

RAN HWANG

TRANSITION

RAN HWANG

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
RAN HWANG: TRANSITION
organized by Leila Heller Gallery, New York
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Leila Heller Gallery, New York
April 5 - April 27, 2012.

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EXHIBITION

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CATALOGUE

Essay by Barbara Pollack
CAD programed by Soohyun Gu, Junu Architects
Photography by Youngha Cho
Catalogue Designed by Yoonjeong Heo, beyond the art
Printed in Seoul, Korea

Cover outside image
Detail of *Healing Blossoms*, 66inch x 325inch / H170cm x W826cm, 2012

Cover inside image
Garden of Water, 90inch x 118inch / H230cm x W900cm, 2010

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CURRICULUM VITAE

The Tender Buttons of Ran Hwang

by Barbara Pollack

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.

Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons, 1914

There is a lot to be found in a pile of buttons--recollections of old clothes, my grandmother's housecoat and my mother's formal worsted suit, more poignant yet, my own sweater, the one I wore as a baby, with tiny white pearlescent circles running up its front. These are buttons that have endured, against the elements and human carelessness, staying put on their respective garments, a combination of decoration and practicality. There are also those buttons that have gone astray, leaving behind two pinholes and torn threads, launching me on a search for something that matches the original. More often than not, I will give up and simply stop wearing the jacket.

This combination of endurance and ephemerality is at the heart of Korean artist Ran Hwang's choice of buttons as her primary medium. As a framework, Hwang starts with iconic silhouettes--Buddhas, birds, temples, plum blossoms---then covers the surfaces with thousands upon thousands of buttons of all sizes. She affixes them, not with glue, but with multitudes of straight pins, carefully tapped into place at an angle. Within this system to pointing, in Gertrude Stein's words, the buttons are free to move, shimmer and vibrate, in place, even as the overall images remains fixed and durable.

Born in Pusan and trained as a realist painter at Chung Ang University in Seoul, Ran Hwang moved to New York in 1997 to attend the School of Visual Arts. After studying, she worked in an embroidery design studio in the garment district where her drawings were scanned into a computer, generating gorgeous machine-made patterns. While working there, she noticed boxes and boxes of unused buttons, stacked in a corner. She asked if she could use them and was told, "Take as much as you like." Hwang soon began incorporating buttons, first into small scale collages and later in room-sized installations.

But her decision to use this material was not just coincidental, or at least, coincided with a bigger event that was life-changing, namely the World Trade Center disaster. From her studio, then in Dumbo, Brooklyn, she could see the towers on fire and in the news coverage she was shaken by images of tiny people falling from the upper floors. To Hwang, the buttons were like tiny faces with two eyes peeking out from each. The random boxes of buttons in the corner of the embroidery business felt much like forgotten souls, piling up on a sidewalk. She intuitively knew that a button could represent a life, and the life cycle, the process of reincarnation, as she picked up the discarded cache of buttons and recycled them into her art works.

The use of buttons most obviously refers to woman's work especially in the labor force of the international garment industry. With globalization, many labor intensive tasks--from stitching t-shirts to wiring the circuitry of an iPhone--are performed by millions of women, many in Asian countries. Though Hwang would not call her work feminist, the fact remains that her choice of medium recalls the generations of women sewing on buttons, at home and in the factory. Her magic is that she can turn this mundane task into a noble, even magnificent production.

Indeed, Hwang's imagery is often monumental. In her most recent work, she has created two towering structures, Old Palace and East Wind from Old Palace, 2011, each over six feet high and ten feet long, actually an amalgam of various temples and palaces she visited as a child. These are much more than postcards or souvenirs. In person, these palaces are inviting and imposing, fantastic and beautiful, spectacular and meditative, all at the same time. To create these works, Hwang started with pictures of details from existing structures, scanned them into a computer, and composed an image in a 3-D CAD file, that provides the blueprint for the dimensionality of her final artwork. She then projects the image and draws the outline on a wall-sized panel and starts affixing her buttons, pin by pin. Even with the help of assistants, one of these palaces can take as long as five months to complete.

Look carefully at these ancient buildings and you will see that they do not have strong foundations, but are resting on a series of chandeliers with flaming candles. In one way, both the temples and the chandeliers share a common goal, that of delivering enlightenment. On the other hand, Hwang knows that by combining the two, she is creating an image where the permanence and invincibility of these sites of power are undercut by the image of flickering candles, soon to be extinguished. It is an image in direct contrast to the art works themselves, which seem quite fragile on first glance, but are actually made to be as strong as a bronze sculpture, the pins permanently stuck in place.

Hwang's treatment of these palaces turns them into the dystopian structures, embodying a clash between an age-old quest for ideal institutions and the 21st century reality of their deterioration and corruption. This artist is looking at iconic Korean symbols, such as the ancient palaces, but infuses these images with a permanent state of instability, as if to say that their power cannot hold in her country's rush towards modernization.

