

Chosil Kil  
in her North  
London studio,  
2010.



## Chosil Kil

Text by HG Masters | Photograph by Maja Flink for ArtAsiaPacific

When Chosil Kil opened the door of her studio and home, on a quiet street of terraced houses in the North London neighborhood of Highbury, she was not wearing glasses. I noticed this because her owlish tortoiseshell spectacles had been sitting on a white plinth in Berlin's Galerie Opdahl a few months earlier. The piece, entitled *Glasses* (2008), embodies Kil's approach to her artmaking: displays of objects that are evidence of some prior activity or private attachment. Kil's works prompt one to investigate the way things are made—in this case, how the artist had been doing without her eyeglasses, and whether she would ever get them back.

There were many questions to be asked, since Kil's often-mystifying works were explained only with a cursory sentence or two at her Opdahl show. Where, for instance, did she find the "17th- to 19th-century cannonballs" that she had heaved against the gallery wall, leaving massive indentations before shattering on the concrete floor? Standing in her studio, Kil explained that "I know a guy named Steve in Plymouth" who searches riverbeds for buried objects. "Call me when you find cannonballs," she told him, and he did. Surveying the chipped metal, Kil speculates that the balls most likely date from the English Civil War, when Royalists besieged the town from 1642 to 1646. Today they are in her oeuvre, growing more fragmented every time she throws them against a gallery wall, a process she is recording for some future use.

The readymade, now a nearly century-old idea, continues to find reinterpretations through young artists such as the Seoul-born Kil. The artist came to London to attend the Royal College of Art, and with a particular interest in both her personal history—she melted down the gold rings her mother gave her when she left Korea to create a thin tangle of wire in *Rings* (2008)—as well as recondite aspects of Korean culture, Kil had excellent stories to tell.

How a city hall employee in Gongju helped her find shamans living in the Gyeryongsan mountains so that she could collect their breath and seal it in a large glass sphere for a piece called *The Breathtaken* (2009). And how some unknown member of the public, perhaps unnerved by the shamans' breath, cut the silicon seal on the work when it was shown in Korea later in the year, compelling Kil to remake it, "in a positive way," with the glass fused shut.

Kil's studio, like one of her artworks, has an antique feel, with a glass-and-bronze chandelier, Art Nouveau-style wallpaper on one wall and pink-striped silk on the others. Two large white tables made from painted fiberboard hold several works. Twenty-five small clay forms from *The Pleasure of Regret (A Wall)* (2009) are arranged in a five-by-five grid, from largest to smallest, left to right, top to bottom. The pieces are impressions from cracks in the walls of Korea's former Defense Security Command building in Seoul, which before its demolition in late 2009 served as the venue for the ambitious, sprawling festival, Platform Seoul. Kil mentioned the possibility of casting the clay pieces, the largest of which is a few centimeters across and the smallest almost a speck, in bronze as permanent relics of the building.

In her ground-floor kitchen, which has a greenhouse-style patio in the rear courtyard, Kil is surrounded by potted plants and odd souvenirs, such as a red plastic N, once used as commercial signage, which her husband found at a Berlin flea market. Over tea, she spoke of an upcoming exhibition at Bologna's Galleria Astuni in July, and plans for a "Fictional Sculpture Park" in Stavanger, Norway, where a handbook will help viewers imagine nonexistent public art. But first, that afternoon, Kil was heading off to the optician, in need of new lenses for her glasses, not only for day-to-day life, but also for a future exhibition. ■