

LION'S HONEY

a reader

BRIDGING THE WORLD WITH ANOTHER

As the humble night sight completely vanished from view, the sign flashed on to indicate that the flight had taken off safely and passengers were allowed to unfasten their seat belts. Only then could I relax a bit and recall a story that the taxi driver told me. At this moment, when one world ends and another begins, I am suspended. The first dawn of one world is also the dawn of my first day stepping foot on an unknown continent ... a wonderful coincidence.

Park Seoryun, *The Shirley Club*

Inspired by a book gifted by John Kaldor, Agatha's spirit flows like honey through the codex of book spines spread across six white bookshelves and the pages placed on the green chair and lambswool rug. Agatha, who we only met via a screen, gifted Readers four hours a day every week throughout the exhibition 경로를 재탐색합니다 UN/LEARNING AUSTRALIA to read in the gallery space.

At first glance the Readers seemed to enjoy the romance of their role, appreciating the sentences in the books, but in fact, time didn't flow so tranquilly. As their reading practice transitioned from one world to another, Readers navigated obstacles – a stranger's gaze, noise, occasional bouts of drowsiness and boredom – but still they had the books in their hands. After losing themselves in the realm of literature, Readers still found their way home to this world.

Just like Seol-hee (Shirley) – the heroine of the novel *The Shirley Club*, which Agatha gifted to Readers as a starting point for *Lion's Honey* in Seoul – Readers oscillated between public and private spheres. They performed the act of reading between states of 'being alone' and 'being together'. I tried to bridge the gaps in this process and encouraged Readers by reminding them that they had taken off safely and could now unfasten their seat belts. Although Agatha lives in Sydney and could not be here for various reasons, I and other trusted delegates organised workshops, exchanged messages and emails, and continued sending signals to bring us all closer. We hoped that the thread of reading, which flowed through the spines of books and bodies, would bring everyone together such that our bonds would not fade.

The fluid vehicles we call books loosely connected us to Agatha's and Seol-hee's worlds, and the worlds of the characters in the books through which each of us travelled. I sincerely hope that this open-ended story will become a bridge that links this world with others elsewhere.

Miji Lee, Public Program Manager

10:30am – 3:30pm on weekdays. When my child is at the daycare centre, this is the only time that I can be on my own. Not alone, to be precise. There is a dog who needs to be taken for a walk and a cat who needs to be played with and fed from time to time. Everywhere in the house I have scraps of breakfast to clean up, ingredients waiting to be cooked for dinner, laundry wishing to be laid in the washing machine, clothes in the drier ready to be housed in the wardrobe, files on my laptop expecting my typing, and the dust on the floor ... I've never been alone. Not even for a moment.

In October 2018, I became a mother and it was a life-changing experience. Taking care of a child is the toughest thing I've ever done, but having another mysterious world of a child by my side has generated a willingness to embrace the toughest work of my life.

However, unfortunately, among the numerous roles of the mother, there is no role as a book-lover who reads for leisure. Of course, it's not that I

haven't read a book at all during motherhood. I have indulged in fairytales and parenting books. From time to time, when I had a minute, I tried reading novels and humanity books. But having to comprehend their narratives or relationships in a short period of time was too much for me. This was until Agatha, a team of curators, and a green chair in the exhibition space sent me to *The Shirley Club* in Australia.

Every Friday I spent about four hours – 30 hours overall – reading. I read art theory books that I have been putting off for years, practical books for my

current job as an editor, essays and basic science books on global crises, and an autobiographical story of a woman who proudly unfolds her path. While reading their books, I encountered the authors, the characters, and the worlds of Jhumpa Lahiri and Emily Dickinson.

Now that *Lion's Honey* is over, I know for sure that, decades later, when I look back on my life and think of the highlights, one of them will be the time when I came into the museum every Friday, settled myself into the green chair, and had a quiet conversation with a book, entirely on my own. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Agatha and the curatorial teams for giving me a precious opportunity to be myself through these books.

Kyounghee Lee

FLOATING READER

Soyoun Lee is a poet, a feminist, and a social activist reader.

Seokhee Kang, *We, Our Best*, Seoul: Changbi Education Publishers, 2021.

Hyunjin Gong et al., *A Poem that Has Not Arrived Yet*, Seoul: Somyung Publishing, 2022.

Hyun-a Yoo, *Anyone of Employees, and Whoelse*, Seoul: Aeji, 2013.

Marc Hamer, *How to Catch a Mole: And Find Yourself in Nature*, translated by Yoowon Hwang, Seoul: Caracal, 2021. Originally written in English.

Eunji Kim, *Three letters in Tangerine and Thank You*, Seoul: Walker, 2019.

André Aciman, *Call Me By Your Name*, translated by Jihyun Jung, Seoul: Jan 2019. Originally written in English.

