
iNVENTX 2025 Creative Exhibition

SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion . Expression . Identity

□ otherisland

Bin Youn
bin.youn@rmit.edu.vn
RMIT University Vietnam, Vietnam
ORCID iD: 0009-0007-8814-6870
(Corresponding Artist)

Abstract

□ otherisland emerges from the enduring gap between islanding and de-islanding, those movements that inscribe lines both inside and outside of cultural identity. This work has undergone transformation from an immersive experience to a corner installation with a customized printed roller blind and thermal blanket. What I term "spatial distillation" reaches its apex in this iteration, where the Korean consonant □ serves as both a linguistic vessel and a spatial portal, creating a hidden threshold between the familiar corner and the alien landscape beyond. The rectangular form of □ functions as what Jacques Derrida calls a "parergon," a frame that is neither inside nor outside the work but constitutes the very condition of its appearing. Through this corner installation, the work embodies SUSTAINAISSANCE, demonstrating how my practice transforms and rebirths from a large immersive installation into a corner iteration. The Korean consonant □ amplifies the core concept of this work, functioning as epoché for viewers, creating a phenomenological moment to think beyond immediate reality, suspending assumptions about space and identity to reveal new pathways for diasporic otherness. The roller blind format re-presents staged photography, transforming the act of revealing into a phenomenological gesture, while the thermal blanket grounds viewers in the immediate present, the physical space and time where participants stand. This metamorphosis of the installation suggests that spatial distillation can amplify experiential intensity, creating "portal aesthetics": the sustainable artistic practice that reinvisions a minimal architectural space into potential speculative futures.

Keywords Sustainaissance; Korean diaspora; Linguistic displacement; Portal aesthetics; Cultural otherness; Transformative space

Received: 1 July 2025, **Accepted:** 20 November 2025, **Published:** 30 December 2025

Artist Statement

Concept and Theme

□, an empty terrain inside and outside.

□, the first sound in powerless space.

□, where I am from and where I go in the end.

These opening lines from my original installation now manifest through a corner portal, a customized roller blind that transforms architectural dead space into a threshold between worlds. The work investigates what Homi K. Bhabha terms the "split-second" of cultural translation, materialized here as the moment of pulling the blind cord to reveal an alien landscape that exists simultaneously as motherland and other lands.

Living as a Korean artist across multiple linguistic territories, I have experienced how identity forms through processes of islanding and de-islanding. The Korean consonant □ becomes both frame and portal: its rectangular form creates what Jacques Derrida calls a "parergon," a frame that is neither inside nor outside the work, but constitutes the very condition of its appearing. Like Derrida's frame, □ marks the boundary between Korean and English, between mother(land) and other(land), creating an aperture through which meaning both enters and escapes. The thermal blanket below functions as a material echo of this linguistic frame, its reflective surface creating what Rosalind Krauss identifies as spaces of "reduplicated being," where the self encounters its own image as alien.

My sustained investigation of blinds as both material and metaphor began with my earlier installation "Somatic Blinds" (2022), where I explored the dual meaning of "blind"—as a physical barrier blocking light and as the condition of unseeing. In my poem of the same title, I wrote: "It needs to be closed to open and open to close. / The windowless blinds are for your inside and outside." This paradox of blindness as insight continues in □ *otherisland*, where pulling the blind to reveal requires first accepting its concealment. The corner installation literalizes this linguistic epoché, using the architectural corner as a site of phenomenological bracketing where cultural assumptions suspend in favor of speculative encounters.

The work directly addresses SUSTAINAISSANCE by transforming material constraints into creative catalysts. I discovered that spatial distillation—from a 737-square-foot installation to a single corner—actually intensified the work's emotional and conceptual impact. The corner, architecturally marginal yet structurally essential, became a metaphor for the diasporic experience: always at the intersection, always between worlds.

Sustainability manifests through both material choices and conceptual framework. By repurposing a domestic roller blind and an emergency thermal blanket, the work demonstrates how everyday materials can generate profound experiences of otherness. The thermal blanket, designed for survival in extreme conditions, becomes a meditation on both cultural survival and planetary crisis—its reflective surface suggesting the Earth's rising temperatures, its emergency function evoking our climate predicament, its thin membrane recalling the fragility of atmospheric protection.

