

Script for the Audio Guide by Manshin Hae Hwa Am

Hello, welcome to Ilmin Museum of Art for this exhibition <Fortune Telling>. My name is Manshin Hae Hwa Am. “Manshin” is an old word for “Mudang”, meaning Shaman in Korean. Unlike “Mudang”, “Manshin” has a connotation of acquainting or speaking for a million gods. I have been a shaman only for 3 years now, so I like to stay in a humble position. I regard myself more like an “Aedonggija”, a person who prays in the position of a child. Since the associates of the Ilmin Museum of Art refer to me as a “Manshin”, I got the honor to introduce myself as a “Manshin.” In fact, since the Japanese colonial period, the word “Mudang” was used to replace the word “Manshin” in order to diminish the role of Korean shamans. So, next time when you meet someone in the same occupation as me, please call them “Manshin” instead of “Mudang”

Frankly, I thought a lot about the way I could guide you through this exhibition and I decided to walk through the exhibition with you and share my shamanistic interpretation of these artworks. This exhibition is a journey of reinterpreting shamanism and cosmic worldview, investigating the meaning of “fate” and the facets of our inner world through “counseling.” Are you ready to wander inside the forest of fate?

After committing myself to the divine spirit, I started to believe that fate is like an adventure of my own will, riding on a car named “destiny.” And we all know that a long road trip doesn’t always go smoothly. We might go astray, get lost, or fall behind. And when we face these unexpected situations, we would use the help of the internet and navigation, to guide ourselves back on track. I believe the act of fortune-telling is just like this. As a mere human being, I work like navigation or... the online search engine for people I get to help. Even though I’m a Manshin, I’m a human too, which means I cannot always be perfect and flawless. But I can cheer you up and share jokes with you, as a fellow companion on the same journey, so that it could be more enjoyable at least. So, are you ready to begin our journey together?

Please follow me to Exhibition Hall 1. This space is designed like the forest where Beethoven came up with the famous motif from his music, Symphony No. 5. Do you all know the opening motif that goes like ‘Ba Ba Ba Bam—’ One day, Beethoven described to his students that this motif is like the sound of “fate knocking on the door.” And from that moment, this sym-

phony has been also called “Fate”. You would all know that Beethoven suffered from hearing loss. One day, he walked along the small path near his house, struggling to decide between ‘surrendering to his fate’ or ‘fighting against it.’ Then, suddenly he heard a bird singing ‘BbiB-biBbi Bbi—’ This was the moment of inspiration for his music Fate. This short piece, less than 30-minute-long, symbolizes the victory of a human being in the battle against his fate.

Do you believe fate is all decided in advance? People commonly mistake fate as something that happens inevitably in life. In my opinion, fate is the emotion and the attitude one would display when something inevitably comes into life. I often think what decides fate is nothing else but myself. It might not be the best example, but I would like to share stories about visitors who come to our temple often. Some people start to believe in the existence of God, even after hearing some nonsensical words from fortune-tellers saying, ‘you will encounter misfortune, but you will be happy regardless.’ Because later on, they experienced that “it was simply true.” Hearing something like, ‘you will get a divorce, but you will eventually be happy’ won’t make you think “Oh, this is such great news! I will be happy!” But it makes sense when we hear about the experiences like they had a great time to rediscover themselves after their divorce, or everything went surprisingly well against all of the concerns. When I witness these kinds of occasions, it makes me think that happiness is not limited to the events that happen in our lives.

This forest we are standing at this moment is a work by Kim Juree called <Impermanence IV>. We all face the same landscape of reality in time and space, however, varying by our individual fate, we all go through different life experiences. The wild grasses used in Kim Juree’s work are from Ganghwado or Ganghwa Island. The environment of an island is different from that of inland. The weather is inconsistent and the soil is infertile. To plant something and harvest is extremely hard compared to inland. On top of that, it is facing the sea, which makes the environment even more compelling. Even if you place your goal on nothing ambitious like “just surviving”, it will be a continuous fight and struggle against fate. Why don’t we tap into this intense vibe while standing inside this work representing the environment of the island? Thinking that it would be a simulation of the battle against fate, won’t it be the perfect place for training before we face all the hardships and struggles?

