

Geumhyung Jeong
Spa & Beauty Berlin
June 23 – August 4, 2018

The 'Spa & Beauty Berlin' Demonstrations will take place on June 28, July 5, 12 and 19 at 7:30 pm. Due to our limited space, we would like to ask you to register under info@klemms-berlin.com.

Trained in the multiple disciplines of acting and choreography, puppetry and animation, Korean artist Geumhyung Jeong has created strikingly unique performances over the last decade that transform and challenge the distinctions between body and object.

Her work '7ways' (2009) for example, was shown most recently at TateLive at Tate Modern in 2017. During this 75-minute durational performance, Jeong took the audience through a series of mesmerising duets with various objects. Through her performance, Jeong turns these objects into 'collaborators' – she does not only use the object as props, she enlivens them, gives them agency to control her; she is both subject and object in the work.

With physical dexterity and control, she becomes both the puppeteer and the puppet as the characters she has created are first invited into an intimate, often erotically charged interaction with her, only to find that they come to life, take control. The artists and her 'collaborators' slip between human and machine, animate and inanimate, passive and active, each to constantly shifting back and forth with a disconcerting fluidity.

Expanding from her previous focus on performing on stage, Jeong's recent gallery installations have shown her collections of objects in new ways. Her 'Private Collection: Unperformed Objects' first show at the Ateliers Hermes in Seoul and more recently at Delfina Foundation in London includes a broader selection of items than those used in the performances. Jeong describes shopping as an important part of her practice – each object is carefully chosen and has both a specific potentiality and personality and the installation format allows us to see that Jeong has built up a vast collection of objects ranging from the domestic and everyday such remote controls for televisions, ladders and vacuum cleaners; to the scientific such as mannequins, prosthetics, plastic eyeballs and models of brains; the erotic: sex toys, inflatable sex dolls; the medical; zimmer frames, underwear, socks, tweezers, pumps...

The artist is a collector. As with many collectors, the impulse is taxonomical – traceable and deliberate. Here the logic is certainly one of bodily exploration, and perhaps even fetishistic; these objects care for, are applied to, beautify, do the job of and for, they interact, pleasure, extend and replace the human.

Displayed clinically, on white pedestals and under strip lighting, Jeong's installations take on a forensic and meticulous air; 'unperformed' the objects are imbued with functions both intrinsic and beyond, their intended use, their possible 'mis-use' and their symbolic meanings which shift and slide.

This malleability of use and meaning is highlighted in the installation by accompanying videos. In particular, Jeong plays with a movement from the medical to the erotic – we see objects seemingly invented for very specific physical or therapeutic purpose being used by Jeong in ways that emphasizes an erotic and personal relationship between the human and object. Jeong falls in love with a human-shaped boxing bag, rolling around the floor with 'him'; locked in a physical tussle both sexual and violent. Elsewhere, she turns an instructional video for harnesses to re-learn how to walk into something else – innuendo-filled and humorous – and in doing so confronts us with both the gendered ploys of marketing and our own anxious preconceptions of an increasing reliance on machines.

In her most recent installation 'Spa & Beauty,' Jeong focuses in on the ubiquitous industry of beauty and body care products – brushes and sponges, lotions and potions – anything offering a more beautiful and healthier body – and explores them as objects in relation to their users. Here, the artist juxtaposes the objects themselves with videos featuring their use and advertisements alongside hand-cut and pasted images, videos showing their creation and her own newly made hybrids created from existing products. In each of these manoeuvres, we see the knife edge of the erotic and violent, the humorous and uncanny, the point where the performer becomes performed that we all must negotiate. In the age of the digital and virtual, Jeong's use of the synthetic, the plastic and mechanical directly intervening in her own body, of materials colliding, speaks of a complex set of interrelations manifestly situated in reality, in the physical.

Together these interactions and images of use, fantasy and promise, form a series of narratives that orientate the viewer around perspectives not only of the personal, but a fundamentally changing societal relationship between viewer and viewed, agent and consumer, human and object.

– Rose Lejeune, 2018

*Geumhyung Jeong (*1980 in Seoul) studied drama at Hoseo University as well as dance and performance at the Korean National University of Arts and the Korean Academy of Film Arts. Her performances and works were in Tate Modern, London; in the Atelier Hermès, Seoul; in the Delfina Foundation, London; at the New Museum Triennial, New York; at the Zürcher Theater Spektakel, Zurich; at the Malta Festival, Posnan; in the Württembergische Kunstverein, Stuttgart; in the PACT Zollverein, Essen; at the Name June Paik Art Center, Yongin and the SPIEL ART Festival, Munich.*

'Spa & Beauty' was commissioned for The South Tank, Tate Modern in London, as part of 'Tate Live: Geumhyung Jeong' (October 2-8, 2017) and reconstituted at SongEun Art Space in Seoul as solo exhibition 'Spa & Beauty Seoul' (March 9-May 26, 2018).