

English

# 서요서: 내 이름은 빨강

Suh Yongsun:  
My Name is Red

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## **Suh Yongsun: *My Name is Red***

Since the late 1970s, Suh Yongsun has been exploring Korea's modernity based on three axes—people, cities, and history. His interest has expanded into three more axes—materials, environment (nature), and mythology—through which he has reflected on the conditions and meanings of contemporary life from the perspective of world-historical universality. Creating works in genres such as portrait, history, and landscape painting, Suh has sought his own path within the formal genealogy of Expressionism and New Figuration. His 50-year artistic journey can be encapsulated as “a fundamental exploration of the medium of painting,” “a contemporary recognition of the history that shapes us” and “a reflection on the origin of the world as a time and place of coexistence.”

This exhibition is an attempt to re-examine Suh Yongsun's oeuvre and to let his artistic world come into view as a “pictorial space.” Rather than confining his painting world to a narrative and figurative frame, this exhibition seeks to reconstruct it as a figural and sensible world—a pictorial space—so as to shed new light on the radicality of his work.

*Suh Yongsun: My Name is Red* generates a new space for Suh's work upon the following coordinates: one axis consists of “cities, people, history (mythology), and nature,” and the other axis consists of “line, plane, shape, and color.” The former is the axis of the narrative (anecdotal) world, which reveals the narrative and figurative aspect of his works, while the latter is the axis of the pictorial (sensorial) world, which shows their visible and aesthetic quality. In a space created on these coordinates, his individual works are reassembled, freed from the confines of their respective production periods and stories. Ethics and politics, violence and destruction, freedom and emancipation, recovery and healing, and life and death are all important vectors on this coordinate plane. Through this process, the exhibition aims to re-illuminate the sensorial and political realm embedded in Suh's pictorial space.

The exhibition is composed of three parts. Part 1, “Gold,” revolves around cities, which have always been an important space in Suh's paintings. Part 2, “Black,” traverses Suh's painting world to explore the meaning of people, politics, history, and life. Part 3, “Butter-Fly,” reveals the artist's quest for the universal world, as well as his search for new possibilities in art and life.

The title of the exhibition, *My Name is Red*, is taken from *Benim Adım Kırmızı* (1998), a novel by Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk. Set in the Ottoman Empire in 1591, the novel revolves around paintings and painters, depicting the conflict between the traditional world and the West. The subtitles of each part of the exhibition are also connected to the main motifs of the novel. Parts 1 and 2 will be held from July 15 to October 22 in The Ground and Space 1, while Part 3 will be held from September 15 to October 22 in Space 2.

