

# Zone of Nowhere

## Kimsooja

17 February – 25 April



Image: Kimsooja, *Bottari Truck - Migrateur*, 2007. Single Channel Video  
Projection, silent, 10:00, loop, performed in Paris. Commissioned by  
Musée D'Art Contemporain du Val-De-Marne (MAC/VAL). Still Photo by  
Thierry Depagne. Courtesy of Kimsooja Studio.

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## About PICA

Housed in a large and striking heritage building in the heart of Perth, Western Australia, PICA is the city's focal point for those wishing to experience the best of Australian and international visual, performance and interdisciplinary art.

PICA is both a producing and presenting institution that runs a year-round program of changing exhibitions, seasons in contemporary dance, theatre and performance and a range of interdisciplinary projects. It boasts one of the largest and most breath-taking exhibition spaces in Australia and has become known for the leading role it plays in the presentation of significant new work.

PICA's key aim is to promote, support and present contemporary arts and to stimulate critical discussion around the arts and broader cultural issues. Providing a site for experimentation, critical analysis, discussion, and debate is fundamental to its charter. PICA is known for the rigour and breadth of its artistic and education programs, high production standards and impeccable presentation.

PICA is an icon of contemporary thinking – it is a catalyst for innovative and groundbreaking art and culture. Not constrained by convention, PICA gives artists and audiences a glimpse of what is possible.

To learn more about our coming program, or to make a booking, visit [pica.org.au](http://pica.org.au) or call 08 9228 6300.

## Exhibition Summary

*Zone of Nowhere* is the first Australian solo exhibition by internationally acclaimed South Korean-born multimedia artist Kimsooja. Born in 1957 in Deagu, South Korea, for more than 30 years Kimsooja has dedicated her work to exploring cultural and political issues and some of the most urgent topics of our times. Possessing a deep sense of humanism and concern of increasing global violence, inhumanity and human displacement, Kimsooja is considered one of the most influential multidisciplinary conceptual artists of her generation.

Working in installation, sculpture, photography and performance/video, the artist is known for her minimalist visual language, heavily influenced by her cultural background as well as eastern philosophies - Buddhism, Zen and Confucianism.

Continually questioning and measuring her work as if it is a mirror with which to reflect herself, Kimsooja is interested in exploring the ephemeral and our constant state of transition, process and impermanence, including that of our own bodies.

Her early interests in sewing, spinning, wrapping and unwrapping, coupled with early childhood memories of her family's nomadic life highly influenced her ideas surrounding the process of sewing a journey to the past, present and future and the internal 'voyage' through space and time. Now, an inveterate traveller, Kimsooja exhibits across the globe, visiting many countries that have had a profound impact on her concept of world unrest, poverty, inequality and injustice.

Beginning her art practice as a painter, in the 1980s Kimsooja initially reacted against traditional painting, preferring stitched two-dimensional works using her own and other people's clothing. Assembling the fabric parts in cruciform format, this series explored the relationship of the horizontal (weft) and vertical (warp) of the fabric to the universality of the symbol of the cross, the Korean alphabet and Taoism - horizontal (earth), vertical (sky) and the dot (human being) together with ideas surrounding 'absence', 'the body' and 'time' – reoccurring themes throughout her art practice.

Following this series and since 1992, Kimsooja has become well known for her exuberantly bright and richly patterned cloth bundles, known in Korea as 'bottari' - traditionally used as containers for the safe-keeping or transportation of a family's elementary household goods. Kimsooja's bottari, however, are filled with second-hand clothing and bound with traditional bedcovers from newly married Korean couples. While the attractive bottari suggest the notion of joy and travel, Kimsooja displaces and repurposes the traditional use, exhibiting her bottari on the ground, as if lifeless, discarded or lost.

From the 1990s, moving into performance art, Kimsooja has created video works in which she is recorded but always with her back to the camera. Working on crowded streets in some of the world's most populous cities, this has brought her international fame. Here Kimsooja reverses the notion of the artist as the main actor and instead we witness her back and we see what she sees and experiences - a mindset linked to Zen Buddhism and eastern philosophies.

