



External Space

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Ivetta Sunyoung Kang

Proposition 1: Hands

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When was the last time you held someone's hand? Did you enjoy it? What if it helps you to relieve your lingering anxiousness from an unforeseen future? Certainty plays a considerable role in our lives; it guides us to make decisions and provides alternatives in various situations. Vice Versa, uncertainty can create many negative mental responses within us. The unpredictability of time, space and people has the power to fabricate fear and anxiety, and it can grow like a disease. We are often taught to fight against the fear of uncertainty or even to ignore it, *Proposition 1: Hands* by Ivetta Sunyoung Kang suggests something different.

A black & white single-channel video installation indicates a series of hand positions involving two participants in which the artist has transformed a child game from South Korea into a therapeutic process for healing. As part of Kang's long-term research project, Ivetta Sunyoung Kang's *Proposition 1: Hands* takes on the perspective of resolving anxiety and nervous energy. Kang's work implies that alongside the happiness that we are always trying to achieve, negative emotional responses also need to be emphasized as a large portion of urban life. Accompanied by an informative booklet that demonstrates the massage steps, audiences are invited to sit on the

chairs provided, play the modified child game, and acquire the other participant's energy flow and warmth.

As the connecting process begins in the video, the recipient has to let their guard down and deliver trust into another's hands. Each step represents a stage of sharing and trusting; hands-holding creates immediate bonding between two persons. The bonds help the recipient to acknowledge that this is a safe space, and time to give in and exchange; as you are not only the recipient but also the one who provides. In this context, the two participants act as therapists for each other and themselves. The process does not aim to walk away from the complexity and concerns, confronting it instead, to take in power and rejoin. The name of this installation, "propositions," suggests that these hands positions are only the physical actions. In order to establish a strong interconnection, the therapy also involves the participant's mental hints and imagination. Kang's installation works more like a capsule that gathers all the negative emotions during the performance and provides time to temporarily walk away from commoditized social structure, to magnify those negative mental aspects.

During the performance, one of the subtitles states that "Admit that you cannot help those hands get warmer," which signifies that, although this therapeutic exercise is partially supported by the other person, it is also dependent on yourself. Energy starts to flow naturally as the performance continues; the other hand will seize all the emotions that's been awoken from the designated hand and reconcile with it. The designated hand will feel pressure but mostly a sense of firm reliability, and awareness that there is no permanent eradication of these anxious fragments but could always be overcome temporarily. Once the designated hand is worn out after a series of massages, such as slapping, clenching, and rubbing, the other person dabs their saliva on the hand and helps it get warm again. Then, the healed ones practice the exercise on the other. The experience may vary from person to person, it could be hard or easy, but energy will be shared as concerns are resolved.

COVID-19 has been unprecedented, and, even until now, there has been no way to fully know how to proceed. The fear of uncertainty has heightened since we are collectively going through this present trauma; connections between people are receded. This pandemic has not only isolated society but also kept us away from its reunion. Social isolation has redefined original forms of communication, and it has changed how we fulfill our emotional needs; materialistic fulfillment can no longer substitute our mental demands. We are gradually beginning to adopt new ways of living and socializing, intimate connections such as hugging and touching have been averted to its maximum extent; the pandemic is building up fear for intimacy. However, after strict sanitizing procedures, *Proposition 1: Hands* encourages physical contact through the practice on-site, which may seem taboo in our current time. The artwork emphasizes the importance of body touch and sensing other's presence while taking care of all the emotional impacts caused by the uncertainty of living we are experiencing.

Proposition 1: Hands represents a poetic way of mediation that can be easily practiced anywhere and anytime; it completely fits into our fast-paced urban life. Kang's work has created a momentary gateway for audiences to reflect and rebalance. It speaks to our empathy for pain and anxiety from current collective trauma; the need to commune with people is unavoidable and shouldn't be forgotten. Despite our living environment being made of materialistic matters and the limitation of body touch due to our current living model, the foundation of inner happiness is not necessarily about how much we grasp. Perhaps, now is the best time to rebalance our genuine emotion demands and boundless commodity desire; to face the fact that uncertainty will always be there, but there are ways to embrace and tolerate it.

- Jenny (Yiping) Zhang