss

→ Look at the sculpture *Closet-I* (2003).

Make a list of adjectives to describe this artwork. What kinds of words did you use? How do they relate to each other?

→ Imagine what it would be like to walk around this piece.

Discuss what moods it evokes and why.

→ *Closet-I* is a replica of the artist Suh's closet in his New York apartment. Hanging in it are duplicates of Suh's jackets and shirts, except, unlike his closet, everything is made from a white translucent fabric. The work is made from material that can be folded and carried around with Suh in a suitcase.

Look back at the images with this information in mind. What do you think about the artwork now?

What do you think about when you think about closets? What associations do you have with them? Look back at the list of adjectives describing the piece. Compare them to the words you brought up when discussing closets. Does Suh's sculpture create different associations than your own closets?

→ Many of Suh's artworks deal with notions of personal space—from the personal spaces we make for ourselves in public to private spaces, such as our homes.

Think about personal space in your life. What kind of personal space do you make for yourself (e.g., space you give others when walking down the sidewalk)? What does personal space mean to you? What images or symbols do you associate with personal space? Compare these responses to Suh's sculpture.

Classroom Activities

Create a Replica

In terms of dimensions, *Closet-1* is an exact copy of Suh's closet in New York. For another artwork, Suh created an exact copy of his parents' home in South Korea. Both artworks are made with translucent fabric, which is light and easily portable.



Do Ho Suh, *Closet-1*, 2003 (detail)

Ask students to think about how Suh's choice of material changes the original object or space. How would the sculptures be different if they were made with another material, such as steel or rubber? For this project, encourage students to make a replica of an object that is significant to them out of another material. Materials could include tin foil, clay, or fabric. As a class, compare the original objects to their replicas. How does the object change when constructed out of the different material?

Home

When Suh moved to the United States, he missed his home in South Korea.

Ask students to begin this activity by writing about their homes. What do they think of when they think of home? What matters most? What do they long for? What images come to mind?

Suh said: "I want to carry my house, my home, with me all the time like a snail. . . . I just didn't want to sit down and cry for home. I just wanted to more actively deal with the issues of longing."⁴

Ask students to discuss this quote. Would they like to be able to carry their home with them and why? What could they create for themselves to carry with them to deal with longing for home? Encourage students to make either a drawing or a small object to respond to this question. Share the results. What did they choose to depict and why?

Classroom Activities

Measuring Architecture

When Suh makes his replicas, he follows the exact dimensions of the original.

Challenge students to choose one room or space and measure the exact dimensions. They should then make a two-dimensional drawing of the space based on these measurements. Ask them to discuss what was challenging about this assignment. Then have them imagine adding the dimension of height and other details, such as doorknobs, to create a three-dimensional installation. What challenges do they think Suh encountered when making his artwork? What do they think he learned about the spaces he re-created? What do they think the process was like for him?

Resources

Websites

- Lehmann Maupin Gallery. <https://www.lehmannmaupin.com/artists/do-ho-suh>.
- Smithsonian American Art Museum, *Do Ho Suh: Almost Home*. <https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/suh>.

Videos

- *Art 21 Extended Play*. “Do Ho Suh: ‘Rubbing/Loving.’” December 9, 2016. <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/do-ho-suh-rubbing-loving-short/>.
- *Brilliant Ideas*. Episode 38, “The Evocative Fabric Stylings of Do Ho Suh.” October 10, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbL4jsC0itw>.

Articles

- Brownell, Blaine. “Do Ho Suh and ‘Unmeasurable’ Architecture.” *Architect Magazine*, June 29, 2016, https://www.architectmagazine.com/technology/do-ho-suh-deconstructs-the-home-rethinks-the-constructed-environment_o.
- Designboom. “Do Ho Suh: *Home within Home* at Leeum Samsung Museum of Art.” April 4, 2012. <https://www.designboom.com/art/do-ho-suh-home-within-home-at-leeum-samsung-museum-of-art/>.
- Suh, Do Ho. “Do-Ho Suh in Conversation,” interview by Annie Dickie. Ocula, November 16, 2013. <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/do-ho-suh/>.

Books

- Koo, Joanne Bonhee and Rosemary Suh. *Home within Home: Do Ho Suh*. Exh. cat. Seoul: Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, 2012.

Visit guggenheim.org/teachingmaterials for high-resolution images, audio, and video, as well as additional historical and contextual information about this artist and others featured in *Teaching Modern and Contemporary Asian Art*.

Note: On page 2, the artist's surname is capitalized to differentiate it from his given name. Colloquial phonetic pronunciations are included, rather than versions in the standard International Phonetic Alphabet, to help teachers pronounce names that may be unfamiliar.

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