In her newly commissioned site-specific installation *To Breathe - Zone of Nowhere*, with 30 grand translucent flags suspended above PICA's central gallery space, Kimsooja draws upon her previous multimedia work commissioned by the 2012 London Olympic Committee, *To Breathe - The Flags* in which 246 national flags are slowly superimposed, one by one, in alphabetical order, without hierarchy or political bias. Originally created to reflect the unifying spirit of the games, including the flags of participating countries, it later represented nations that weren't accepted or officially recognised by authorities.

In *To Breathe - Zone of Nowhere*, the colours and symbols of multiple national flags are again layered and intermixed creating a visual breakdown of national hierarchies and boundaries. Here Kimsooja's physical flags extend a wish for coexistence and for a utopian society in which individuals can unite in celebration of their differences while appealing to the sense of humanity we all possess.

<http://pica.org.au/show/zone-of-nowhere/>

<http://www.kimsooja.com>



Kimsooja, *To Breathe - Zone of Nowhere*, 2018. Site specific installation. 30 flags, fabrics. 152 x 243 cm (each). Installation view (detail). Commissioned by PICA - Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth. Courtesy PICA - Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. Photo: Gianni Costa.

## Primary / Secondary Themes

The art of South Korean, New York based artist Kimsooja directly addresses profound questions of human existence through reflection, self-awareness and broad themes including:

### **GENDER**

Women and various issues they face in different cultures and countries

### **IDENTITY**

Change and social flux, time, memory and the human body's relationship with the material world, Eastern & Western philosophies

### **SOCIO POLITICAL**

Issues of today including cultural dislocation, migration/immigration, asylum, war, exile, violence, human rights and freedom of speech exposing art's complicated connections to politics and globalisation including the artist as social critic.

### **DESIGN**

and cultural distinctions of Eastern & Western historical & contemporary design, textiles, flag design and the decorative arts, symbols, the mandala

### **VISUAL ARTS**

Art styles and periods including minimalism, abstraction, avant-garde art, conceptual art, performance/video, post modernism and new media art, contemporary art, Korean aesthetics, art and design.

### **BELIEF SYSTEMS**

Including Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, Shamanism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, Communism, Christianity, Catholicism, Judaism, Karma

### **SOUND**

and Tibetan, Gregorian, Islamic chants

## PRIMARY | YEAR 1 – 6

### Visual Arts / Humanities & Social Sciences

#### FOR TEACHERS:

- Visit PICA's website [www.pica.org.au](http://www.pica.org.au) and Kimsooja's website [www.kimsooja.com](http://www.kimsooja.com) to view images and watch video footage of Kimsooja's past and current works.

#### PRE-ACTIVITIES CULTURE & ART

- As a class discuss the word 'culture' and explore what it means.
- Research Korean culture including clothing and ceremonial customs for birthdays and weddings and art and art styles, design, textiles, ceramics, dance, food, architecture and music.
- Analyse what is similar or different in Eastern and Korean culture to Australia.
- Investigate Eastern belief systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism and how religion and religious faith form an important part of Eastern and Western cultural history.
- After viewing Kimsooja's works, investigate and discuss how her work is influenced by her Korean culture and belief systems.
- Encourage students to explore and discuss the meaning of 'identity' and 'difference' and how culture is important to everyone's identity. Explore different cultures and religions that exist within the class and, if possible, within the school.
- Research and compare Australian flag designs including Australia's first peoples Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and North and South Korean flags, together with global flag designs and different emblems, colours, symbols and their meanings.
- Discuss what it means to be 'Australian' and how students would describe what being an 'Australian' looks like.
- Encourage students to discuss and write about their individual family origins and, in a respectful way, write about and discuss physical similarities and differences within their class and more broadly in their school.
- Discuss portraiture in art and then encourage students to create a 2D or 3D self-portrait that doesn't bear any resemblance to how they look. Instead, ask students to represent themselves with a selection of images, materials and objects that reflect aspects of their interests, culture and beliefs. Encourage students to experiment with painting, drawing, printing, collage and/or construction. They could also create one or a series of images. Later, as a class, discuss and analyse the work.

