

## WRAPPED UP

*Kimsooja unwraps the cultural history of Bottari*



Alicia Luxem, Thierry Depaepe, Collection of Die Mobiliar, Bern, Switzerland, commissioned by Korean Arts & Culture Foundation, courtesy of Kimsooja studio

Lee Jong Soo, Courtesy of Kimsocja Studio, Simon Vogel, Courtesy of Keweenaw Gallery and Kimsocja Studio







Illustration of Mosaic 3 Stockholm, Konstfart, courtesy of MMCA and Hyundai Motor Co. and Hyundai Motor Co.

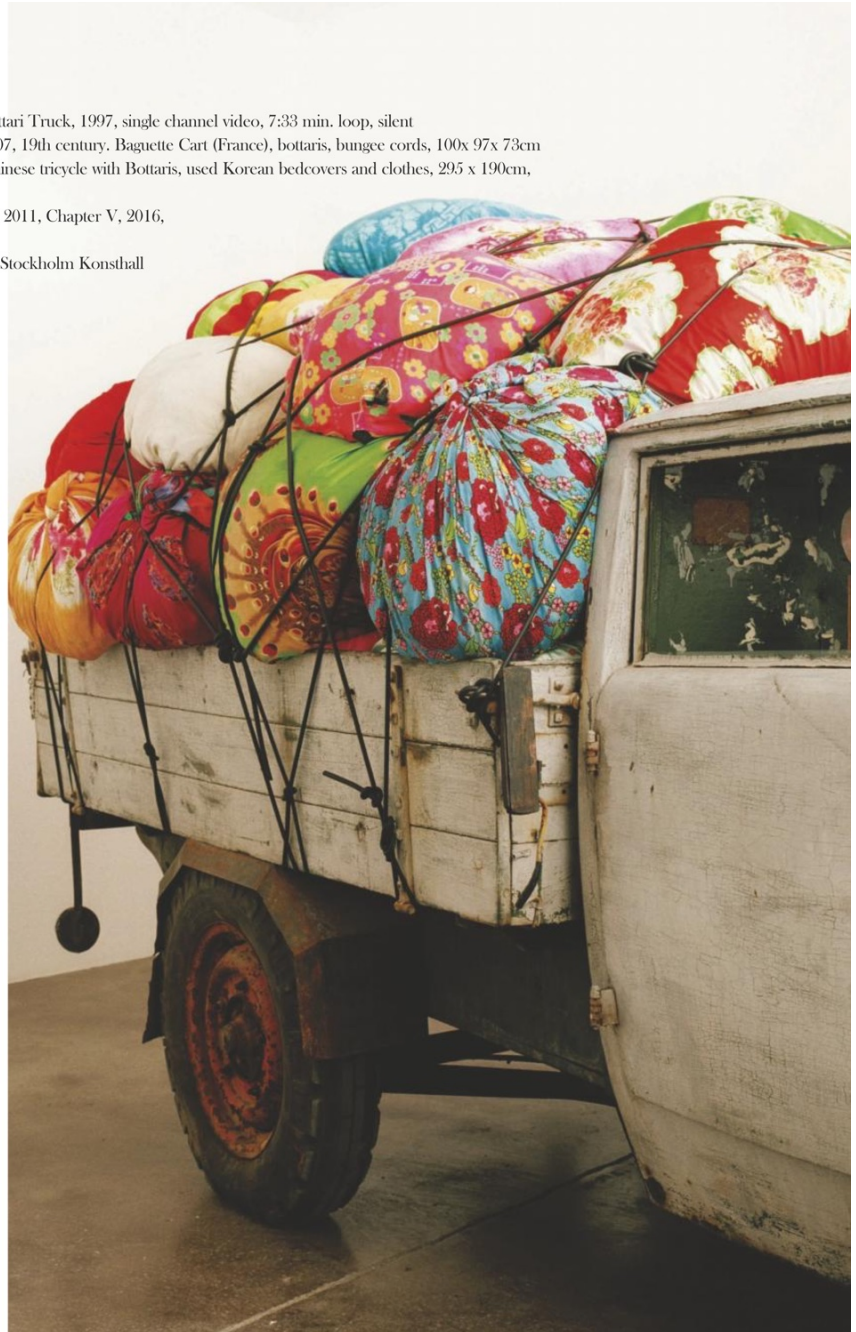


Previous page right: Cities on the Move, 2727 KM Bottari Truck, 1997, single channel video, 7:33 min. loop, silent  
 Previous page top: Deductive Object (Bottari cart), 2007, 19th century. Baguette Cart (France), bottaris, bungee cords, 100x 97x 73cm  
 Previous page bottom: Bottari Tricycle, 2008, used Chinese tricycle with Bottaris, used Korean bedcovers and clothes, 295 x 190cm, Installation view at Continua Gallery, Le Moulin  
 Opposite: Thread Routes, Chapter I, 2010, Chapter II, 2011, Chapter V, 2016, still from 16mm film, 21:39, sound  
 Below: Bottari Truck, 2005, Installation at Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall

**Korean born, New York and Paris based** artist Kimsooja began working with textiles in 1983 when she started to sew using her late grandmother's clothing. Today she is most well known for her use of bottari, or wrapping cloth, as well as a number of explorations into textiles on film. Her approach is loyal to observation rather than intervention. Doing less or doing little, rather than doing more and more, is antithetical to so much of what drives contemporary commercial values. But perhaps this is precisely why it is a good time to reflect on an artist who has long thought less is more.

