

Media City Seoul 2010
Trust

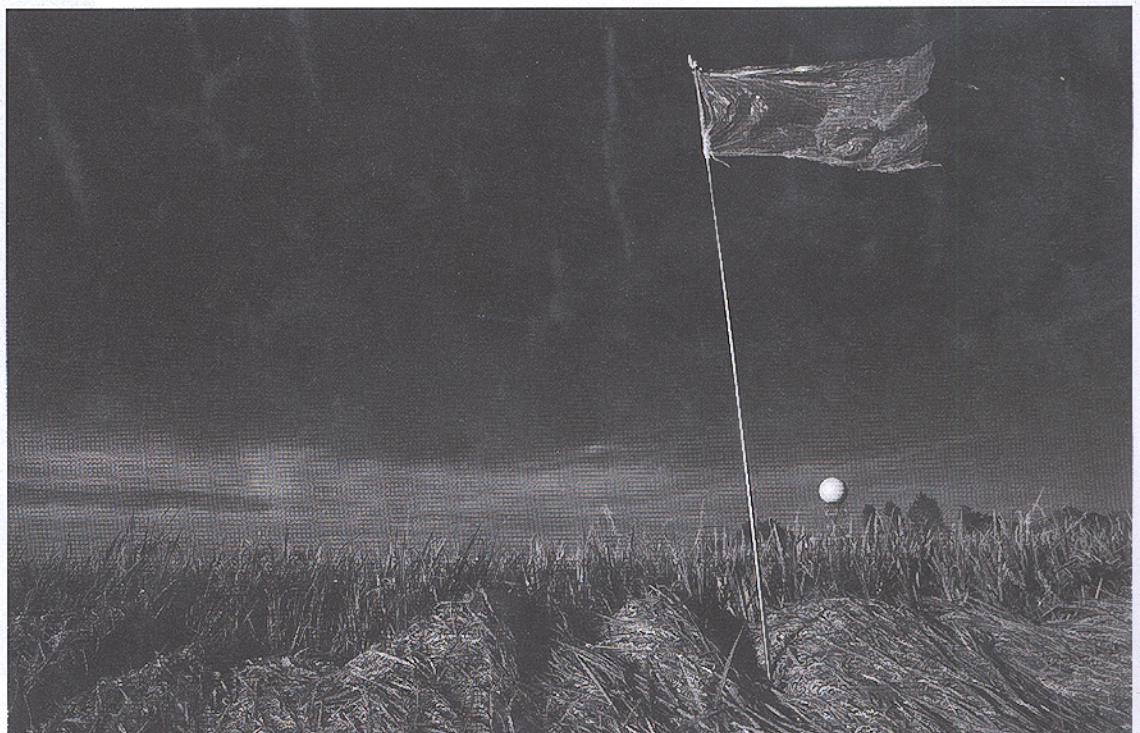
Seoul Museum of Art and other venues, Seoul
7 September – 17 November

Since its inception in 2000, Media City Seoul has evolved from a biennial dedicated to new media to a noteworthy, though smaller, alternative to the Gwangju Biennale, Asia's leading event of its kind, which also takes place in South Korea. True to form, the sixth edition of Media City Seoul – entitled *Trust* – does not lack ambition, despite being restricted in scale. Showcasing works by 45 artists from 22 countries, the biennial expands over four locations: the Seoul Museum of Art and the museum's Gyeonghuigung Annex, the Museum of History and Simpson Memorial Hall, though the last two almost appear redundant. *Trust* is one exhibition put together by three curators – Clara Kim, Nicolaus Schafhausen and Fumihiko Sumitomo – who live on different continents, under the artistic direction of Sunjung Kim. Hence, it showcases top-notch international art and does fulfil the 'local and global' aspirations most biennials strive for. The flipside of this multiple curatorship, however, is a lack of coherence.

Still, the first floor of the Seoul Museum of Art offers a very rich, versatile and consequential selection, uniting works that explore mistrust of (often authoritarian) governments. Among the many highlights are Sarah Morris's mesmerising *Beijing* (2008), a video showing the daunting, perfectly oiled machinery behind the 2008 Olympics; Noh Suntag's photos of an omnipresent radar dominating the Korean countryside (2004–7); and Miki Kratsman's *Targeted Killing* (2010), a photographic series shot with the type of lens used by the Israeli Defense Forces in unmanned aerial surveillance, with the result that the subjects look like terrorists.

Elsewhere in the biennial, the conceptual strength and compactness of the first section dissipates. The rather elastic way in which the theme is interpreted does not improve the situation. What follows is a succession of works that occasionally refer to the theme – as they please, without a real consideration of the conceptual framework of the exhibition. Antonio Caballero's Latin American retro photo-novellas and Mark Bradford's mixed-media collage of used street posters, for example, are farfetched deviations from the concept. Other pieces have been perfectly cast, however, such as Julika Rudelius' well-known *Forever* (2006), a video portrait of older ladies who are not strangers to plastic surgery nor to the notion of self-deceit; or Apichatpong Weerasethakul's widely acclaimed *Primitive* series (2009–10), which explores how the past haunts the present in a Thai village.

Besides incoherence, the biennial's multiple curatorship also leads to an unevenness in quality. Some of the works on display simply lack maturity, as is the case with Do Ho Suh's tacky animation of faces gradually transforming into one another – which verges on being a cheap copy of Michael Jackson's video for *Black or White* (1991) – or Yangachi's esoteric *Bright Dove Hyunsook, Gyeongseong* (2010), a film about a woman identifying with birds and ghosts. Despite some structural flaws, this sixth edition does illustrate Media City Seoul's successful transition from being a new media biennial to one that can compete with the big boys. *Sam Steverlyncck*



Noh Suntag, *The Strange Ball*,
2004–7, pigment print, 80 × 110 cm