

# ***KIMSOOJA***

## ***Unfolding***



A Needle Woman, 1999–2001 (still)  
8-channel video projection, 6:33 loop  
Collection of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea  
Courtesy of Kimsooja Studio

## **TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE**

### **FALL 2013**

**Vancouver**  
Artgallery

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# Vancouver Art Gallery

## Teacher's Guide for School Programs

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The exhibition *KIMSOOJA Unfolding* is the first retrospective exhibition of the artist Kimsooja, born in Korea and living in Paris and New York. It highlights works that address ideas of time, memory and displacement. While the scale and media of Kimsooja's art varies widely, what remains constant is her engagement with questions of identity, culture and our relationship with the everyday. This exhibition includes coloured textile pieces, sculptures, photographs, installations and videos.

### DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition *KIMSOOJA Unfolding*. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour *KIMSOOJA Unfolding* has three main goals:

- to introduce students to Kimsooja's body of work and artistic practice,
- to consider the meanings that arise from the artist's use of diverse media,
- to explore individual artworks within their particular contexts.



*Bottari, 2000*

Used bed covers and used clothing, dimensions variable

Private Collection

## BACKGROUND TO THE EXHIBITION: *KIMSOOJA Unfolding*

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The exhibition *KIMSOOJA Unfolding* offers an unprecedented opportunity to trace the development of the artist's thirty-year career, from her earlier works to her more recent production.

North American audiences were first introduced to Kimsooja's work in the early 1990s, when she began constructing *bottari*—objects wrapped in colourful Korean fabrics. Kimsooja's adaptation of the Korean tradition of using fabric to bundle and transport domestic items became formal and symbolic as she continued to use it throughout her career. Accordingly, her *bottari* works, which represent various meanings, symbols and stories, are prominently featured in this exhibition.

In addition to her textile pieces and *ready-made* sculptures, Kimsooja combines *performance*, video and installation, addressing issues of identity, women's work and the body as art object. In many of her works, everyday actions such as sewing or doing laundry become two- and three-dimensional objects, or a performance piece. Throughout her work she considers themes of displacement, migration and exile, and she reflects on philosophical issues related to the human condition. Besides taking us on her journey, the exhibition invites us to contemplate our existence and the major challenges we face in this era.

The exhibition is accompanied by the catalogue, *KIMSOOJA Unfolding*, co-published by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Hatje Cantz (Berlin), which features over 100 images of the artist's work as well as essays by Daina Augaitis, Mary Jane Jacob, David Morgan, Selene Wendt and Suh Young-Hee.

Organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director.

## ARTIST INFORMATION

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Kimsooja was born 1957 in Taegu, Korea, and is based in New York, Paris and sometimes Seoul. She is an internationally acclaimed conceptual multimedia artist. Named Kim Soo-Ja at birth, she adopted the name "Kimsooja" in 2003, when she picked a domain name for her first website. She was struck by the implications of combining her family name and given name, and memorialized the act as a conceptual piece titled *A One-Word Name Is An Anarchist's Name* (2003). Throughout her various works, she is consistently interested in identity, migration and the common bonds that bind all people, as well as her belief in equality, regardless of culture, language or gender. She has been recognized in Korea as an artist who has created her own unique art by using traditional fabrics in a new and innovative way.

Kimsooja earned a BFA (1980) and MA (1984) from Hong-Ik University, Seoul. She has received the Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2002), among other honours, and has been an artist-in-residence at the World Trade Center, New York (1998); P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City (1992–93); and École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts, Paris (1984). She has had major exhibitions at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2009); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (2008); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2006); Magasin 3, Stockholm Konsthall, Sweden (2006); Massachusetts Institute of Technology, List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge (2005); and other institutions. Kimsooja has participated in international exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale (2001, 2005, 2013), Yokohama Triennial (2005) and Whitney Biennial (2002).

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Kimsooja and Her Art (Adaptable to all grades)

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### **Objective:**

Students explore Kimsooja's background, art processes and body of work.