Sometimes, Hwang uses another technique to evince transience. At the foot of her artworks, you can find piles of buttons on the floor, as if they have popped off their panels. In another series, images of birds and eagles, the picture seems to be disintegrating, with gaps in the depiction and an entropic disbursement of buttons. In Empty Me, S-II, 2010, the eagle, a regal emblem, is both an image of power and an especially powerful image, wearing a crown and spreading its wings against a golden background, paired by a female eagle nearby on a smaller scale. It is impossible to resist its evocation of freedom. Yet, these birds are literally pinned in place, unable to go anywhere, like butterfly specimens on an entomologist's table. It is this tension between freedom and confinement, power and impermanence, that underlies all of Hwang's work and gives it a complicated beauty.

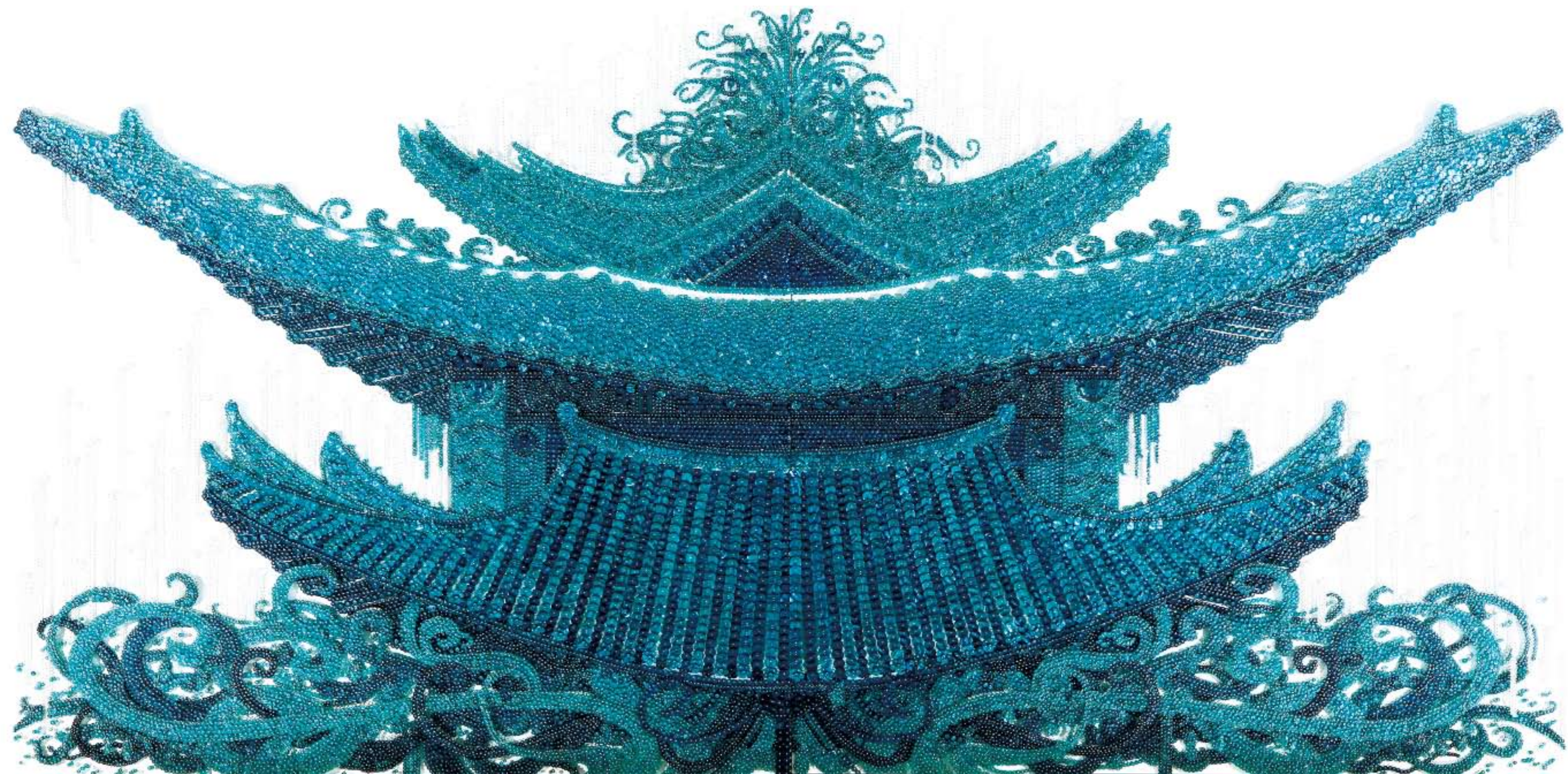
In fact, Hwang admits that her own process replicates these complications. On one hand, it is an overtly labor-intensive mode of art-making, to the point that thinking about the sheer effort can distract from appreciation of the work.

But, for the artist, the task of mounting buttons upon buttons, one pin at a time, parallels a Buddhist monk's practice of staring at a blank wall for months on end as a path to enlightenment. Her art-making is entirely meditative for Hwang, and she hopes that viewers can share the meditative state evoked by her strongest work.

All of these qualities come together in Hwang's video installation, Garden of Water, 2010. In this work, three plexiglass panels are pierced with thousands of crystals on the end of pins, creating the impression of three crystal chandeliers, hanging from the ceiling and touching the floor. An ethereal projection of spiders dancing across the strands of light enlivens each panel, later turning into streams of a waterfall, flowing down the walls. Slowly, the waterfall fades and the chandeliers return to light the dark interior of the room.