Park Seoryun, *The Shirley Club*, Seoul: Mineumsa, 2020.

A GENUINE READER

I became a Reader on 17 December 2021. Anyone can be a reader but thanks to Agatha, I genuinely became a 'Reader'. It was a busy time for me then. However, being an understudy Reader, I couldn't help but say 'I'll be there' whenever the other weekday Readers asked me for a favour. All because of the green chair that consumed me with its indescribable force. Those mysterious and obscure sensations, generated through the green chair, were things that I had never experienced before while reading.

The books I read were mixed up across the shelves of the six regular Readers. I was imprinted upon their space like the white foam created by waves rolling back out to sea.

Since I was given the role of a 'Reader', I took the matter of objectification into serious account. However, I decided to become a more active object in this process of being seen. The visitors at the museum watched me reading to myself, from a certain distance. Whenever I couldn't concentrate on reading, I could feel their gazes. But soon enough, I fell into the world of books. Even at that moment, though, I had a sincere wish. I wished for the visitors to imagine freely the world that I had infiltrated. It wasn't easy for me to endure their glances,

but adopting an active and subjective attitude allowed me to create meaning beyond objectification. There is a thrill in the moment when I am reading a book and the audience is reading me, and then the whole thing is read by all. It was joyful, even when a docent [volunteer guide] mistakenly introduced me as a person who cannot read books in daily life. So I want to say, as a willing participant, that all of this was as I had intended. This is how *Lion's Honey* by Agatha is boundlessly free. Just as I gifted visitors the freedom to imagine me, Agatha gifted me a green chair, six shelves, and a book as a gateway to represent her thoughts. There was no other intervention. Only a gift of green socks from afar, which was like a message saying that she was here with us. I confess that I was relying on Agatha the whole time as a Reader. Thank you.

Soyoun Lee

TUESDAY READER

Muyeong Kim is based in Seoul and he engages with video works and performances.

Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, translated by Gwangsoo Gwak, Seoul: Minumsa, 2008. Originally written in French.

Ivan Cheng, *Confidences/Baseline*, Berlin: TLTRPreß, 2021.

Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*, translated by Yunhee Lee, Seoul: Hyunsil Munhwa, 2006. Originally written in English.

Park Seoryun, *The Shirley Club*, Seoul: Mineumsa, 2020.

THURSDAY READER

Bae Haeyoul is a playwright and a reader who has come to realise that reading is a dynamic act.

Sol-a Im, *To Flatly Say It's Nothing*, Seoul: Moonji Publishing, 2021.

Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, translated by Jin Huh, Seoul: Open Books, 2014. Originally written in English.

Haeouk Shin, *Looking Out the Window*, Seoul: Moonji Publishing, 2021.

Lulu Miller, *Why Fish Don't Exist: A Story of Loss, Love, and the Hidden Order of Life*, translated by Ji-in Jeong, Seoul: Bear Publishing, 2021. Originally written in English.

Sum Kim, *Ls Sneakers*, Seoul: Mineumsa, 2016.

Goeun Yoon, *Night Travelers*, Seoul: Mineumsa, 2013.

Jungwon Mok, *Rather Silence for Mother Tongue*, Seoul: Achimdal Books, 2021.

Boram Lee et al., *Woman Does Not Cry*, Seoul: Right Season Publishing, 2019.

Park Seoryun et al., *That is Why We Are in Love*, edited by Rainbow Bookmark, Paju: Dolbegae, 2021.

Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*, translated by Hyunkyung Kim & Bitna Han, Seoul: Minumsa, 2017. Originally written in Japanese.

Jinyoung Choi, *A Week*, Seoul: Jaeum & Moeum Publishing, 2021.

Park Seoryun, *The Shirley Club*, Seoul: Mineumsa, 2020.

ORIGINALLY COMMISSIONED BY

Making Art Public: 50 years of Kaldor Public Art Projects

RE-COMMISSIONED BY

경로를 재탐색합니다 UN/LEARNING AUSTRALIA

Kaldor Public Art Projects at the Art Gallery of New South Wales

7 September 2019 – 16 February 2020

Seoul Museum of Art & Artspace, Sydney

14 December 2021 – 6 March 2022

SUPPORTED BY

CURATORIAL TEAM

PUBLIC PROGRAM MANAGER

Seoul Museum of Art & Artspace, Sydney

Seoul Museum of Art (Gahee Park, Eugene Hannah Park, Kani Kim)

Artspace, Sydney (Alexie Glass-Kantor, Michelle Newton, Johanna Bear)

Miji Lee

RE: THE VOLATILE MEDIUM OF LION'S HONEY

Dear Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday Readers; dear understudy Readers,

I asked you to read for my work *Lions Honey*, performed at Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA) as part of an exhibition entitled 경로를 재탐색합니다 *UN/LEARNING AUSTRALIA*. Each of you read books of your choosing in public, and now this Reader is a document of your reading, and the project. The work started in Australia in 2019, as part of another exhibition, *Making Art Public* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

These two iterations of the same work are made from the same various component parts – commissioners, money, Readers (who are you – people), books, time, pages, sentences, words, letters, and your labour, in the form of reading in public. The physical place the work plays out in – the gallery or institution – provides a frame or support for the work that is by no means neutral or unencumbered by its own material, social, cultural, and political specificity.