The name Kimsooja – now always written as a single word – is the result of website protocol which does not accommodate spaces between words. After the artist adopted a single word name it soon took on new meaning, as she explains; "A one-word name refuses gender identity, marital status, socio-political, cultural and geographical identity by not separating the family name and the first name." Even here, observation rather than intervention is at work.

Kimsooja may be most well known for *A Needle Woman*, exhibited as a multiscreen projection filmed at a number of urban locations around the world. From 1999-2001 silent footage was recorded in Tokyo, Shanghai, Mexico City, London, Delhi, New York, Cairo and Lagos. In 2005 a second version was made in locations even further afield: Patan (Nepal), Jerusalem (Israel), Sana' (Yemen), Havana (Cuba), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and N'Djamena ▶



Martin Runchberg, Courtesy of Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall and Kimsooja Studio

Opposite: Lotus: Zone of Zero, 2008, Rotunda at Galerie Ravenstein, Brussels, Approx. 2000 lotus lanterns, Tibetan, Gregorian, and Islamic chants, Steel structure and cables,

(Chad). In both projects the artist stands centre screen; the back of her head, her back and long straight black hair are all that is visible to the viewer. Urban crowds pass to her left and right; some rush, others saunter. There are individuals who offer a passing glance; others stare, while some remain utterly preoccupied with their own thoughts, never acknowledging her presence. Kimsooja, centred in the camera lens, remains disarmingly stationary throughout: an individual in spite of the crowds, grounded in spite of the haste surrounding her, a silent presence requiring others to move around her.

More recently, *Thread Routes chapters I-V* (2010-2016) records textile traditions around the world; Peruvian spinners and weavers, European lace makers, weaving and embroidery in Gujarat India, embroidery, weaving and indigo dyeing in China, and the carding of fibres and basket weaving by the Navajo and Hopi in America. Each 16mm film is nearly, but not quite, silent. These chapters adopt the eye of a mute anthropologist, recording the resemblance of textile patterns in the natural and manmade landscape, alongside dexterous skill.

This devoted attention to the textile is also apparent in Kimsooja's use of bottari, a Korean term for wrapping cloth that has made repeated appearances in her work over the past two and a half decades. In 1997, before she was to leave Korea, she travelled to destinations throughout the country that were significant in her memory. *Cities on the Move - 2727 Kilometres Bottari Truck*,

shows her back and bundles of brightly coloured cloth packed in a small truck. Kimsooja is supported by the cloth but looking forward into a future the viewer, and artist, cannot see.

Two years later *Bottari Truck in Exile* was exhibited as a sculpture at the 1999 Venice Biennial, installed in front of a mirror. In other shows bottari was presented in its natural, seemingly tumbling state until recently, when Kimsooja began placing them in spaces with more of a minimalist approach. They are resolutely colourful, despite interpretations of political and economic migration and displacement that could be read into the work. And – perhaps ironically for the gallery context – bottari remains unquestionably functional in the most pedestrian sense of the word. This fabric carries and covers, wraps and holds, often prompting considerable curiosity among audiences for what each bundle contains.

But this interpretation of these vibrant textiles is in fact something of a mistake, as the artist speaking in an interview with Gerald Matt explains a very different material memory. "The bedcovers I use are mostly abandoned, used ones, and those that are made for newly married couples..." Kimsooja explains, "the fabrics I find are mostly abandoned ones, which means the couple has thrown it away, or they are not together anymore." Here, bottari is more specific than any generic piece of cloth. A bedcover reminds us that the bed is a place of birth, rest, conception and ultimately death.

This attention to textile portability and the home is shared by another Korean artist based in the US, Do-Ho Suh, whose translucent remakes of interior spaces refer to apartments he occupied, questioning what home represents. Suh's sheer flat panels and visible seams can be read as a version of Korea's bojagi tradition – a system of quilting or piecing remnant cloth to hold a child close to its mother, carry goods, shield food from flies and other useful adaptations. Artist Chunghie Lee works exclusively with this technique and fosters craft-specific dialogues through the Korean Bojagi Forum. All three artists share a fascination with how much overlooked meaning can be found in the immediate, often anonymous, details of daily life.

*Lotus: Zone of Zero*, first conceived in 2003 as Kimsooja's response to the Iraq War, offers another call for contemplation. Interpretations of the work since its original conception have broadened to refer to society's need for safe meeting points for communities of differing cultures to reflect. The installation of red lotus-shaped lanterns has been adapted for numerous site-specific installations, often using circular mandala-like forms and, most recently at the CAC Málaga, Spain, a rectangle of 708 lanterns covering the gallery's ceiling. Made of repeating multiples, the work – despite its static nature – creates ever-changing perspectives as viewers walk beneath. \*\*\* **Jessica Hemmings**  
**Kimsooja will be exhibiting as part of Socle Du Monde in Denmark until August 2017**  
[www.socledumonde.org](http://www.socledumonde.org)

Mikael Falke, courtesy of The Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Korea, Keweenaw Gallery, Berlin and Majorea, and Kimsooja Studio