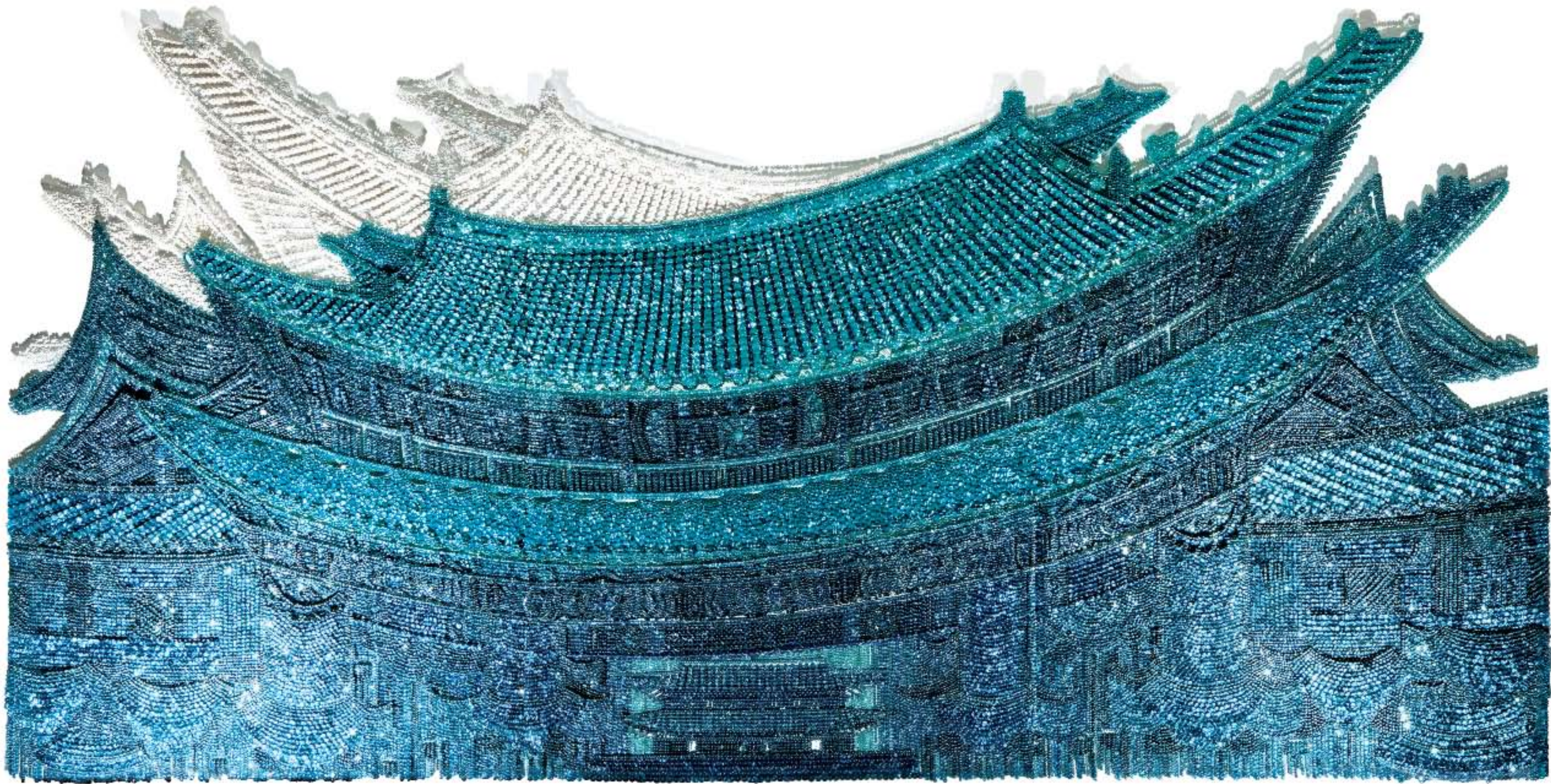
Spectacle can often be a distraction from meditation, the very opposite of sitting still and exploring the mind's interior space. Bur in Hwang's Gardens of Water, spectacle is employed to instill a meditative state of mind. Viewers cannot resist the mesmerizing sensation of watching the fantastic light source--chandeliers with flickering candles--dissolve in the flow of an unstoppable rush of water, the seemingly permanent thing erased by a more transient force. In seeing the chandeliers disappear and return again, Hwang has created an environment brimming with the spirit of reincarnation, a spiritual life cycle found in all of her works.

These days, Hwang divides her time between New York and Seoul with studios in both locations to keep up with the demand for her work. She seamlessly manages the inevitable identity shift that comes with shuttling between these two locations. In her work she seems to be saying that all is fluid and nothing permanent, not culture, not identity, not even her art works themselves. After all, after seeing something as monumental and durable as the Twin Towers topple to the ground, what can endure of ancient palaces and fragile temples? That they do endure, even in contemporary Korea, only proves that the ephemeral is sometimes stronger than structures built from concrete and steel. It is marvelous that Hwang finds this truth by staring at an ordinary button and from this little bit of nothing builds entire worlds.







