

Way Home

What does home mean for you? It can be a peaceful resting site, or a place where a family is born and raised. Today, for Koreans in particular, the home is a dwelling place for a family but also a desired goal and a symbol of wealth. My work re-defines this meaning of "home."

My work focuses on the making of the home, or the house. My "house" is not something in which one can actually live, nor is it a precise reinvention of a house that really existed. The house that I make is one that exists only in someone's memory, drawn out from their recollections through an interview. Precious memories reside in the house where one was born, raised, or lived. Unfortunately, houses, charged with such precious memories, cannot exist for a long time. That may be because people living in it move out of the house, or the house is demolished due to redevelopment projects or even wars.

My grandparents were victims of the Korean War. They were born and raised in Gaesung, North Korea, where they started their family. The Korean War broke out in 1950, and they became displaced people. Many victims of the war in Korea lost their homes, and the displaced could never go back to their home town or reunite with their families. This is not something that happens only in Korea. Wars break out all around the world, and many people lose their homes overnight. It may not just be due to wars. Houses charged with childhood memories vanish, as old buildings are demolished in the name of economic and regional development, and new buildings are built in their place.

In my new body of work, I interviewed people who lost their homes due to reasons beyond their will, who long for the house they can never return to. Then I created the houses in their memories as they describe them. My grandparents passed away, never being able to return to their home. They asked to be buried in the northernmost mountain in South Korea, so that they can face their hometowns even after they die. The grief of losing one's precious home remains a tragic wound in their heart even after death. The houses that no longer exist are built into travel suitcases so that they can be carried along anywhere, in the hopes that the memories and homes are kept and not lost.