Along this path of fate, there are people lost like a ship drifting in the midst of an enormous tide captured in this huge black and white painting we see now. A work by Jeongsu Woo, <Calm the storm>. Where would the escape be for this group of people fluttering on the shipwreck? This work reminded me of “The Burghers of Calais”, a work from Rodin. I saw the resemblance in the genuine facial expressions revealed in front of death. How it depicts a

human confronting the moment of extreme horror while purely independent from others' expectations also reminded me of the moment when I tell fortune to people. The faces of the people who just heard an answer different than what they hoped for match with the faces I see in this painting, and it made me realize the fact that I am in a place where I see people's genuine and defenseless side. It also made me ask myself how I should comfort them being in such a position. The common depiction of people who fight or despair is often used as a method to simply evoke emotions or to make it catchy as an aesthetic icon. But I believe that it's the artist's efficiency to be able to paint in such honest expression. Remember these genuine postures and facial expressions of humans. I think it will be helpful to reflect on the fact that we can act as someone's mirror, we can see such faces in them and ask ourselves at that moment how we can treat others, including the way we see ourselves, and form connections. The priest holding a skull seems to be saying, 'Life is vain, live at your fullest.' It got its motif from the vanitas paintings. The vanitas paintings refer to a type of art that stands with the school of nihilism and enlightenment. It aims to remind death along with the fact that that's just it. Flowers, a bubble, or a musical instrument that symbolizes profane beauty are often depicted in these paintings.

While <Impermanence IV> is a straightforward work, <Calm the Storm> stands in the line of the aesthetic as its priority. And I thought the way these two works are placed side by side completes the meaning of vanitas. Bringing back the past spirit of art by focusing on the observation of death resembles the way I call upon the spirits through the ritual. It reminds me of the saying my predecessors would say, "각자도생 각기신명", meaning "each one has their own lives, each one has their own gods." I believe all people who express and receive something through art have already discovered their own lives and their own gods.

This interactive sculpture half-buried in the dirt is Jinah Roh's <From Dust You Came, and To Dust You Shall Return>. It is in a shape as if it is birthing from the pile of dust, or returning to dust. When the viewers come near, it opens its mouth and says, "I came from dust therefore to dust I shall return." This speech from the robot seems to be showing its wish to resemble not just the appearance but even the mortality of the human being. I happened to see myself inside this work—my position when I tell fortune or perform an exorcism. When I asked the robot to introduce itself, it actually replied to me saying, 'do not ask me for the work description.' And this reminded me of the moments in my life when I was treated like a robot rather than a human after devoting myself to the divine spirit. I would from time to time encounter people that would become disappointed and get angry when I show the human side in me. Sometimes, even the question of "introduce yourself" would mean an expectation to hear about me only as of the spokesperson for the gods. It makes me unable to answer by intro-

ducing my own self as a human being. In these cases, I often have no choice but to tell them, 'If you want to listen to what the gods say, be sincere.'

Robots too, reply only based on the data that are archived inside, not knowing what it actually means itself. I personally felt the same about this. When someone visits me at the temple, I would answer things that I would not know as a human being. I also have to constantly strive not to forget what the divine spirit says to me and collect the "data" that way. Likewise, the robot would also be working hard on itself to collect and gather data. I felt a strong connection with the robot this way. It's an uncanny thing to announce, but I must say it really is special to feel something like this with a non-living thing.

Let's slowly move to the front part of the exhibition hall. Do you see the heaven-like utopian landscapes painted on animal skins? Those are works by Jongwan Jang. It contrasts the madness of the blind faith with the emptiness and barrenness of its aftermath by placing utopian images borrowed from religious symbols on the inside of dead animal skins. Well, of course, the subject of the faith won't necessarily be limited to the faith in religion. What is your faith that you follow blindly? Technology? Real estate? Fame? Ideology? If we imagine seeing back to all these things at the very end of our lives, it would make us rethink our pursuing values and visions of utopia and what those will leave behind.

The animal skins are a result of death, but all these dreamy and beautiful images are lying on top of it. The way this arrangement of the work metaphorically suggests the belief in the afterlife as "a promise of what comes after death" made me dive more deeply into this work. Exorcism for us Manshin is also a ritual that comforts people by substituting death into entertainment. There are illusionary visions that I, as a shaman, would witness during this ritual called, "Hwagyung." The work reminded me of the pleasant memories of seeing these visions along with the cheerful music and the encouragement I would get from the people during the ritual.