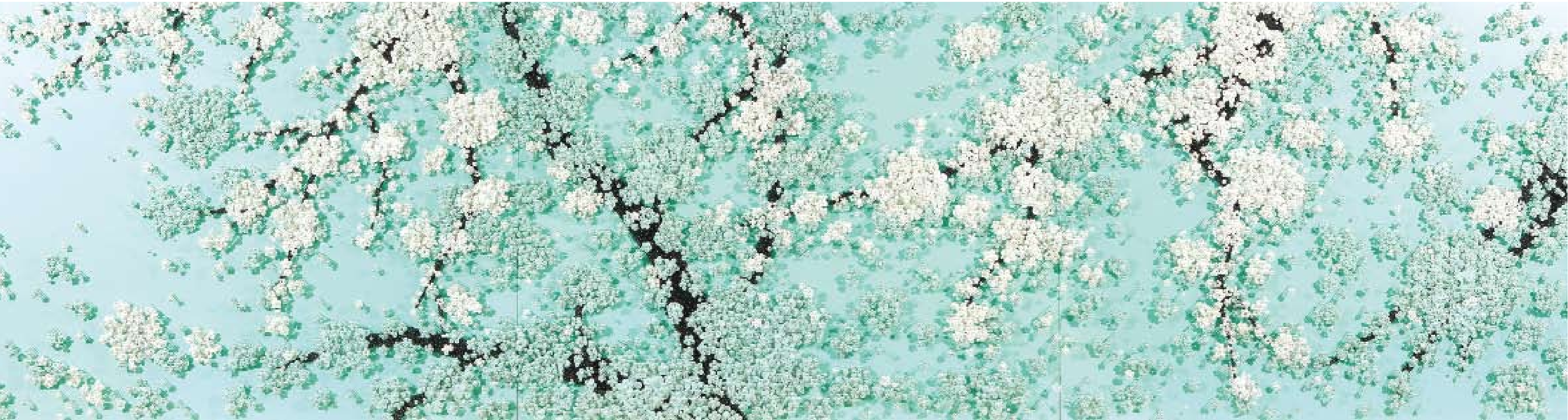


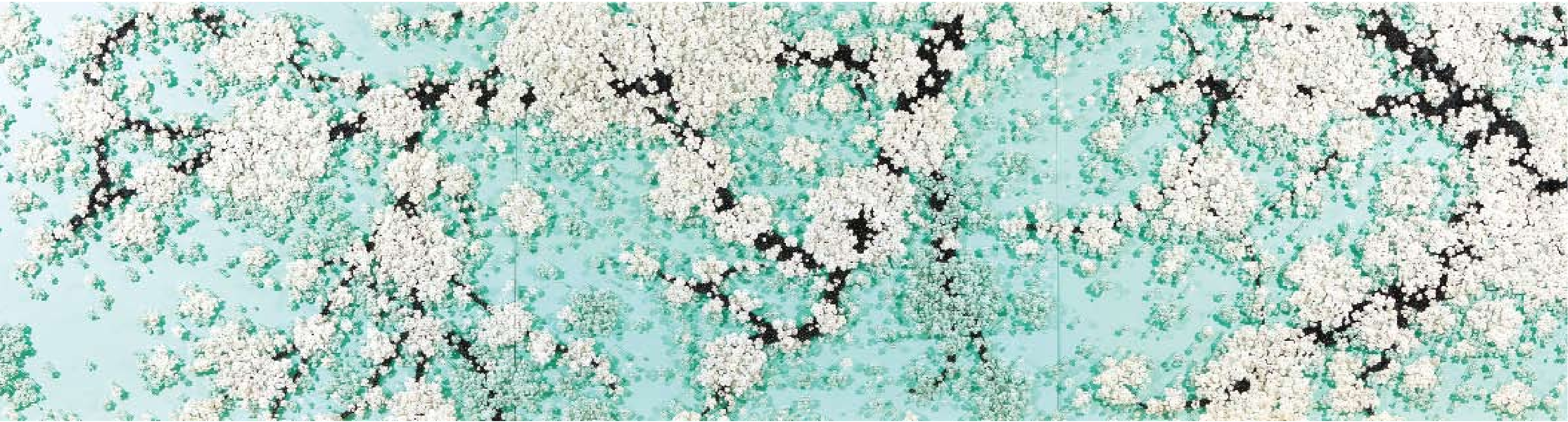