### **Materials:**

- writing materials
- Artist Information Sheets (p. 7), Student Worksheet (p. 8)
- Internet: <http://www.kimsooja.com>, [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org), online resources listed in this study guide, Google search

### **Process:**

1. Divide students into four groups. Give each group one of the categories from the Information Sheet (p. 7).
2. Give each student a copy of the Student Worksheet (p. 8) and ask them to consider what they need to find out to complete their section. Have them conduct research using the Internet, either at home or at school.
3. Ask each group to find and describe a piece of work by the artist and add it to the Worksheet, in the space provided.
4. Have each group present their information while the rest of the students fill in their Worksheets.

### **Conclusion:**

Points for class discussion and/or individual writing assignments:

- What makes Kimsooja a significant or important artist?
- What is interesting about her work and life?
- In what ways does her work connect to or resonate with students' lives?
- What else are students interested in finding out about the artist?

# Artist Information Sheet: Kimsooja

(intermediate and secondary grades)

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## Her Life

- She was born in Taegu, Korea in 1957.
- She earned a BFA (1980) and MA (1984) from Hong-Ik University, Seoul.
- She lives in New York, Paris and sometimes Seoul, Korea.
- She is an internationally recognized conceptual multimedia artist.
- She came to international fame in the 1990s.
- She has been recognized in Korea as an artist who has created her own unique art and has presented traditional fabrics from a new and innovative perspective.

## Her Art

- She works primarily in video, performance, installation, object-based sculpture and photography.
- Her work is about questioning identity, gender, culture and conditions of the globalized world such as poverty and migration.
- She is best known for her *bottari* sculptures, made from colorful Korean fabrics typically used to bundle personal possessions.
- She transforms everyday objects, such as ladders, farming tools, spools and window frames with the use of colourful cloth.
- In many of her works, everyday actions such as sewing or doing laundry become two- and three-dimensional objects or a performance piece.
- Her art encourages viewers to reflect on the human condition—birth, death, solitude, companionship, etc.

## Major Achievements

- Her work has been exhibited throughout the world in museums, institutions and galleries.
- She has received the Anonymous Was A Woman Award, among others.
- She has participated in international art exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale in 2001, 2005 and 2013.

Student Worksheet: Kimsooja

Her Life	
Type of Art	
Her Works	
Important Achievements	
An Artwork: Title & Description	



## PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Portrait and Place (intermediate and secondary grades)

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### **Objective:**

Students create photographic images that describe how they see themselves in relation to their school or neighbourhood.

### **Discussion:**

- Kimsooja considers issues of culture, identity, society and the universal human condition throughout her work. She depicts herself in many of her videos and photographs (see title page of this Study Guide) and strategically places herself in a particular environment. Whether standing in a street full of passers-by, lying on a rock or watching a river, Kimsooja has carefully chosen each location based on her connection to it. In this way, she tells stories, creates meaning and contemplates existence while interacting and connecting with the world around her.

### **Materials:**

- cameras (cell phones are fine)
- printer for photographs, at home or school
- construction paper and glue for mounting

### **Process:**

1. Divide students into pairs.
2. Ask students to think about how they see themselves in relation to their school or neighbourhood.
3. Questions might include:
  - What part of the school do students connect to most? Gym, art room, their locker, etc.
  - Is there anything in the neighbourhood that is particularly important or significant to the students?
4. Have students work in pairs to take photographs of each other in a chosen setting that represents these connections.
5. Have students print photos.
6. Alternatively, each student can have his or her individual photograph taken and printed. They can collage the background with images that represent their environment.
7. Have students present and explain their work to the class.
8. Photographs can be mounted and displayed throughout the classroom.
9. *Optional:* Have each student write a paragraph to accompany their work.

### **Conclusion:**

Questions for discussion:

- Describe the process of creating your final work. Did you learn or experience something new? How was it challenging?
- Did you gain new insights into yourself and your connections to the world around you?
- What new things did you learn about your classmates that you did not know before?