- Discuss the art of spinning, weaving, sewing, crocheting, knitting, tapestry and traditional crafts, often considered to be ‘women’s work’. Explore the work of Australian artist Louise Weaver [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/358.2015/](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/358.2015/) and Louise Saxton [www.louisesaxton.com/index/](http://www.louisesaxton.com/index/) and discuss how each artist uses sewing, crochet and embroidery techniques. Discuss Louise Saxton’s work and how she often incorporates second-hand or what she calls ‘reclaimed’ materials in her work.

## SOCIO POLITICAL ISSUES

- With your students, discuss the meaning of ‘immigration’ and how people immigrate for many different reasons that may include war, political unrest and personal choice.
- Familiarise your students with the Korean peninsula and where the East Asia region is situated in relation to Australia and America. Discuss the North/South Korean divide and the Korean war (1950 – 1953) which led to mass post war immigration to America.
- Orient students to Kimsooja’s birthplace in Deagu, South Korea and discuss how the artist and many Koreans were forced to immigrate to America after the war due to poverty, famine and ongoing unrest. Research and view online images of Korean immigrants forced to flee South Korea after the war, taking only what they could physically carry in a few ‘bottari’.
- Discuss what it might feel like to be a nomad and how Kimsooja still leads a nomadic life after immigrating and living in different countries, resulting in the artist becoming more aware, sympathetic and empathic towards people who have also had to leave their homelands.
- Encourage students to discuss and then list, photograph, draw and/or paint important possessions they would pack if they were relocating to an overseas destination for a year. For this project, discuss how Kimsooja uses ‘bottari’ to symbolise relocation and immigration in her art practice and how, in a western sense, they could symbolise ‘relocation’ or ‘journey’ with suitcase/s, woven nylon bag/s, plastic bag/s or boxes etc. Extending this idea, encourage students to list, draw, paint and/or construct a work that includes their possessions.



Kimsooja, *Mumbai: A Laundry Field*, 2007-2008, C-Print on FujiFilm Paper. 44.5 x 60.8 cm (each).  
Courtesy of Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milan, Italy and Kimsooja Studio.

## POST ACTIVITIES

- Alter visiting the exhibition 'Zone of Nowhere', discuss the title of the exhibition and what the students think the title may mean, including key messages the students think Kimsooja wishes to communicate to visitors.
- Analyse Kimsooja's minimalist approach to art making and how she is able to convey many personal and historically significant ideas and issues in this way.
- Reflecting on the work *To Breathe – Zone of Nowhere*, encourage the students to discuss the grand scale of the flags and the layering and style of imagery in each flag. Discuss the shapes, colours (primary & secondary), lines (curved, straight, wavy, zigzag) and the possible ideas expressed in each of the designs. Encourage students to observe whether they recognise any of the flag designs, symbols or shapes from their earlier research. Discuss the layering of imagery suggesting the notion of many countries uniting as one, reflecting how the artist is expressing her distress at the state of world politics and the wave of human migration, as well as her utopian desire for world unity and peace.
- Further analyse and discuss the meaning of the title 'To Breathe' and the gentle movement of the flags. Discuss how the artist's aims are to communicate the universal act of breathing of all human beings, while relating to the importance of the breath in meditation and Zen Buddhism, reflecting on earlier studies into Buddhism.
- Explore and discuss the visual art elements in Kimsooja's work including line, colour, shape, form, value, space, texture.
- Encourage students to experiment with a range of materials and methods such as digital imaging, screenprinting, linocut, drawing, painting and sewing, knitting etc. to create a new flag design. The design could express a special message on world peace or include a mixture of imagery that they consider important.
- Explore and discuss Kimsooja's art style and the influences of Korean culture in her works such as *To Breathe – Zone of Nowhere*, *Bottari*, *Bottari Truck*, *Mandala: Zone of Zero*, *Sun-Earth-Water-Fire-Air* and *Encounter: Looking into Sewing*.
- Invite students to create a collage with fabric or paper offcuts, recycled clothing or other objects for a 2D or 3D work that represents Australian culture. Discuss the Australian coat of arms and flags and symbols, emblems, Australian animals and reptiles and plants, food and special events etc., together with how one might represent a mixed cultural heritage.