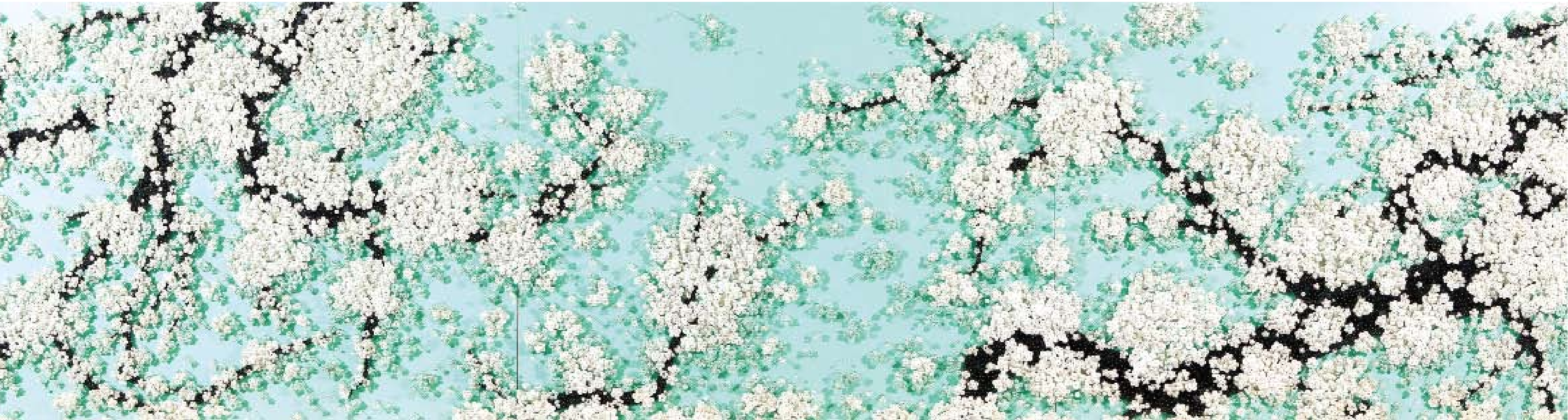








