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DO-HO SUH
By Shamim Momin

Through installations and sculptural objects of stunning formal clarity and multivalent conceptual complexity, Korean-American artist Do-ho Suh investigates notions of personal space and its relationship to individuality, collectivity and anonymity. While often based on specific institutional structures such as school or the military, Suh uses these structures as a model to suggest larger cultural ideas, a microcosmic enactment of social standards wherein individuals learn to place themselves within the world. Almost all his work is interactive, requiring the viewer to physically engage with it—by walking over a floor made of thousands of military dog-tags from which swells a larger-than-life central figure, for example, or traversing a glass floor supported by the upturned hands of thousands of plastic figures. Like much of Suh's work, these installations convey meaning through an accumulation of small elements that form a greater whole. The process of discovering the small components that make up the work creates an intimate, personal journey for the viewer, yet one that is always informed by the initial impression of the greater whole. This discourse entices the viewer to contemplate how an individual becomes a part of a powerful, collective body and underscores the permeability of boundaries between personal and group identity. Similarly, wallpaper that from a distance resembles abstract patterning is on closer inspection revealed to be composed of tiny high-school yearbook portraits, evoking the psychological space in which individuality or anonymity is defined.

Suh's interrogations of space - metaphorical as well as literal - have also taken on a more explicitly architectural nature. Reconstructions in semi-transparent fabric of specific homes in Seoul or New York capture the notion of a transportive space that nevertheless remains distinct and site-specific - metaphors for the ways in which one must navigate cultural displacement and determine one's specific identity in an increasingly globalised world. Dovetailing Suh's concern with interactivity, nearly all his work addresses the physical body, although never through a realistic representation of a specific person. Often it is the absence of the figure itself, suggested through the symbolic presence of clothing or its representation in the most generic, endlessly reproducible form, that evokes the possibility of emptiness residing at the core of collective unity, and of grouping as a social construct. This approach couples with the physical engagement required by the viewer to create a sense of individual identification and an awareness of

one's body in space, a legacy of minimalism that Suh has elaborated into a uniquely contemporary strategy.

Born in Seoul, Do-Ho Suh currently lives and works in New York. He received an MFA from both Yale University and Seoul National University and spent time at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at venues including the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Missouri; Seattle Art Museum, Washington, Serpentine Gallery, London; Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, New York; and Lehmann Maupin, New York. Suh's work was included in the Biennale of Sydney (2002); Venice Biennale (2001); 'Greater New York', PS1, New York; and 'KOREAMERICKAKOREA', Artsonje Center, Seoul. His work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York, Walker Art center, Minneapolis; Museum of Contemporary Art, California; and the Guggenheim Museum, New York.