

## KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

### Jae-Eun Choi Solo Exhibition *Nature Rules* at Kukje Gallery

Press Conference: March 20, 2025 (Thurs.), 12pm

Exhibition Dates: March 20–May 11, 2025

Venues: Kukje Gallery K2, K3

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present *Nature Rules*, a solo exhibition by Jae-Eun Choi, in the gallery's K2 (spanning both floors) and K3 spaces from March 20 to May 11, 2025. Marking the artist's third solo presentation at the gallery, the exhibition presents works that explore themes revolving around the origin of life, temporality, birth and extinction, as well as the complex dynamic between nature and humanity. Across disciplines encompassing sculpture, installation, architecture, photography, video, and sound, *Nature Rules* is a major introduction to the multi-hyphenate artist who, having moved to Tokyo, Japan, in the mid-1970s, was trained at the Sogetsu Art Center in the avant-garde interpretation of *ikebana* (生け花). In 1986, Choi presented *Earth*, an installation where she covered Isamu Noguchi's interior garden, *Heaven*, with thirteen tons of topsoil and sowed seeds, manifesting her unique philosophy concerning the cycle of life and spatio-temporality. In *World Underground Project*, an ongoing series that also began in 1986, Choi examined concepts of vitality and cycles by burying specially made papers in the ground and then unearthing them to analyze traces of accumulated time. Expanding upon this seminal project, Choi has also experimented with new approaches combining art and science, including works involving the magnification of the miniature universe of micro-organisms within paper itself. In particular, starting with the *Dreaming of Earth* project which has evolved since 2015, she has developed a complex collaborative art project as a means of restoring the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)'s fragile ecosystems grounded in in-depth professional research.

Throughout the exhibition, Choi suggests multifaceted interpretations and reimaginings of the "forest," a subject of persistent interest in her oeuvre. Strewn across the first floor of K2, the series of paintings titled *From the Forest* draws from the artist's daily experience of strolling in wooded ecologies. Collecting various autumn leaves and flower petals during her walks through the forest located in the neighborhood of Kyoto where she currently resides, the artist utilized these natural materials as pigments for paint, applying them onto her canvases. Consisting of chromatic variations ranging from coral to earthy and light brown hues, each pictorial plane is characterized by a singular palette that eschews representation but can be described as a faithful portrait of the forest in which the artist walked. Inscribed on the surface of the paintings are graphite transcriptions of ambient sounds—such as whistling of the wind, bird song, and rainfall—that Choi encountered while strolling. For instance, *Sar r r r r* (2025) refers to the sonic translation of the falling leaves in late autumn, while *Hu u u u* (2025) is based on the sound of a mountain echo from distant mountains beyond the forest.

Choi's sensory analysis of the light and sound of the forest continues on the second floor of K2 through multidisciplinary experiments including text-based work, sculpture, and video. Installed on the floor of K2 is *Monologue of a Tree* (2025), a poem written by Choi, which conveys an intimate story of trees that she encountered in the forest. Forming a visual harmony with the body of sculptures that include gold leaves on twigs, the poem provides a multivalent narrative of the forest. Meanwhile, the video work *Flows* (2010) is on display further inside the exhibition space. Depicting the base of a giant, old tree in a slow 360-degree rotation, the work invites the viewer to confront the sublime manifestations of the epic flow of time in the form of complex inscriptions on the bark.

K3 introduces the DMZ Project that the artist has developed over the past decade. Initially conceived under the title of *Dreaming of Earth*, Choi's DMZ Project has been recategorized under a new title *Nature Rules*, in which the artist has undertaken more structured research into the ecological recovery of the DMZ in the Korean peninsula. A culmination of years of dedication, the project involves an in-depth analysis of the ecological conditions of the DMZ and an organization of data concerning the types and quantity of plant species required for the ecological restoration of each region. The artist has proposed a "dream" solution consisting of making small seed bombs—measuring three to five centimeters in diameter that contain tree seeds—and sowing them from the air via drones, over the DMZ, where millions of landmines remain buried. Through this project, Choi seeks to promote a collective dream for the future of this contested land, a dream that searches for potential and actual collaborators who can help materialize this vision.

On the computer installed inside each folding screen, produced with dried flower petals that Choi collected during her daily forest walks, the viewer can access the website for *Nature Rules* and register to make a "promise" of seed bomb donations in the desired region by browsing the map of the DMZ. In this project designed to allow visitors to make a donation at the cost of KRW 100 per bomb, the seed bomb serves not only as a specific method, but also as an intermediary network that connects participants to each other in the process of recovering

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the forest of the DMZ. The artist named this platform and initiative *New Alliance*, a concept forged by the renowned Belgian physical chemist Ilya Prigogine, which implies a harmonious existence of men within the natural order. Contrary to Choi's initial expectation, the ecological environment inside the DMZ was undergoing severe degradation. As revealed in the process of carrying out the "DMZ Ecological Forest Plan," the artist realized that the fragmentation of the DMZ's ecosystem was more intense than the public's perception as a result of prolonged military interventions by both South and North Korea. Through this project—open to anyone across the globe without the constraint of boundaries—Choi envisions the recovery of nature's sovereignty as well as the establishment of a foundation for a new hope built on universal consensus and shared values.

### **About the Artist**

Jae-Eun Choi has held solo exhibitions at various venues including Ginza Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo (2023–2024); Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2019, 2010); National Gallery Prague, Czech Republic (2014); Kukje Gallery, Seoul (2012); and the PLATEAU (formerly Rodin Gallery), Seoul (2007), among other venues. She has also participated in group exhibitions at internationally renowned institutions such as the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2024); Culture Station Seoul 284 (2022, 2019); and National Gallery Prague, Czech Republic (2008). Following the 1993 presentation of *Recycle Art Pavilion* at Daejeon Expo '93, Choi participated in the 46th Venice Biennale (1995), where she represented Japan, and the Venice Biennale of Architecture (2016). Her works are included in the collections of prestigious museums around the world, including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul; Art Sonje Center, Seoul; Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; and National Gallery Prague, Czech Republic, among others. Major open-air sculptures include *Seon Space*, a stupa for the Buddhist monk Seong-Cheol at Haeinsa Temple, Hapcheon, Korea, and *Direction of Time*, a sculpture installed in front of the Samsung Medical Center in Seoul. Choi currently lives and works in Kyoto, Japan.



**Jae-Eun Choi (b. 1953)**

*From the Forest*

2025

Natural dyes and charcoal pencil on canvas

100 x 72.7 cm each, 2 sets

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Jae-Eun Choi Studio

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



**Jae-Eun Choi (b. 1953)**

*Nature Rules*

2025

Silk, cotton linen and *washi* (foil)

155.4 x 122 x 2.7 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Jae-Eun Choi Studio

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



**Jae-Eun Choi (b. 1953)**

*New Alliance*

2025

Wood structure with pressed flowers on 112 *urushi* lacquered wood panel, framed  
212.6 x 238 x 6.9 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Jae-Eun Choi Studio

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



**Jae-Eun Choi (b. 1953)**  
*Seed Bomb Manual*  
 Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery  
 Image provided by Kukje Gallery

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