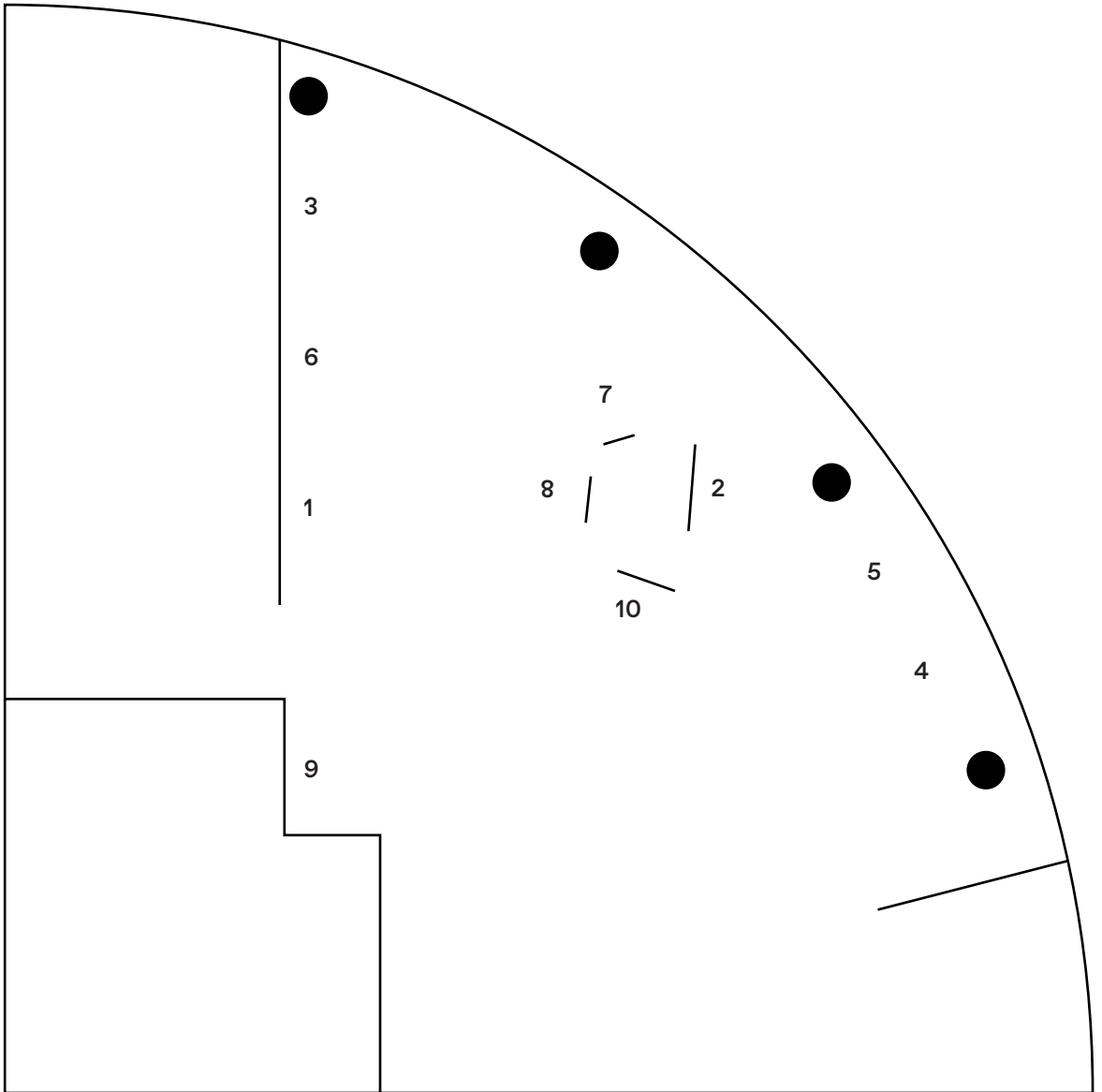
## Part 1

### GOLD

July 15–  
October 22,  
2023

The first urban experience for Suh Yongsun began in Seoul, a city devastated by the Korean War. As a child, the artist witnessed the rebuilding of the destroyed city and observed the people living in it. The war-torn city was undergoing rebirth and people were finding new lives. In the 1980s and '90s, as the Gangnam area—a newly developed part of Seoul south of the Hangang River—became more settled, the artist began to paint the city in earnest. In the 1980s, the fruits of the economic development were becoming visible in Seoul and the city was entering into full-scale growth and expansion. Suh was interested in the transformation of the city, the people in constant motion, and the cityscapes seen from public transportation. Rather than simply depicting the city, he sought to capture the significance of Seoul as a place where the past and the present are condensed into one. The cityscape and people of Seoul have always been important to the artist, for they serve as an actual indicator of Korea's modernization and modernity. Seoul is the starting point and the foundation for the artist's exploration of the past and the present. His exploration of cities and city dwellers has expanded to other cities, such as Berlin, New York, Melbourne, and Malindi, ranging from the center to the periphery of modernity, yielding works that revolve around their modernity, cityscapes, as well as people who live in them.

# MAP



- 1 *Sookmyung Women's Univ. Station 07:00-09:00*, 1991, acrylic, vinyl technique on canvas, 180×230cm.

Suh Yongsun's exploration of the city is closely linked with his own life trajectory. While leading a life as both an artist and a lecturer, he painted the cityscapes he encountered on his way to his home, studio, and university. From the bus or subway he took, he observed the city as it connected from the north to the south. The cityscape seen through the window of public transportation and the view of people moving on the streets were important visual statements that allowed the artist to glimpse the expansion of Seoul in the 1990s as well as the urban life of its citizens. Along with *In Chunggyecheon* (1986-1989), *Turning Left at Nakseongdae Entrance* (1992), and *At the Entrance of Chongshin University* (1997), this work is an important testimony of the cityscape and people of Seoul in the 1990s.

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- 2 *City-In the Car*, 1989, 1991, oil on canvas, 230×180cm.
  - 3 *People on the Bus*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 259×338cm.

