

The Future of the Digital World: The Emergence and Proliferation of 'Artijecta'

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The central concept that forms the basis of Yena Park's recent work is 'Artijecta'. This neologism, which she created by combining 'artificial', 'object', and 'data', is a pivotal element that constitutes the universe in her recent works. She first introduced a worldview centered around 'Artijecta', which serves as a new entity born from the data network, in the exhibition *Calypso* at Doosan Gallery in 2022. The 'Artijecta' she has created is born from objects and data, evolving into living organisms that survive and propagate through human activity within network systems. Distinct from passive man-made objects, 'Artijecta' actively proliferate utilizing humans as hosts, utilizing humans for their survival within the web of information. This concept originates from the notion that tools designed in the most optimized form for human convenience might actually know humans best.

Yena Park's interest in artificial objects was initially evident in her first solo exhibition *Movements for a Breakaway* in 2017. During this time, she made kinetic objects that operated independently regardless of their intended purpose, such as vinyl chairs that would expand and deflate like a balloon, and a self-activating hair dryer. These objects, seeming to exist autonomously, embodied the artist's emotions, lying dormant in an ambiguous state and suddenly emerging devoid of context. Since 2020, amidst the global isolation due to COVID-19, Yena Park's work has shifted from personal emotional expressions to a macroscopic perspective on future civilizations influenced by digital networks. For example, in her online project 'Post-future Ground' (2019-2021), which deals with the fate of artificial objects, she presented a vision of the world after the collapse of human civilization on Earth, treating fragments of artificial objects such as pieces of asphalt, tiles, and broken ceramic cups as geological specimens or as meteorites and cosmic dust in infinite space.

In her solo exhibition *Overlapping World* in 2021, she displayed artificial debris collected from construction sites, ground down like gravel or soil, on the floor of a commercial space in Gimpo, thus materializing the 'Post-future ground'—the 'Land after the future'—she had created in virtual spaces online. This tactile materiality of her work made it feel as though the era of 'Post-future' had already arrived in reality. Yena Park designed a movable and adjustable research lab table and placed plant pots filled with 'Post-future soil', along with attached soil composition charts. This presentation provided clues about today's Earth environment in the form of experimental reports and visualized a futuristic ecology that could soon become a reality, drawing upon Si-Fi imagination. The exhibition space, reminiscent of the surface of a planet, allowed visitors to tactilely perceive these crushed materials while simultaneously viewing them as drifting meteorites in a virtual cosmic space through VR. This experience led to the realization that the surface they were standing on would soon become relics of Earth's future.

Thus, Yena Park's recent works overlay the past, present, and future, providing an experience that retrospectively views our current era from a futuristic perspective. This use of macro-temporal layers is also a shared focus within contemporary art. Similar explorations can be seen in Julian Rosefeldt's 'In the Land of Drought' (2017) which seemed to view a parched Earth post-civilization after the apocalypse through an extraterrestrial lens, and Pierre Huyghe's 'After Alife Ahead' (2017), set in an abandoned skating rink, showcasing the aesthetics of ruins and a science-fiction outlook. These

works present an unfamiliar aesthetic by inserting time that has not yet arrived into experiential space-time, while also issuing a warning about an impending apocalypse resulting from the speed of technology surpassing the rate of human evolution. Yena's work also evokes a sense of *déjà vu* and sci-fi fantasy due to its ambiguous time zone, which straddles chronology, the real world, and the future. It prompts us to imagine a future timeline where the present inevitably becomes an ancient civilization. This reflects the cognitive conditions of today's humans, urging us to anticipate catastrophe amid the rapid evolution of the digital world, surpassing the speed of human body, and amidst unpredictable climate change and environmental problems. Simultaneously, it prompts us to imagine and prepare for life awaiting after.

In her new work, presented at the OCI Museum of Art, the key is also the perspective of retrospectively viewing the present from the future. In this exhibition, she visualized her worldview centered around the installation work 'Part of the Incident' (2024), which multiplied 'Artijecta' as an even more threatening entity. This work presupposes the collapse and disintegration of a researcher's basement, which had been studying 'Artijecta', due to their explosive proliferation. Understanding this underlying worldview requires recalling her 2023 solo show *Hotspots Base Camp* at the G-Blue Gallery in Euljiro. During that time, she presented the exhibition space as a research base camp tracking the existence of 'Artijecta', visualizing 'Artijecta' as moving clusters of cells through a 3D video that viewers could see in the streets around Euljiro using an AR app on their smartphones.

In the current exhibition at the OCI Museum of Art, 'Artijecta', born within the network, become bizarre ecological hybrids that encroach the physical realm out of human control. The explosive proliferation of this new species, born from immense data flow, presupposes a scenario in reverse, where this alien presence invades and dominates the three-dimensional material world, twisting space-time. Components from *Hotspots Base Camp* (2023), such as doors, furniture, and utensils, are destroyed, dismantled and devoured by 'Artijecta', which is now further empowered. These remnants evolved into structures resembling neural networks, muscle tissues, or 'Sindansu(神壇樹)¹' and columns of a temple, by proliferating and intertwining with the wires of the network that gave birth to 'Artijecta'. Yena Park's 'Artijecta' have now become powerful symbols and ecologically embodied entities occupying space as another heterogeneous base camp. Visitors can enter the material structures of these fusion bodies and sense their properties through VR virtual images that mimic the writhing of a living organism. Inside these structures, AI continuously broadcasts simulations of natural landscapes on monitors, revealing the artificial system's ability to endlessly create pseudo-nature by combining information.

In her new work, the wreckage of *Hotspots Base Camp* creates an impression as if we are witnessing a near-future situation where 'Artijecta', due to an explosive amount of information, has evolved beyond the pace of human civilization to become the dominant species. Additional materials, such as anthropometric images, were also fabricated to appear like old references that 'Artijecta' has utilized for its own evolution, and exhibited as traces of an ancient civilization. Thus, Yena Park makes us to oscillate between *déjà vu* and a sense of the microscopic by creating a setting that overlaps past-present-future timelines. Simultaneously, she conveys an implicit warning

¹ Sindansu is a deified tree from Korean mythology, 'Dangun'.

about an era in which humans become mere devices useful to 'Artijecta', and envisions a high-dimensional complex system where even artificial objects become part of nature.

In 'Out of Control' (1994), Kevin Kelly presented a new evolutionary biological perspective predicting that machines would gradually acquire biological traits. As he foresaw, mechanically created objects gaining autonomous capabilities and becoming indistinguishable from organisms are not a far future. Yena Park's work allows us to experience a science-fiction world that has already arrived in our present by mixing physical and virtual spaces, real data and imagination. It appears like a time-slip report about a future dystopia. A work like this makes us feel the effectiveness of art in dealing with the future, as it enables an intuitive perspective on the fate of civilization, foreseeing beyond other futurological texts by prompting us to imagine a near-future timeline in which nostalgia towards the perished present is inherent.