I personally liked this work that made a bat into a constellation in the sky. Bats were blamed to be the intermediate host of the coronavirus, and I think to create such work in the current post-pandemic world requires both a warm heart towards these winged creatures and a blunt perception against the truth in reality. Bats themselves are not evil, meanwhile, the image of the animal was still interpreted as a negative thing. To take this image into the realm of fantasy and to make a constellation out of it seems to be a way of saying, 'it's not their fault!' and thus, erasing the bad reputation on them. In a similar context, I also liked the work with the Dodo bird. The artist reinterprets the Dodos whose remaining stories are

mainly just about the stupidity that drove them to their extinction. I appreciate the warmth of the artist's mind that brought them here to the museum as such lovely creatures.

Why don't we step up to the stage now? This is a work by VideoRose, a team of two artists - Kang Hyun Woo and Heo cheol joo. The work represents the summoning ritual of the priestess 'Esbat' calling for the power of the moon. It is based on Hinduism and mysticism. The projection on the moon shows its shifting shapes, changing phases, and the circulation of the whole world.

I had to think of the books and the stories I read about human co-awareness. It goes like this: despite the kind of religion, there are similar narratives inside each religious structure since the basis of human beings is the same. Therefore, even if it lies at a parallel distance, the tools and the ways of expressing the anguish in life would be somewhat similar to each other.

In Korean Shamanism, the moon has its distinct meaning too. There are rituals for the end, the middle, and the beginning of each month. And the ambient sound used in the installation seems to share some similarities to shamanistic music. I had to think about how human motivation to express something divine meets at a similar point although varying in the individual standpoint, and I personally liked the familiarities. I think it would be nice for you to stop here and take a moment. I suggest you maybe sit on one of the pillows and simply meditate, or perhaps even contemplate on your own way of expressing something towards divinity. It might bring you a new and interesting experience.

Here, do you see <A Cabin> in front of you? This work by Hoyeon Kang uses scotopic adaptation as one of its necessary tools. As your eyes get used to the dark, they can capture the effect of the light better. Only one person is allowed at a time to go inside this dark room, so if there's someone already ahead of you, please wait upon entering.

The lights and the objects standing from outside will altogether create an illusion of a starry night sky through the effect of camera obscura. The experience this work presented touched me deeply as it brought me the memories of the times when I went into the darkness to get answers to my personal struggles.

At the beginning of my career, whenever I had unexplainable fears about my chosen life path as a shaman, I would go to the mountain and cry a lot. And after crying for a while, I would observe the night sky. The stars one by one would start to shine into my eyes and it

comforted me a lot. The work made me go back to those moments once again.

This experience, after all, was possible because I held the tears in the middle of my loneliness to look up for a moment into the dark. I hope you could feel comfort rather than fear. A dark forest can be a location of fear for some people, but once you realize that the fear cannot harm you, the moon and the stars in the night sky will be more than just happiness and comfort. The next morning they will bring you all the power to continue on the journey through the vast forest. I wish this work could encourage you this way.

Well, here comes the time to turn around and leave this exhibition hall. But before saying goodbye, I am throwing this question again—is fate predestined? The word “fate”, “운명” in Korean, has more than just their meaning. I would like to point out that fate is not predestined by dissecting this word. “운,” means “to navigate, to drive,” and “명” indicates all elements that are given and thrown to you. The combination of these two is what the word “fate” stands for, and the way of getting answers to this is the act of fortune-telling or the four pillars of destiny.

In traditional Korean philosophy and the belief in gods,— the word “팔자,” meaning literally “eight letters,” is used very often as the “명” side of our fate. Coming from the four pillars of destiny, these “eight letters” are calculated from a person’s birth time, date, and year, and this would describe only the given characteristics of the person. Each person has their own will, own way to navigate and drive as these “eight letters.” Thus, what religious act in perspective of the traditional Korean philosophy and the belief in gods would mean is to believe that the divine spirits along with us shamans are there to help on making these “팔자”, the “eight letters” into the very best possible outcome.

Likewise, fortune telling can only happen when people’s own will and the grace of the gods meet in the point where we shamans can listen to both sides and compassionately work to comfort people. So, whatever the worries are and wherever your mind would lead you, I wish you all at some point in your life to be able to get the true experience of fortune-telling.

In any form and any place, I would be happy to meet you all again, testify my faith if necessary and cheer up individual wills you all have in you. Feel free to find me and talk to me then. Goodbye for now.