Public transportation functions as the most important element in the artist's urban exploration. He has been moving through the spaces of Seoul by bus. Passing through Miari, Jeongneung, Sookmyung University, Chongshin University Station, and Nakseongdae, the artist observed the transformation of the city and the figures of the people. The act of seeing is important to him. It is a matter of how to perceive and portray the world as an artist. Accordingly, the windows of public transportation function as an essential visual dispositif for the artist. Meanwhile, the artist pays attention to the billboards in the city. From commercial advertisements to political propaganda and news bulletins, the city's vibrant articulations create an urban phantasmagoria, while also plainly exposing its desires and conflicts. The artist views this cityscape as an illusion and attempts to break through it. Along with *Conflict* (1992), this work is one of the central pieces in Suh Yongsun's early urban paintings.

- 4 *City Centre*, 1997-2000, oil on canvas, 260×200cm.
- 8 *City*, 1997, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 117×91cm.

In general, Suh Yongsun's urban exploration of Seoul allows us to imagine the geographical and cultural transformation the city underwent in the 1980s and the '90s. In the 1990s, the development and vitalization of the Gangnam area—the new Seoul—went into full swing, while Korea was becoming a full-fledged consumerist-industrial society based on the knowledge-information industry. People's lives began to change rapidly. But instead of depicting the excitement, anticipation, and joy of such economic development, the work expresses the enormous expansion of the city in geometric shapes or portrays people and cars either moving rapidly or standing still in the city. Rather than depicting Seoul as it is, the artist questions the current state of Seoul in the midst of transformation.

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- 5 *The Viewers*, 1991, vinyl technique on canvas, 208×204cm.
  - 6 *Two People*, 1992, oil on canvas, 53×73cm.

Along with his exploration of urban space, the artist also focuses on the people who live in the city. They are either waiting for something or gazing at something, going somewhere or standing still. The artist's exploration of people living in a city amidst urbanization either takes the form of figures standing against the backdrop of the city—as in works titled *In the City or People on the Street*—or is manifested in portraits titled *A Person*, *Two People*, *Three People*, *A Man*, and *A Woman*, or works with single word titles such as *Conflict* or *History*. In these portraits, the most important element is the gaze. The city dweller oscillates between the act of seeing and the object of being seen.

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- 7 *Public Square*, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 76×60cm.

In this work, the diamond-patterned floor takes up more than half of the canvas and the dark sky hangs low. A barbed wire fence runs through the center of the painting. A female North Korean

soldier stands on the other side of the fence, while a man in a white shirt stands on this side. In the background stands a ruined building. This painting, titled *Public Square*, was presented as part of the artist's research exhibition on the Korean War. In a smaller work of the same title, a man wearing gray prisoner-like clothing stands next to a female North Korean soldier. The work deals with the return of prisoners of war after the armistice, loosely connected with Choi Inhoon's novel, *The Square*. Although this work is linked to a specific historical event—the Korean War—this exhibition presents it in the context of the artist's urban exploration, in order to establish a direct connection between the war as a destruction of civilization and the present state of the city through the mediation of an urban public space, the square.

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- 9 *23rd St. Exit*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 197×124.7cm.
- 10 *Brooklyn*, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 200×120cm.

The artist travels outside of Seoul to various cities such as New York, Berlin, and Beijing. These visits are not just simple trips, they are attempts to escape from the familiar environment and absorb new senses and experiences as an artist. They are also field research for the themes he is exploring at the time. New York remains as a city that the artist often visits to this day, where he stays for a period of time to create his paintings. As already mentioned, the artist pays particular interest to the city's means of transportation. The subway of New York, the U-Bahn of Berlin, and the bicycle of Beijing are all important tools and places that help the artist look into the current state of the city. In these places, he once again witnesses the actuality of life.

Born 1951 in Seoul. Suh Yongsun graduated from the Department of Painting, College of Fine Arts, Seoul National University in 1979, and from the Department of Western Painting, Graduate School of Fine Arts, Seoul National University in 1982. He worked as a professor at the College of Fine Arts, Seoul National University from 1986 to 2008, and currently holds the position of emeritus professor since 2016.