But circulating between, and suspended in relation to, these component parts of material and context, is another substance. It is a medium (*a substance that makes possible the transfer of energy from one location to another*) that holds a heady mixture of things: both those outlined on the didactic panel beside the work and other less tangible or easily ascribable. I am not sure exactly how to describe this substance, only to say that it is certainly not neutral or stable and it is also very sticky!

It includes the stories that emanate off the many pages of the many books – authorial intention, cover art, narrative arcs, cliffhangers, character development, climactic chapters, denouements, and other literary conventions – that you have collectively read under the conditions of *Lion's Honey*. It is the relationship between books themselves, like a daisy chain inadvertently formed by correlation. It's a kind of composite portrait of our times created through the books you choose; the moods you all have, many and varying according to the day, week or month; your feelings that the work is a blessing and/or a curse; your agreement to labour; the memory, held in your body memory of sitting in the chair inside the museum, of the administrative emails, of organising your calendars to facilitate the work's existence.

But it also incorporates the origin and history of the work's emergence in 2019, its gradual formulation under a series of social, cultural, historical, and economic conditions; my motivations for making it initially and my choice to return to its logistics in this iteration. It draws in and preserves (even replicates) my own anxieties, tensions and decisions around the work and these are suspended in this visceral medium – including my fear of the work's imminent failure or misrecognition. Or simply its capacity to irritate both its Readers and viewers.

This substance – this unstable medium – simultaneously enables the transmission of the work to its new context in SeMA and paradoxically weakens any possibility of its replication without substantial transformation. The delegation to the Readers (in the form of labour and tone) which is inherent to the work's logic both creates the possibility of its iteration, and loosens the tension that ordinarily holds a work together. The passing of responsibility for making and enacting the works to you, dear Readers, exponentially increases the work's mutability, but accountability for the work's authorship remains with me. In the case of *Lion's Honey*, the medium – that which holds the materials and rests upon the context – is itself both fickle and fugitive.

The journey of the work to this new context in Korea – physically, temporally, and linguistically distant from me – seemed to have the effect of amplifying the unpredictability of the work's transmission. No matter how hard I tried to mitigate this volatility by gently (and sweetly) 'training' each of you according to my own intention and 'tone' in Zoom workshops and email correspondences, the medium seemed to take on a life of its own. And in this iteration of *Lion's Honey*, unlike in Sydney, I was not in physical proximity to any of you, and not able to responsively steer this medium when it began to morph or mutate.

At the beginning of this project,

I sent you a letter that constituted both an agreement and some advice. It listed several caveats of the work:

We are always performing; find comfort in this uncomfortable situation; we will always be in dialogue with what is adjacent to us; this is not an endurance work, but it is durational; you may lose hope in the work's premise or my artistic authority. You may regret your own willing participation; the conditions each of us perform under are unique and bear distinctive challenges, inequities, and privileges. Public places are unpredictable; our image may be captured and disseminated without our permission. We are remunerated for our daily labour at a known hourly rate.

Content is selected consciously; share responsibility; this object is a record of our wilful transformation of capital from one form to another. This is an improvisation. The conditions are always changing, and the parameters are always negotiable. Take pleasure; have ease.

On reflection, this list of conditions was an attempt to stabilise the medium, to enhance its capacity to hold the work reliably and consistently and keep all of you inside it.

But in practical terms, as you read your books,

carefully chosen, amongst the ambience of SeMA and the other works in 경로를 재탐색합니다 *UN/LEARNING AUSTRALIA*, I was not there to protect you, or advocate for your safety. I could not absorb your absorption of these books you have chosen to read. I was not there to witness your discomfort, or grace, or irritation, or pleasure. I was not there to see your chosen books resting on your laps, the sheepskin (never touched by me) softly supporting you (or perhaps inflaming your skin), or to see the chair itself gradually, but insistently, begin its journey through the

SATURDAY READER

Yeonggyu Jeon is a literary critic and reader interested in poetic, unique and enchanting ways to share her beloved texts with others.

Anne Helen Petersen, *Can't Even*, translated by Dasom Park, Seoul: RH Korea, 2021. Originally written in English.

Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods, *Survival of the Friendliest*, translated by Min-a Lee, Paju: Dplot Press, 2021. Originally written in English.