Approach and Process

My methodological approach evolved through "spatial distillation." The original □ *otherisland* was a 737-square-foot (68.5-square-meter) theatrical installation with projectors, reflective surfaces, and complex technical requirements. Faced with the constraint of sustainable practice, I began experimenting with radical spatial concentration.

The breakthrough came when I recognized the corner as a site of concentrated possibility. I developed a diagonal mounting system for a customized roller blind (165cm × 110cm), positioning its bottom edge 70cm from the floor to create intimate viewing conditions. The alien landscape, created through staged photography of constructed environments, depicts unfamiliar cosmic terrains that exist outside of time and space.

The integration of the thermal blanket (90cm × 90cm) emerged from both practical and conceptual considerations. Practically, it defines the viewing area. Conceptually, its reflective surface creates a fragmented, unstable ground. Viewers glimpse blurred fragments of themselves in the metallic surface, experiencing what participants describe as altered sensory awareness through the material's unique texture and sound. This creates "reflexive displacement": viewers become part of the alien terrain they observe through fragmentary reflections and haptic encounters.

The experimental approach involved testing how minimal intervention could maximize impact. I discovered that the simple gesture of pulling a blind cord could carry the weight of dimensional travel when properly contextualized.

Meaning and Impact

□ *otherisland* aims to convey that extraordinary worlds exist within ordinary spaces; we need only the right gesture to reveal them. The work embodies my belief that possibilities emerge from present awareness: the space and time we inhabit now actively construct our potential future. The work tells a story of enduring displacement and discovery, where identity forms not through fixed positions but through active exploration between worlds.

I hope viewers experience "sustainable wonder," the recognition that profound imaginative experiences can emerge from minimal material means. When viewers step onto the thermal blanket and pull the cord, they become active agents in an act of world-making. The alien landscape serves as a mirror for their own experiences of otherness, whether cultural, linguistic, or existential.

The work provokes reflection on how we might reimagine sustainability not as reduction of possibility but as concentration of experience. It asks: What worlds hide behind the corners we pass daily? How can daily materials become portals to new identities? The impact lies in transforming viewers' relationships to space. After encountering □ *otherisland*, every corner contains a potential portal.

Materials and Techniques

The work employs two primary components that embody the principle of sustainable transformation. The customized printed roller blind measures 165cm × 110cm and features digital printing on standard blind material. Mounted diagonally across the corner using adapted commercial hardware, the blind's bottom edge is positioned precisely 70cm from the floor to create an intimate viewing angle. The printed image depicts an alien landscape created through staged photography, featuring green planetary surfaces, impossible geological formations, and cosmic atmospheres that exist outside any recognizable temporal or spatial location.

My use of thermal emergency blankets emerges from my own experience of mothers and lands. The skin is the primary sensory layer where I remember them, bathing in their heat, energies, colors, and light. The blanket, measuring 90cm × 90cm, consists of metallized polyester (Mylar) material originally developed for space exploration. Its reflective surface creates visual integration between viewer and artwork, fragmenting the viewer's reflection into the alien terrain. This lightweight yet durable material embodies the principle of "doing more with less," transforming a survival technology into a platform for imaginative encounters. Positioned to extend from the corner outward, the blanket defines the active viewing zone.

The photographic process involved constructing and staging alien environments rather than digital manipulation, creating otherworldly scenes through physical arrangement and lighting. This approach maintains a material honesty; what appears alien emerges from real spatial interventions rather than post-production effects.

High-resolution capture ensures clarity when printed at large scale, maintaining the uncanny detail that makes the landscape simultaneously familiar and alien.



Figure 1. Staged Photography from the Original □ *otherisland* Installation (2022),
Now Featured on the Roller Blind in the Corner Iteration

References and Influences

The work draws from multiple cultural and theoretical sources that inform its conceptual framework and material approach. Central to the work are Korean spatial concepts and the visual language of *Il-weol-o-bong-do*, traditional Korean palace paintings depicting cosmic harmony through sun, moon, and five peaks, here reimagined as an alien landscape that disrupts rather than harmonizes.