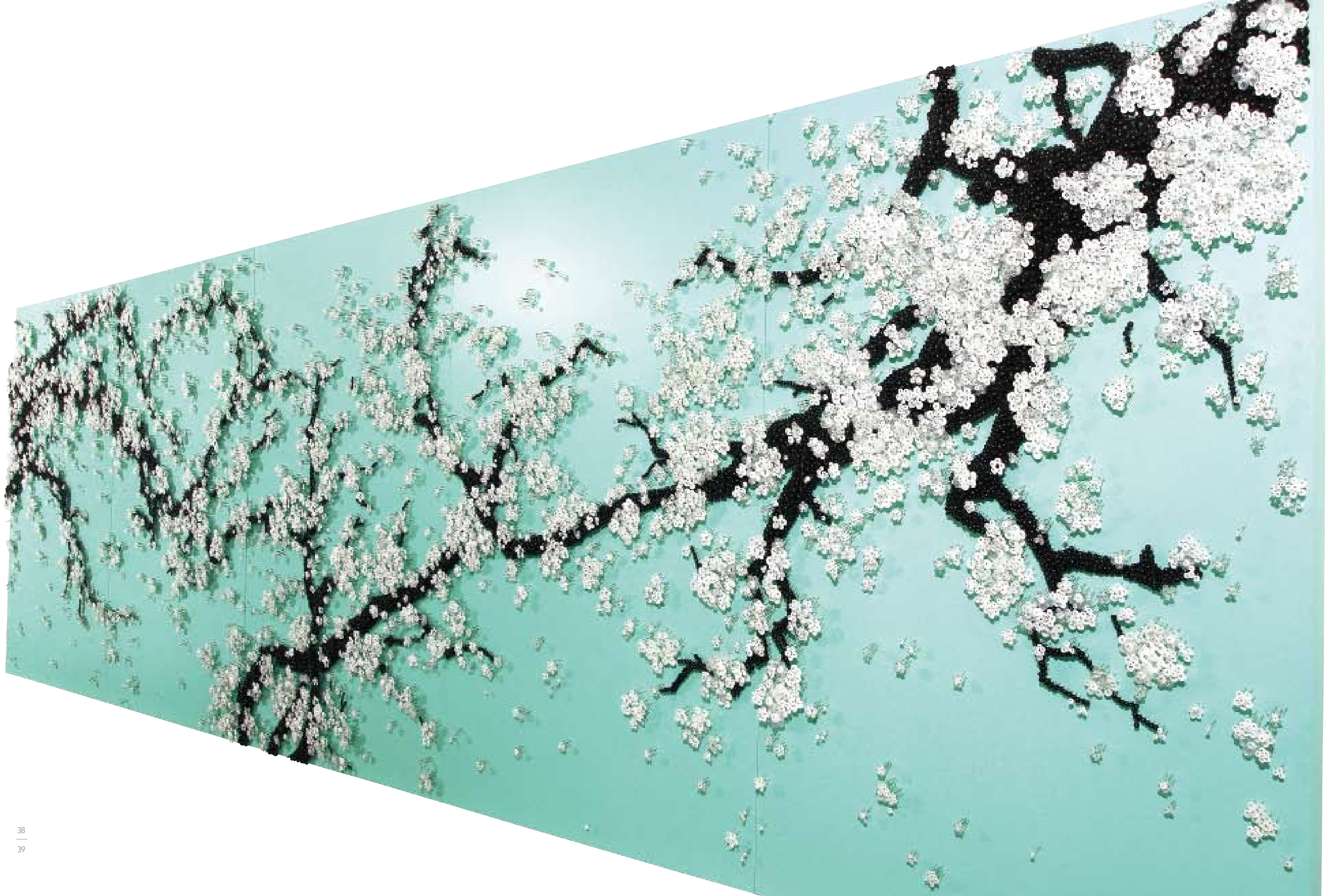
















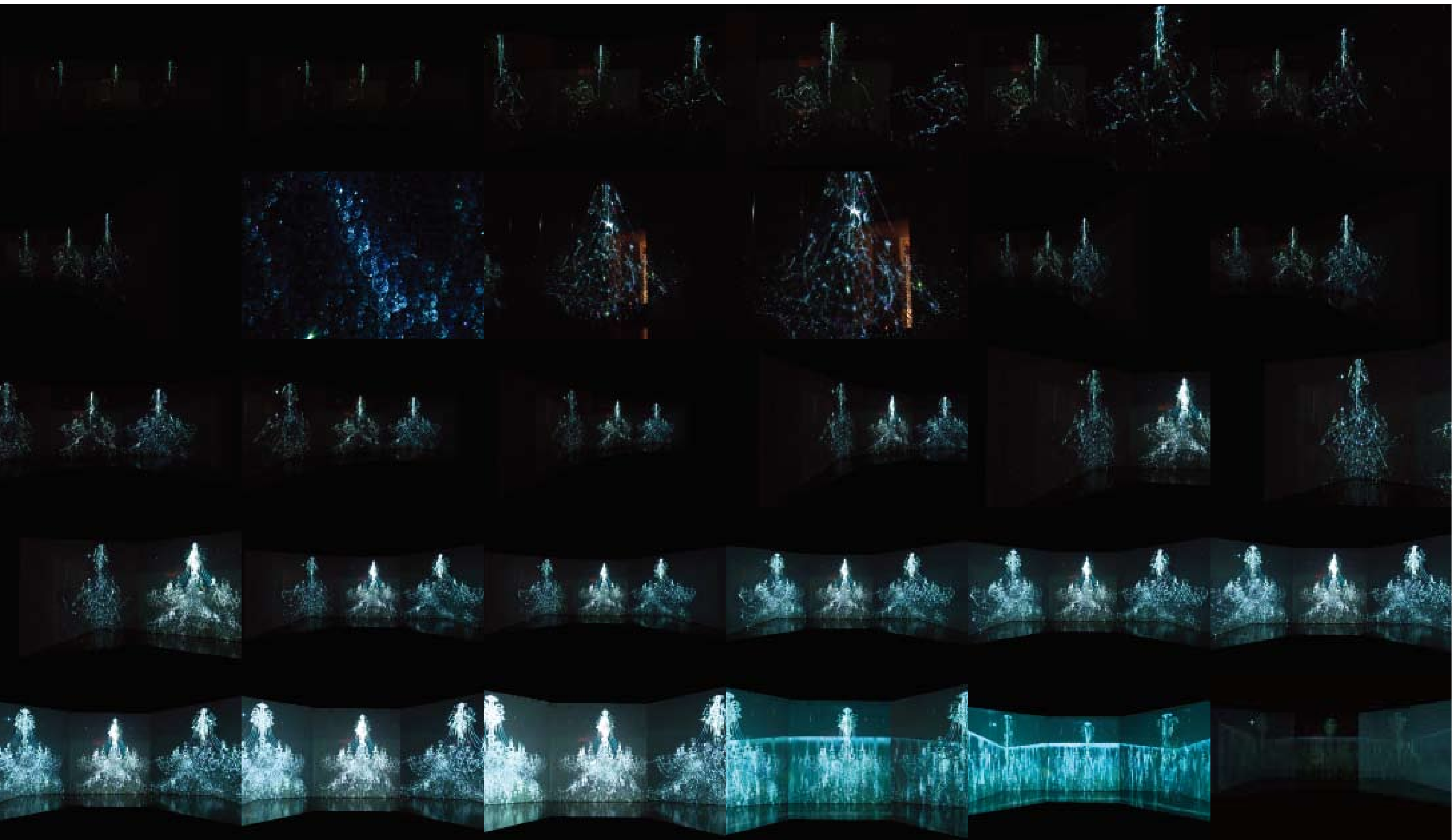