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Meaningful Objects (Adaptable to all grades)

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### **Objective:**

Students assemble a unique collection of objects that reflect aspects of their daily life, and use them to form a conceptual sculpture.

### **Discussion:**

Kimsooja considers sculptures to be symbolic tools that can help represent both simple and complex meanings. Most notably she creates ready-made sculptures using everyday objects, such as *bottari*, to represent her life experience, culture and issues of identity in the globalized world. Through her sculptures, Kimsooja reveals the expressive power of ordinary objects.

*"I really think I've tried to find a way not to make things. So I've been using a lot of found objects in daily life—not really to touch much or make things but to present as is, questioning different issues. Bottari was one of them."*—Kimsooja

### **Materials:**

- objects, chosen by students
- *Optional:* cameras (cell phones are fine)  
printer for photographs

### **Process:**

1. Ask students to gather three or more objects that represent aspects of their life. Objects should be very specific to them—a favourite book, photograph, hockey puck, etc.
2. Have students bring the objects to school and arrange them in an interesting or artistic way on their desks, the floor or other appropriate areas.
3. Once the object-based sculptures are complete, have the students photograph them.
4. If students wish to make their work outside of school, have them photograph it and bring the photos to class.
5. Have them print photographs at home or at school. Regular printer paper is fine.
6. Have students write a brief description of each object's significance to them, and describe how the objects contribute to the finished artwork. Younger students might write a sentence or two for each object, older students a paragraph or more.
7. Have students edit the text, write/type a good copy and mount it on coloured paper.
8. Have each student present their work to the class and read their piece.
9. Display the written text alongside each sculpture in the classroom.
10. If the work is photographed, mount the photograph on coloured paper alongside the written text.

### **Conclusion:**

Questions for discussion:

- Why do you think artists choose to use everyday objects in their art? Would you? Why or why not?
- Does the meaning or significance of the everyday object change when it becomes part of an artwork? How?

- Have you learned anything new about your classmates through their chosen objects? If so, what?
- Is there such a thing as an acceptable subject for a work of art? What could be considered unacceptable? Why?

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Everyday Actions: What Happens When Nothing Happens? (intermediate and secondary grades)

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### **Objective:**

Students take a small, detailed everyday action and rethink it by writing about it, illustrating it and performing it.

### **Discussion:**

Traditionally, ordinary everyday actions have not been considered subjects for art. However, many contemporary artists work with the commonplace and the everyday as a way of addressing a multitude of issues. In her practice, Kimsooja takes familiar actions that for the most part go unnoticed in our daily lives, and reimagines them through her art. Sewing, wrapping, folding, unfolding, covering and breathing are actions to which she repeatedly returns. In doing so, she challenges us to stop and rethink our most basic activities.

### **Materials:**

- paper (large and small) and pencils
- pencil crayons and/or collage materials: magazines, scissors, glue

### **Process:**

1. Ask students to think about small moments of their everyday lives—actions that take from a few seconds to a few minutes. Examples include tying a shoelace, brushing teeth, putting on a coat, making a cup of tea...
2. Have them choose an example and break it down step by step. For example, brushing teeth:  
Pick up tube of toothpaste, remove cap, pick up toothbrush, put it down face-up, squeeze toothpaste onto toothbrush, put cap back on toothpaste, return toothpaste to cup, pick up toothbrush, turn on tap, put toothbrush under tap, etc.
3. Have each student choose an everyday action that represents an aspect of their life, break it down into step-by-step details and write a paragraph about it.
4. Have each student illustrate the action. They can draw a part of it, cut a picture out of a magazine or collage an image. Display each student's written piece and illustration alongside one another—without names.
5. Have students practise and then perform their action for the class. The performance should be clear enough that the class can guess what the action is. Have the class figure out which description/illustration matches the performance.

### **Conclusion:**

Questions for discussion:

- The actions Kimsooja uses in her works represent her life experience or view of the world. What aspects of your daily life did your chosen action represent?
- Are everyday actions an interesting subject for art? Why or why not?
- At what point does an everyday action become art? How does this happen?
- What were some of the most interesting things that you learned or discovered?
- Can you think of—or find—any other artwork that shows everyday actions?