Theoretically, the work engages with Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of cultural translation and the "third space" where hybrid identities form between fixed cultural positions. Gaston Bachelard's "poetics of corners" from *The Poetics of Space* provides the phenomenological framework for understanding how corners concentrate imaginative possibility. Lucy R. Lippard's writings on dematerialization in art directly influenced my approach to reducing material presence while amplifying conceptual impact. Jacques Derrida's concept of the parergon from "The Truth in Painting" (1987) provides a crucial framework for understanding how □ functions as both inside and outside, frame and content. Rosalind Krauss's analysis of reflective surfaces in "Grids" (1979) informs my understanding of the thermal blanket as creating spaces of "reduplicated being."

The work also connects with Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's linguistic disruptions in exploring fragmented identity through language. Land artists working with minimal intervention, such as Michael Heizer and Nancy Holt, demonstrate how small gestures can transform vast conceptual territories.

Conclusion

□ otherisland demonstrates that sustainable artistic practice can expand rather than contract imaginative possibility. By transforming a single architectural corner into a portal between worlds, the work proves that environmental consciousness and conceptual depth reinforce each other. The piece's significance lies in its methodology: showing how artists can create profound experiences of cultural translation and identity formation through minimal material intervention.

The work's potential impact extends beyond the gallery context. It suggests new models for artistic production that honor both environmental and cultural sustainability. By using repurposed materials to create experiences of wonder, □ otherisland points toward a future where artists need not choose between ecological responsibility and imaginative ambition.

This work continues my investigation into “alienation as resource,” explored across multiple projects that transform experiences of displacement into portals for connection. Whether through physical corners that reveal alien landscapes or digital interfaces that resurrect fallen flowers into hybrid beings, my practice demonstrates how sustainable artistic methods can transform estrangement into new forms of kinship.

Future directions might include creating a series of corner portals in different locations, each revealing distinct otherworlds while maintaining the sustainable methodology. Environmental influences shape both the work's form and urgency. The climate crisis necessitates new approaches to artistic production that minimize resource consumption while maximizing experiential impact. The repurposing of space exploration technologies for terrestrial survival speaks to our current moment of environmental precarity. Contemporary artists investigating sustainability, including Olafur Eliasson and Tomás Saraceno, provide models for creating wonder through environmental consciousness. The work could also inspire community workshops on transforming everyday spaces into sites of imagination using minimal materials. Ultimately, □ otherisland proposes that the most sustainable practice might be teaching viewers to see the extraordinary within the ordinary, to recognize that every corner potentially contains a cosmos. Enduring movements of islanding and de-islanding draw new lines. With layered lines, you become land in the end.

References

- [1] Bachelard, G. (1964). *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press.
- [2] Bhabha, H. K. (1993). "Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation." *1993 Biennial Exhibition*. New York: Whitney Museum of Art, pp. 62-73.

- [3] Cha, T. H. K. (1982). *Dictee*. New York: Tanam Press.
- [4] Derrida, J. (1987). *The Truth in Painting*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [5] Krauss, R. (1979). "Grids." *October*, Vol. 9, pp. 50-64.
- [6] Lippard, L. R. (1973). *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Acknowledgment

The artist gratefully acknowledges California State University Long Beach for supporting the original installation development, and RMIT University Vietnam for ongoing research resources supporting this work's theoretical evolution and sustainable transformation. Additionally, special thanks to MMU University for the great opportunity and for supporting this work.

Funding Information

The artist did not receive any funding from external parties for the creation or publication of this artwork

Authors' Bio

Bin Youn is a Korean multimedia artist and educator based in Vietnam, whose practice bridges lens-based media, poetic spatial installation, and participatory environments. Currently an Associate Lecturer at RMIT University Vietnam, Youn explores diasporic identity, otherness, and language through ephemeral materials such as light, shadow, reflective surfaces, and found materials. Her work examines displacement and alienation as generative forces, investigating how estrangement can create new forms of connection across cultural, technological, and spatial boundaries. Holding an MFA from California State University, Long Beach, Youn has exhibited internationally and is dedicated to creating sensory experiences that foster cultural reflection. Her recent work investigates "portal aesthetics," transforming minimal architectural spaces into gateways for speculative encounter and cultural translation, where the boundaries between self, space, and time are continually re-imagined.