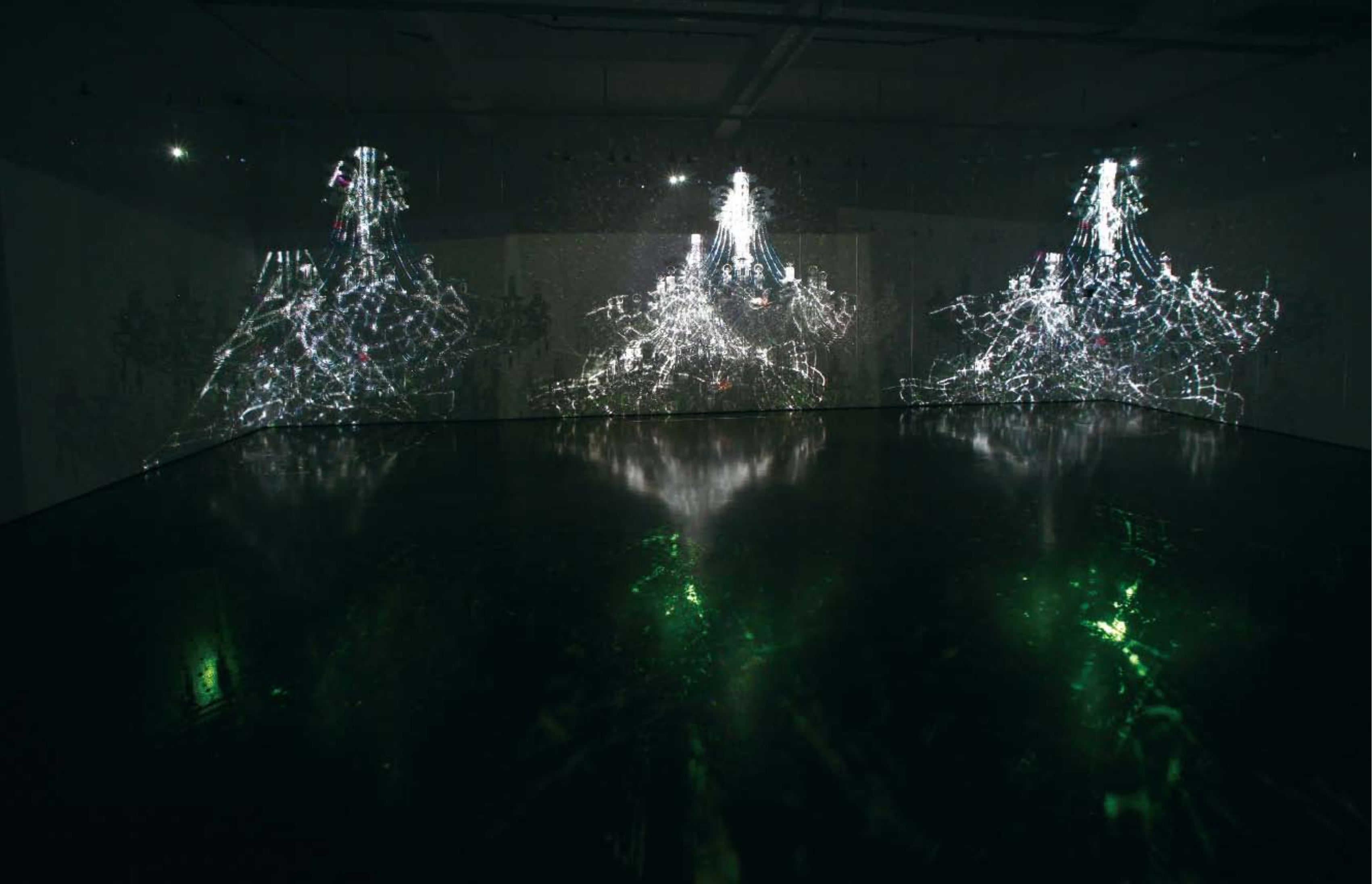