- In the work *Bottari*, Kimsooja's brightly coloured second-hand Korean silk bedspreads, used to cover and contain her bundles, were traditionally gifted to newly married Korean couples and so the bedspreads also relate to the artist's nostalgic memories of her own marriage and homeland. This is nostalgic for the artist also because the bedspreads were traditionally unpicked and re sewn before and after each washing by female family members and Kimsooja would often do this with her mother. As a class, discuss and write about the jobs that men and women undertake in their own homes and if those jobs done by men and women could be and are ever swapped. Also discuss how students would feel and if they would miss it if their parent or guardian or sibling couldn't do the task that they often do together. Encourage students to take one or more digital images that represent a special job they will often do with a parent, guardian or sibling and later display and discuss these as a class.
- Encourage students to discuss as a class and write individually about how it might feel if they were forced to leave their homeland at short notice and for an unknown period of time to an unknown destination, understanding they could only take what they could physically carry in one bag, box or suitcase. Enable the students to create a 2D, 3D or video work that illustrates the possessions they would include and what they would take to remind them of home.



Kimsooja, *Mandala: Zone of Zero*, 2004 – 2010. Single Channel Mixed Media Sound Installation (single jukebox speaker, three chants mixed with Tibetan, Gregorian, and Islamic), 9'50", loop. Jukebox speaker dimensions: 81.3cm (diameter) x 30.5cm. Courtesy PICA - Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. Photo: Alessandro Bianchetti.

## SECONDARY | YEAR 7-10

### Visual Arts / Humanities & Social Sciences

Visit PICA's website [www.pica.org.au](http://www.pica.org.au) and Kimsooja's website [www.kimsooja.com](http://www.kimsooja.com) to see images and watch online video footage of past and current works.

**MAKING** – exploring, investigating and developing ideas and processes

**RESPONDING** – expressing personal opinions, responses, production, discerning, presenting

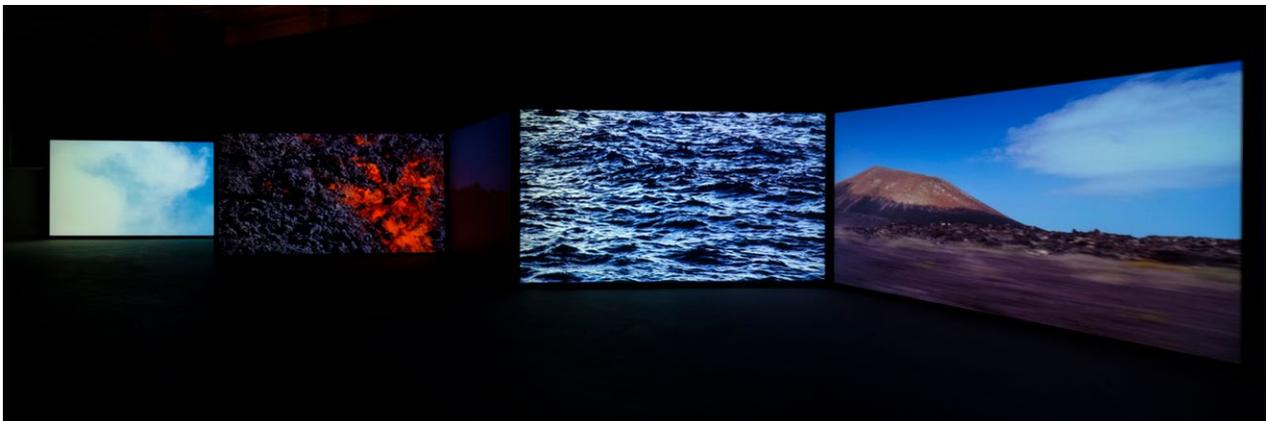
- Explore and discuss the title 'Zone of Nowhere' and what Kimsooja may wish to communicate in relation to her body of work in the exhibition.
- Interpret the subject matter, themes and ideas in Kimsooja's work including how the artist has incorporated art elements and principles, style, composition, materials and technique.
- Kimsooja's bottari act as containers or sculptures, symbolic of her childhood and Korean culture, as well as nomadism, immigration and global politics. Write about your childhood memories of travel or transience and select specific objects and materials to create a work which symbolises relocation, change, transience or migration.
- Research and examine the works '*To Breathe / Respirare (Invisible Mirror, Invisible Needle)*' at the Teatro la Fenice in Venice and the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris, as well as *To Breathe - The Flags*, 2012 and *To Breathe- Zone of Nowhere*, 2017, analysing the meaning of 'To Breathe' and the overlapping imagery on video and printed on fabric to convey the artist's ideas.
- Source the work *Fake Flag*, 1997, by the Greek/Australian artist, Constance Zikos. Explore his ideas surrounding altered cultural representations of the Australian flag and discuss and compare his ideas to Kimsooja's beliefs of cultural diversity and unity.
- Research the work of American artist Jasper Johns and his series on flags, and explore his ideas, media and styles.
- Create a flag design in 2 or 3 dimensions, as a drawing, painting, print photograph or video that uses particular symbols to express your ideas and views about Australia's diverse cultural mix.