His major solo exhibitions include *Suh Yongsun's Mago, Searching for Goddess Mago in Our Minds* (Seoul Herstory House Yeodamjae, Seoul, 2021), *Mancheopsanjoong* (萬疊山中), *Suh Yongsun Painting* (Yeoju Museum, Yeoju, Korea, 2021), *Pain· Symptoms· Signs, The Remaking of History in Suh Yongsun's Painting* (Art Center White Block, Paju, Korea, 2019), *Expanding Lines-Suh Yongsun Drawing* (Arko Art Center, Seoul, 2016), *Utopia's Delay- the Painter and the Metropolis* (Kumho Museum of Art / Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2015), *Suh Yongsun* (DAAD, Bonn, Germany, 2014), *Memory, Representation – Suh Yongsun and 6.25* (Korea University Museum, Seoul, 2013), *Mt. Odaesan Landscape* (Dongsanbang Gallery / Lee C Gallery, Seoul, 2012), *Politics of Gaze* (Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2011), *Landscapes by Suh Yongsun* (Lee C Gallery, Seoul, 2010), *Artist of the Year 2009* (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, Gwacheon, Korea, 2009), *Suh Yongsun* (Cheoram Railroad Station Gallery, Taebaek, Korea, 2006), *The Memories of the Future* (Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul, 2004), *Suh Yongsun 1993-1999, The Diary of Nosangun (King Danjong)* (Yeongwol Culture Center, Yeongwol, Korea, 1999), *Suh Yongsun 1987-1993, The Diary of Nosangun (King Danjong)* (Shinsegae Gallery, Seoul, 1993), and *Suh Yongsun* (Arko Art Center, Seoul, 1989). He also took part in several group exhibitions, such as *Minimalism-Maximalism-Mechanism Act 1-Act 2* (Art Sonje Center, Seoul, 2022), *Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of Halartec Cheoram Grigi* (Taebaek Coal Museum, Taebaek / Mokpo Cultural Center, Mokpo, Korea, 2021), *2020 Busan Biennale, Words at an Exhibition\_an exhibition in ten chapters and five poems* (Museum of Contemporary art Busan, Busan, Korea, 2020), *Gongjae* (恭齋) and *Self-Portrait of Painters* (Haengchon Art Museum, Haenam, Korea, 2019), *From Vietnam to Berlin*

(Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, Korea, 2018), *Expression of Landscape* (Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, Korea, 2017), *How to Sit* (Indipress Gallery, Seoul, 2016), *What makes the Wind Sway* (Busan Art Museum, Busan, Korea, 2014), *The 3rd IRAP Sea of Peace, Baekryeungdo - interview '525,600 hours'* (Incheon Art Platform, Incheon, Korea, 2013), *Korean Painting Now* (National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan, 2012), *Korean Rhapsody- A Montage of History and Memory* (Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, 2011), *Beginning of New Era: Defense Security Command* (the present, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, Seoul, 2009), *Berlin to DMZ* (Seoul Olympic Museum of Art, Seoul, 2005), *Gwangju International Biennale P\_A\_U\_S\_E, Project 3 - Stay of Execution* (5.18 Memorial Park, Gwangju, Korea, 2002), *The 1st Cheoram Grigi* (Taebaek Coal Museum, Taebaek, Korea, 2001), *Korean Art '97 – Humanism · Animalism · Mechanism* (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, Gwacheon, Korea, 1997), *City and Art* (Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, 1996), *Korean Painting Now* (Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden, Netherlands, 1996), *Exploration The Seoul Culture* (Hanwon Gallery, Seoul, 1994), *6 New Figurative Artists* (Moran Museum of Art, Namyangju, Korea, 1990), *Present · Image – Transforming and Taking Aim* (Gallery Noksaek, Seoul, 1988), *Seoul In Seoul* (Osaka Contemporary Art Center, Osaka, Japan, 1986), *'82 Selected Artists Works* (by 12 Art Critics) (Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, 1983), and *The 1st Seoul '80 -Work with Photo-Group* (Space Gallery, Seoul, 1980).

## Special Lecture

Date: August 3 (Thu), 2023, 16:00–18:00  
Venue: Art Hall, Art Sonje Center  
Speaker: Chung Young Mok  
(Emeritus Professor, Seoul National University)  
Admission: Free (Entry to exhibitions  
not included)

## Artist Talk

Date: August 25 (Fri), 2023, 16:00–18:00  
Venue: Art Hall, Art Sonje Center  
Participants: Suh Yongsun, Chunghoon Shin,  
Jung-Ah Woo, Jang Un Kim  
Admission: Free (Entry to exhibitions  
not included)

## Docent Program

[www.artsonje.org](http://www.artsonje.org)

### Leaflet

Suh Yongsun: My Name is Red  
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### Exhibition

Suh Yongsun: My Name is Red  
2023. 7. 15. – 10. 22.  
Venue: Art Sonje Center

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2023 ARKO Selection Visual Art  
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### Admission

Fee:  
25–64 years: 10,000 KRW  
19–24 years: 7,000 KRW  
9–18 years: 5,000 KRW  
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