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Threads of Many Cultures (intermediate and secondary grades)

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### **Objective:**

Students learn about the significance of fabrics or textiles from around the world.

### **Discussion:**

Kimsooja uses traditional Korean fabric to create her *bottari* works. In addition to wrapping and packing personal belongings, this fabric has a variety of uses in Korean culture. In many parts of the world, communities value textiles as significant objects that have symbolic meaning. In addition to being utilitarian objects for everyday use, they are often sacred, valuable and used in ritual or ceremonial occasions.

*"Especially in Korea, we use cloth as a symbolic material on important occasions such as coming of age ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and rites for ancestors. Therefore cloth is thought to be more than a material, being identified with the body—that is, as a container for the spirit."* —Kimsooja

### **Materials:**

- Information Sheet (p. 14): feel free to add to the list, or ask students to research textiles that connect to their own culture and heritage
- Internet: Wikipedia, Google search, etc.
- printer, at home or school

### **Process:**

1. Divide students into pairs.
2. Assign a fabric to each pair.
5. Have them conduct research using the Internet, at home or at school.
3. Have the students write at least three facts about their assigned fabric.
4. Have them find an image of the fabric.
5. If possible, have them print images at home or at school.
6. Have students present their research to the rest of the class.

### **Conclusion:**

Questions for discussion:

- Did you learn something new about fabrics and textiles? How has your perception of fabrics and textiles changed?
- Do you have any significant fabrics or textiles at home or in your own culture?
- Are fabrics and textiles works of art? Or only objects for everyday use and special occasions?
- If you were to make a sculpture using fabric, how might you use it?

## Information Sheet

### Fabrics and Textiles from Around the World:

- Bojagi (Korea)
- Tartan (Scotland)
- Kente cloth (Africa)
- Rushnyk (Eastern Europe)
- Tampan (Indonesia)
- Fukusa (Japan)
- Palampor (India and Europe)
- Pina cloth (Philippines)
- Patola (India)

## VOCABULARY

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**bottari:** bundles traditionally made by women in Korean culture, used for the safekeeping and transportation of worldly possessions during voluntary or forced migration.

**conceptual art:** art in which the ideas behind the creation of the work are more significant than the end product. During the 1960s and '70s, conceptual artists rejected the idea of the unique, precious art object and focused on intellectual explorations into artistic practice.

**contemporary:** created in the last thirty years. Most contemporary artists are living artists. Challenging traditional boundaries, many contemporary artists use a limitless range of materials and ideas to reflect, explore and comment on today's world.

**displacement:** the forced movement of a person or persons from their home or home region. Also known as forced migration.

**installation:** art that is created from a wide range of materials and installed in a specific environment. An installation may be temporary or permanent. The term came into wide use in the 1970s, and many installation works were conceptual.

**performance art:** works in any of a variety of media that are performed before a live audience. The performance itself, rather than a specific object, constitutes the artwork. Documentation is often an important part of the performance.

**ready-made:** everyday object selected and designated as art.

**retrospective:** an exhibition or performance of works that have been produced by an artist over a considerable period of time.

Deleted: **site-specific:** created for a specific site or venue; usually a site-specific work is destroyed in the process of being dismantled. [TERM DOES NOT APPEAR IN TEXT.]¶

## RESOURCES

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**Print:**

Augaitis, Daina et al., *KIMSOOJA Unfolding*, Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2013.

**Online:**

<http://artradarjournal.com/2013/07/12/deep-breaths-with-kimsooja-at-the-55th-venice-biennales-south-korean-pavilion-interview/>

<http://courses.washington.edu/femart>

<http://www.designboom.com/art/kimsooja-korean-pavilion-at-the-venice-art-biennale/>

[www.kimsooja.com](http://www.kimsooja.com)

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/kimsooja>

[http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the\\_exhibitions/exhibit\\_kimsooja.html](http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_kimsooja.html)



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