Ataru Sasaki, *This Fierce Force*, translated by Cheon Ahn, Seoul: Jaemum&Moem Publishing, 2013. Originally written in Japanese.

Jaechon Choi, *Homo Symbiosus*, Seoul: Eum Books, 2022.

Sol-a Im, *To Flatly Say It's Nothing*, Seoul: Moonji Publishing, 2021.

Young Man Huh, *Appearance 1: Read Mind from Faces*, Seoul: Wisdom House, 2008.

Jung Eun Hwang, *A Diary*, Seoul: Changbi, 2021. Rebecca Solnit, *Whose Story Is This?: Old Conflicts, New Chapters*, translated by Jiyang Noh, Seoul: Changbi, 2021. Originally written in English.

Park Seoryun, *The Shirley Club*, Seoul: Mineumsa, 2020.

exhibition space. I was not there to observe you being apprehended by gallery visitors. I did not see you describing the work nor shielding yourself (with your books) from further intrusions or enquiries. I could not buy you a hot drink or sit with you in the café and ask how it was feeling, how you were feeling.

As the conclusion of *Lion's Honey* at SeMA drew near, one of the Readers, Muyeong, wrote on his @LionsHoney Instagram post that he felt the work was 'powerless, indecipherable, yet generative and contagious'. I felt a strong sense of the uncanny – it was as if the medium itself, and all the volatile, conflicting feelings contained within it, was speaking back to me. Muyeong was describing his own experience of reading, and yet he also described my own sensations throughout the passage of the work's duration, all the way back to its inception at the moment of commission.

I thought back to 2019, when I was sitting with John Kaldor at the Art Gallery of New South Wales café, and his words returned to me. 'Let me tell you a story' he began, 'the desert itself was hot and dry. Its sand hills rose and fell ... Suddenly, a huge lion rears up before a man ... he tears it apart limb from limb. The lion is dead, and the man continues to the village ... Later, as he returns across the huge desert, he comes upon the place he murdered the lion. The lion has decomposed so that it is only a carcass now, its flesh rotten and dry ... Golden viscous liquid trickles from the hive and pools in the carcass of the lion ... He reaches his hand through the exposed bones and scoops out handfuls of golden seeping honey.'

I asked Muyeong more about these four words he posted: *powerless, indecipherable, generative and contagious*. He replied, 'I often think about you getting home to a mailbox from Seoul and seeing all the dog-ears and highlights that are indecipherable to you forever ... You develop and they await but if something comes back to you it is reversed ciphers. You

can't help but decode the individual rhythm of all the dog-ears and highlights. Those are the chaotic leftovers which you are suspended to devour.'

Mutating honey and chaotic leftovers, dog-ears and ciphers, love and contagion, authorship and delegation, durational reading as a temporal suspension, a volatile medium that carries both gift and burden.

The books, grasped by your hands, opened to your eyes and chests and heart, now sit in my studio, mute, but still held in suspension by this same ambivalent medium that has carried the work since its origin. And for this duration, I too have been suspended – my body, my tone, my tensions, and my inconsistencies. During your time as Readers the same medium also held you. You and I passed through it, connected momentarily, and pass these stories between our hands, and we continue to pass this honey, that both sustains and devours us.

It is this story of *Lion's Honey*, played out again and again, during the hours, days and months of your reading, and over the years since I began this work, that constitutes this medium of endlessly proliferating sweet and viscous complexity.

Sincerely,
Agatha

SUNDAY READER

Seoha Lee is a poet and art educator who writes a ten-year diary. As a reader, she is interested in history, domesticity, the environment, feminism, and animals.

Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, translated by Eung Sang Kim & Hyosil Yang, Seoul: Changbi, 2020. Originally written in English.

Charlotte Perkins Climan, *Moving the Mountain*, translated by Hyun Jeong Im, Seoul: Kungree Press, 2020. Originally written in English.

Jorge Luis Borges et al., *I Knew Every Raindrop by Its Name*, edited by Paris Review, translated by Juhye Lee, Seoul: Darun Publishers, 2021. Originally written in French.

Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, *De avond is ongemak*, translated by Jihyeon Kim, Seoul: Viche Book, 2021. Originally written in Dutch.

Ruth Ammann et al., *Das Buch der Bilder*, translated by Kyung Hee Park, Seoul: Mujin Tree, 2021. Originally written in German.

Eunmi Choi, *A Snowman*, Paju: Munhakdongne, 2021.

Park Seoryun, *The Shirley Club*, Seoul: Mineumsa, 2020.

Readers Soyoun Lee, Seoha Lee, Minhyun Joo, and Yeonggyu Jeon are members of the Literary coterie Kyeum (meaning 'turn on'), a collective of young female poets and a literary critic. They write poetry and criticism that energetically discusses feminism, the climate crisis, and other issues of our time.