

Curated by Irene Shum, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art

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Public Programs

Artist Talk: Mineko Grimmer

Wednesday, June 5, 7–8 p.m.

Main Building

The above program is free and open to the public.

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Contemporary Focus

Mineko Grimmer

May 31 – July 14, 2019

THE MENIL COLLECTION

On view at the Menil Collection for the first time in 18 years, this exhibition presents *Remembering Plato*, 1992, a mesmerizing and meditative room-sized installation by artist Mineko Grimmer (b. 1949). Since the early 1980s, Grimmer has been creating “sound-producing kinetic sculptures” that evoke calm and encourage contemplation. Using water and melting ice, the artist explores notions of time, movement, silence, and sound. Her work seamlessly merges the Eastern traditions of Zen Buddhism and the Western aesthetic traditions of minimal and Conceptual Art.

A floor-to-ceiling wall installed just beyond the room’s entrance has been designed by Grimmer to shield the artwork from view. Once inside the darkened gallery, visitors immediately encounter shimmering reflections on the opposite wall. The effect is created from light bouncing off of two identically-sized rectangular water basins that are positioned symmetrically in the gallery and illuminated on an angle with theater lights. The shallow vessels have only one difference: across the middle of one rests a brass rod, and across the other are two taut piano wires. Suspended above the center of each basin is a pyramid-shaped block of ice embedded with pebbles. As the ice melts, droplets of water and then pebbles fall, striking the brass rod or piano wires below, producing random musical sounds and adding rippling concentric circles to the reflections on the wall. As the rate of falling stones quickens to a crescendo, the typically silent natural process of entropy is rendered audible. Once nothing is left except the filament from which the ice was hung, a new pendant of ice is installed.

Grimmer’s interest in impermanence evinces her deep connection with Buddhist thought. The sound of falling stones brings to mind the passage of time. The stones collecting in the basin beneath the water’s surface offer evidence of an ongoing process, suggesting the renewal of nature. Each time the ice melts, a new block is hung and the cycle repeats. The title of the work, *Remembering Plato*, alludes to the allegory of the cave from the ancient Greek text *The Republic* written by Plato. In this work, the philosopher Socrates recounts how prisoners shackled in a cave since birth are unable to imagine or understand the world beyond their sight and thus confuse shadows

projected on a wall with full entities. This title invites viewers to ponder metaphysical questions such as the nature of truth versus illusion, ignorance versus wisdom, and the ambiguity of perception.

Mineko Grimmer was born in Hanamaki, Japan, in 1949. She received a BA in art at Iwate University and worked as a commercial artist in Japan before moving to Los Angeles, where she earned a BFA and an MFA at the Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. Her work has been included in group and solo exhibitions at the Asia Society Texas Center; the San Jose Museum of Art, California; the Museum of Modern Art Saitama, Japan; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In 1991 and 1992, she collaborated and staged performances with composer John Cage and violinist János Négyesy at the University of California, San Diego; Stanford University; John Hopkins University; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Her work is held in such collections as the Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand; the Smithsonian American Art Museum; and the High Museum of Art, as well as in private collections.

Time is essential in my work, as it is in everything. Change through time is not a uniquely Japanese idea although it is prominent in Shinto and Buddhist thought. A well-known Zen saying is “Ichi-go ichi-e,” which literally means “one occasion, one meeting.” It is a way saying that each moment is unique. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “A person cannot step into the same river twice.” Confucius stood by a river and said, “Everything flows like this, day and night, constantly.” The person who sees my work watches the ice melt, sees the pebbles fall, and listens to the sound. He might think he can do the same thing again tomorrow, but he can’t. Ichi-go ichi-e.

—Mineko Grimmer