## YEAR 11 VISUAL ARTS

Art Making/ Art Interpretation / Cross-Curriculum Priorities, ICT, Critical & Creative Thinking, Personal & Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding

### UNIT 1. DIFFERENCES

- Explore and compare Western religion and beliefs to Eastern philosophies such as Zen Buddhism and Confucianism and look at how Kimsooja uses a variety of media to express her philosophical ideas. Compare Kimsooja's ideas and beliefs to the American Pop artist Andy Warhol and his interest in advertising and commercialism in art.
- Analyse your cultural beliefs, values and heritage in comparison to those of Kimsooja, selecting particular materials and objects symbolic of contemporary life that are important to you that may include plastic, synthetic and man-made materials.
- Examine Kimsooja's video installation *Earth – Water – Fire – Air* and discuss contemplation, universal themes, utopian values and a desire for global peace, also explored by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei.
- Research the works commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) to accompany the exhibition, *Melbourne Now, On top of the world: Flags for Melbourne* series, 2013, and examine how these works might relate to Kimsooja's work, *To Breathe – The Flags*, 2012 and *To Breathe - Zone of Nowhere*, 2017.
- Arriving from South Korea in 1998 in New York and seeing artefacts of American pop culture with the mandala symbol, Kimsooja thought of this as a perfect meld of East and West. Why do you think this was significant for her and inspired her video *Mandala: Zone of Zero* which includes Tibetan, Gregorian and Islamic chants?
- Discuss, define and compare sculpture with installation in Kimsooja's work, and in the work of Louise Paramor and Emily Floyd.



Kimsooja, *Tierra - Agua - Fuego - Aire / Earth - Water - Fire - Air*, 2009-2010. 6 channel video installation. Site specific. Installation view (detail). Courtesy PICA - Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. Photo: Alessandro Bianchetti

## UNIT 2. IDENTITIES

- Referring to Kimsooja's works *Bottari* and *Bottari Truck*, create and write about a work which explores your identity and cultural background. Choose specific found objects, 'ready-mades' or materials that express your connection to your home and place and contemporary life, while thinking about your feelings and a style or aesthetic you wish to achieve.
- Kimsooja's installations that explore everyday activities also allow viewers to interact with her work from different viewpoints. Why would this be important to understanding her ideas?
- Research the theme of gender in art and Kimsooja's visual expression and comment on women's and men's division of labour. What is the significance of sewing and wrapping and the Korean marital bedspread in Kimsooja's work?
- View various styles of portraiture in art and create a self-portrait that reflects all aspects of yourself without translating any similarities to your appearance.
- As a part of the Conceptual Manifesto in 1967 the conceptual artist Sol LeWitt wrote "*what the work of art looks like isn't too important. It has to look like something if it has physical form. No matter what form it may finally have it must begin with an idea.*" Explore the work of conceptual artists Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Wolfgang Laib, Joseph Kosuth, Damien Hirst and the Young British Artists (YBA) including Tracy Emin, Zhang Huan and Jenny Holzer to develop ideas for a work that incorporate contemporary materials, methods and media to express your childhood memories, family history, culture and current political issues.

## CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

- Examine Asia and Australia's current engagement with Korea
- Research and write about particular communities forced to lead a nomadic life of dislocation from their homelands as a consequence of war, famine and political persecution including Korean immigrants fleeing to America following WWII and the Korean war.



Kimsooja, *Bottari*, 2018. Sculpture. Used clothing from Australia wrapped in used Korean bedcover. Approx. 45,7 × 55,9 cm. Courtesy PICA - Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. Photo: Alessandro Bianchetti.

## YEAR 12 VISUAL ARTS

### UNIT 3: COMMENTARIES

- “While I discovered experimental artistic value in women's domestic labour—especially in Korea, where female and male labour were clearly separated until the late nineties I was questioning the surface of the ‘tableau’ and measuring its bodily and psychological depth, binding myself to it (the other) and taking it as a mirror with which to reflect myself, which was also a healing process for me and for others.”

Research and discuss Kimsooja’s stitched two and three-dimensional ‘avant garde’ conceptual series of works that use initially her own, her grandmother’s and others’ clothing, and her sewing, spinning, wrapping and unwrapping techniques. Reflect on and write about this series of works in relation to her comment above and express how you might create a series of works which explore your cultural background and history.

- Research and interpret Kimsooja’s early interests in sewing, spinning, wrapping and unwrapping and her desire to express global issues. Look at how the artist has manipulated various media to convey her ideas.
- Kimsooja says her work focuses on ‘consciousness’ of what it means to be human. Examine this comment and discuss and write about differing perspectives of understanding the complexities of ‘humanity’.
- Explore how Kimsooja’s work is influenced by Korean design and conceptual and postmodern approaches to art making. Create a work that is influenced by Asian design and/or aesthetics.
- Examine how Kimsooja’s work has been influenced by the style, concepts and ideas of the Dutch artist and theorist, Piet Mondrian.



Kimsooja, *To Breathe – The Flags*, 2018. Public project. Series of site specific print installations. Commissioned by PICA - Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth and realized with the generous support of Wesfarmers Arts. Courtesy PICA - Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. Photo Alessandro Bianchetti.

**UNIT 4: POINTS OF VIEW**

- Research Korean past and present politics, culture, design, fashion, music and contemporary life (including KPOP), and its relationship to Kimsooja's style, techniques and choice of materials, as well as how the artist communicates her ideas and points of view.
- Breathing is a symmetrical act, and thus it is akin to a given aesthetic found in the majority of Kimsooja's works — both those where her own body is at play and those where objects exist. In Kimsooja's work *To Breathe – Zone of Nowhere* she reflects her distress of world politics, war and human dislocation, as well as a utopian desire for global unity. Discuss the grand scale of the flags, the layering and style of imagery, and the symbolism of the layered physical flag designs. Discuss the meaning of 'To Breathe', symbolising 'life and the living' and the universal act that connects us.
- Research the work of contemporary artists whose work is inspired by eastern philosophy including Wolfgang Laib, Ai Weiwei and Kate Beynon and compare these artists' works with Kimsooja's approach and methodologies.
- "On a metaphorical level, the bottari functions as a signifier of mobility in unbound space, and is thus at the same time a container that includes its own contents." Discuss and explore this comment in relation to symbolism and the metaphor in art.
- Explore how Kimsooja's work relates to existentialism and a deeper consciousness and how it connects with utopian and dystopian themes in art.
- Kimsooja has always been prepared to take a risk and push the boundaries and conventions while combining materials that remain honest, genuine and purposeful to the core of her concept. Discuss and write about how she is able to achieve this and then explore how you intend to create a work which expresses your ideas and concepts in a true and honest way.
- "My engagement with social issues in different forms is the basis of my art. My work has always been a response to violence and inhumanity". Discuss Kimsooja's comment and the notion of the artist as social activist, commentator and critic.
- Research artists whose work employs textiles and techniques that may be associated with 'women's work', such as Paul Yore and Louise Weaver, and why their method and material approach to art making is important in conveying their ideas.

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