

Do Ho Suh: Passage/s

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Disputing Le Corbusier's assertion that a house is merely a "machine for living in," 20th century designer and architect Eileen Gray posited that a house should be viewed rather as "the shell of a man, his extension, his release, his spiritual emanation." Although Gray passed away in 1976, her sentiment is still relevant in our increasingly globalized world. It is echoed in the premise of Korean artist Do Ho Suh's *Passage/s* on view at Victoria Miro Gallery (February 1 to March 18, 2017). The show marks the first exhibition of the artist's work in London since *Staircase-III* was presented at Tate Modern in 2011. It also makes up the most comprehensive display of Suh's oeuvre since his retrospective at the Serpentine Gallery in 2002.

Drawing inspiration from his peripatetic life, Suh investigates the notion of home as both a tangible edifice and a lived experience. Negotiating the porous boundaries that exist between the individual and his/her dwelling, the concepts of identity politics, cultural hybridity, transience and migration are explored. Referencing and replicating the various places he has lived—from his childhood home in South Korea to his student residence in Providence, Rhode Island, and apartments and studios in Berlin, New York City and London—the exhibition is a physical manifestation of Suh's journey through life.

A colourful walk-through installation of nine structures meanders around the 25-metre-long gallery floor. The configuration is intended as a series of passageways, each depicting a specific space the artist has inhabited. "I see life as a passageway, with no fixed beginning or destination," says Suh.¹ "We tend to focus on the destination all the time and forget about the in-between spaces. But without these mundane spaces that nobody really pays attention to, these grey areas, one cannot get from point a to point b."² Choosing to eschew facades, the artist rather replicates the interstitial areas that are often overlooked, namely, corridors, vestibules, thresholds and landings.

The amalgamation of these labyrinthine structures composed of stitched, coloured polyester panels incites visitors to enter the installation. The enveloping architectural space (in this case, the white cube) visually seeps through the sheer fabric and becomes an intrinsic part of the beholder's visual journey. Once inside, viewers can travel into the surrogate skin of a place they have never experienced. The act of navigating through the semi-transparent "hubs" becomes an emotive experience of crossing boundaries and drifting through Suh's eidetic psychological states: "The space I'm interested in is not only a physical one, but an intangible, metaphorical, and psychological one."³ Blurring the line between the public and the private, time appears to be frozen,

as fleeting memories are rendered permanent. Moving beyond the artist's unique experience, the structures also speak metaphorically about movements between cultures. Hence, the changing colours—from jade green to blue, pink and purple—mimic man-made demarcations around mapped geographical territories. Binary concepts of home and displacement intermingle, imbuing the "fabric architecture" with meaning, as Suh's inherently personal history is universalized. In the artist's words: "I've been living in so many different countries, and my work is about questioning the borders, and moving in and out freely. My life and work are all about that."⁴ Through this poetic process of retelling, Suh investigates the intrinsically human need to belong—to a country, city or even a physical space—and the subsequent fallout of being displaced. Thus, while the places where the artist has lived are meticulously replicated, their ghost-like appearance communicates effacement.





Exploring new processes in art making, the *Rubbing/Loving Project* was created over the past three years and acts as an homage to the artist's New York City apartment. Intimately engaging with his surroundings, Suh lined every surface of the interior with paper; he then rubbed the flat's inner shell with coloured pencils and pastels. This fastidious "gesture of loving" not only speaks of the memories associated with the place, but also of the relationships created within it. The *Exit Series* (2016) exhibited in Gallery I takes this concept a step further, as the name of the artist and his landlord are hauntingly etched onto smaller dexterously reproduced household fixtures and fittings—namely, light bulbs, plug sockets, doorknobs and entry buzzers. Parodying the Duchampian readymade, the pieces are composed of white fabric and are displayed in a light box like the sloughed skin of a reptile specimen. Next door, Suh's iconic architectural installations have been steamrolled into colossal two-dimensional drawings. Sewn and submerged in water, the gelatin dissolves to watermark the white paper with skeletal images. Relics of Suh's imagined dimensional apocalypse, the imprint hovers over the page like pressed flowers.

The exhibition also contains three immersive video installations: *The Pram Project* (2015-2016), *My Home/s* (2014-2016) and *Passages* (2015-2016). Attaching a GoPro video camera to his daughter's stroller, Suh explored the streets of Islington (London) and Seoul, visually documenting three different viewpoints. Ambient sounds from the cities are juxtaposed against intimate conversations between the artist and his daughter. Both English and Korean can be heard, as cultural and geographical boundaries are blurred. The videos follow the ribbon of narrative that Suh has woven carefully around the white cube space, as the transience of human experience is presented both as a sustained emotional state and an act of self-discovery.

Investigating the binarism between the accuracy of representation and the transformative power of an artwork's physical environment, the success of Suh's architectural facsimiles lies in their ability to communicate to viewers the unique moment in which reality and imagination meet. Through the use of gauzy materials, an elusive experience is crafted. While visitors can enter the installation, its gossamer walls appear ephemeral and transient, akin to the life the artist has led in multiple cities. Documenting his transient, uprooted existence, Suh's spectral manifestations will endure as phantasmal relics of fossilized architectural memories—places once inhabited that now belong to the artist's past.

1. Do Ho Suh in "Do Ho Suh, Passage/s," Victoria Miro Gallery, 2017.
2. Suh, 2017.
3. Do Ho Suh in Turner, Christopher, "For Do Ho Suh, There's No Place Like Home," *Apollo Magazine*, 3 December 2016.
4. Do Ho Suh in Belcove, Julie, "Artist Do Ho Suh's Houses of Memory," *Financial Times*, 26 January 2017.

Ariane Belisle is a London-based art advisor specializing in post-war and contemporary art. She established AIB Art Advisory after her many years of first-hand experience in both the primary and secondary art markets. Ariane has worked closely with several major private art collectors, corporate collections and foundations, advising them on their acquisition and consignment strategies, and managing their collections on an international scale. Since receiving her MA in Curating from The Courtauld Institute of Art, Ariane has worked on a variety of curatorial projects and is a regular contributor to numerous art publications.