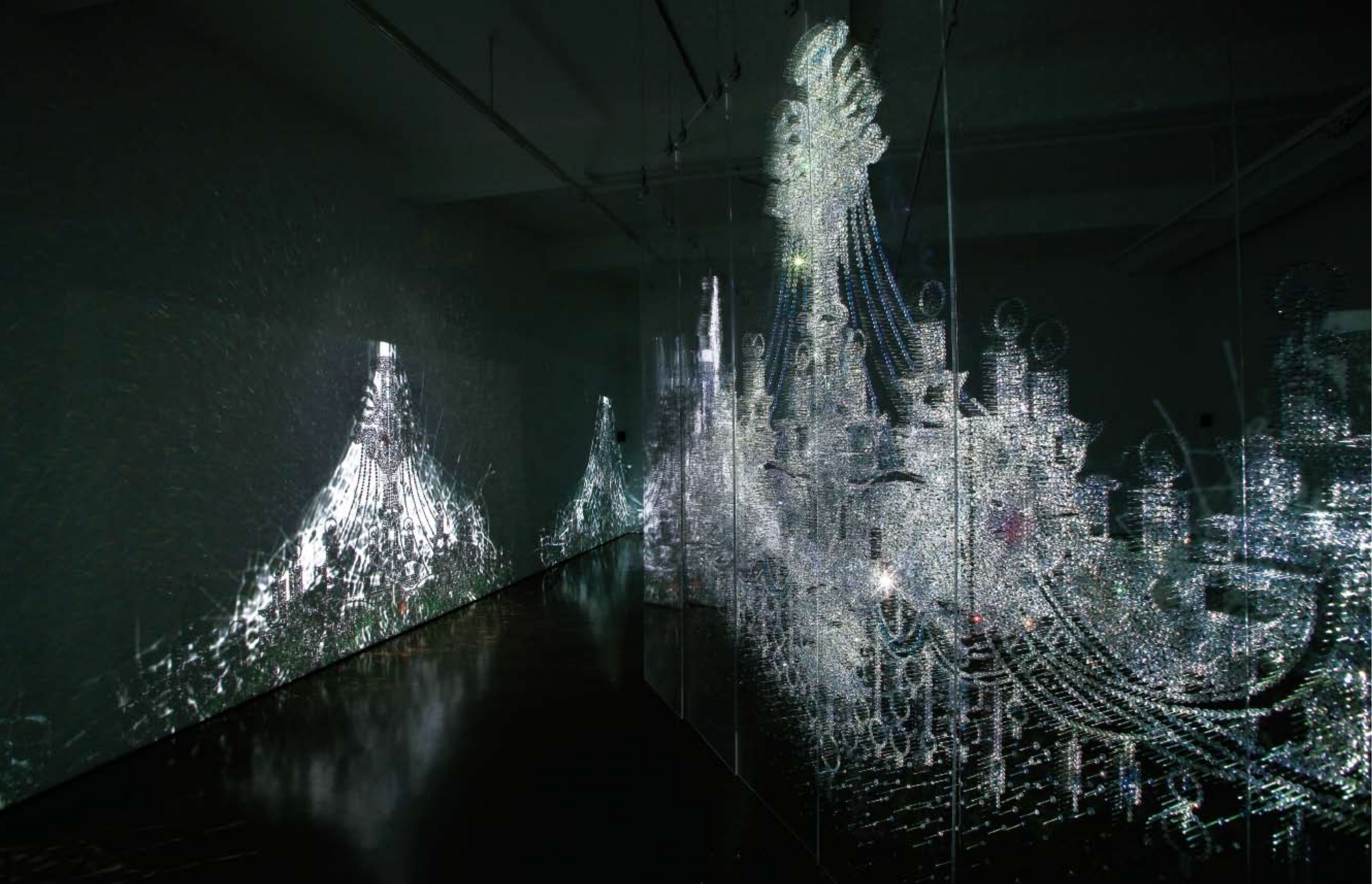




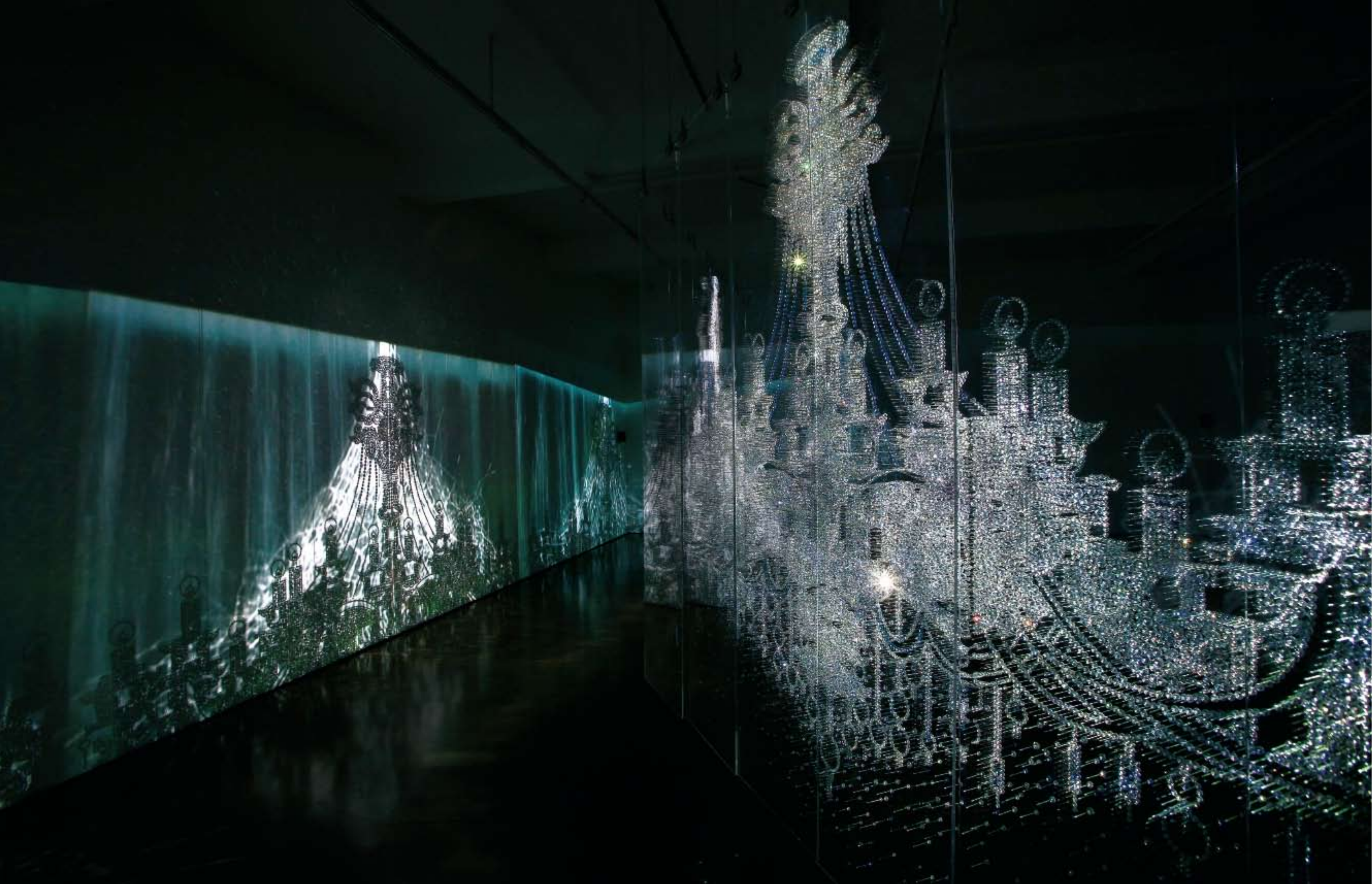


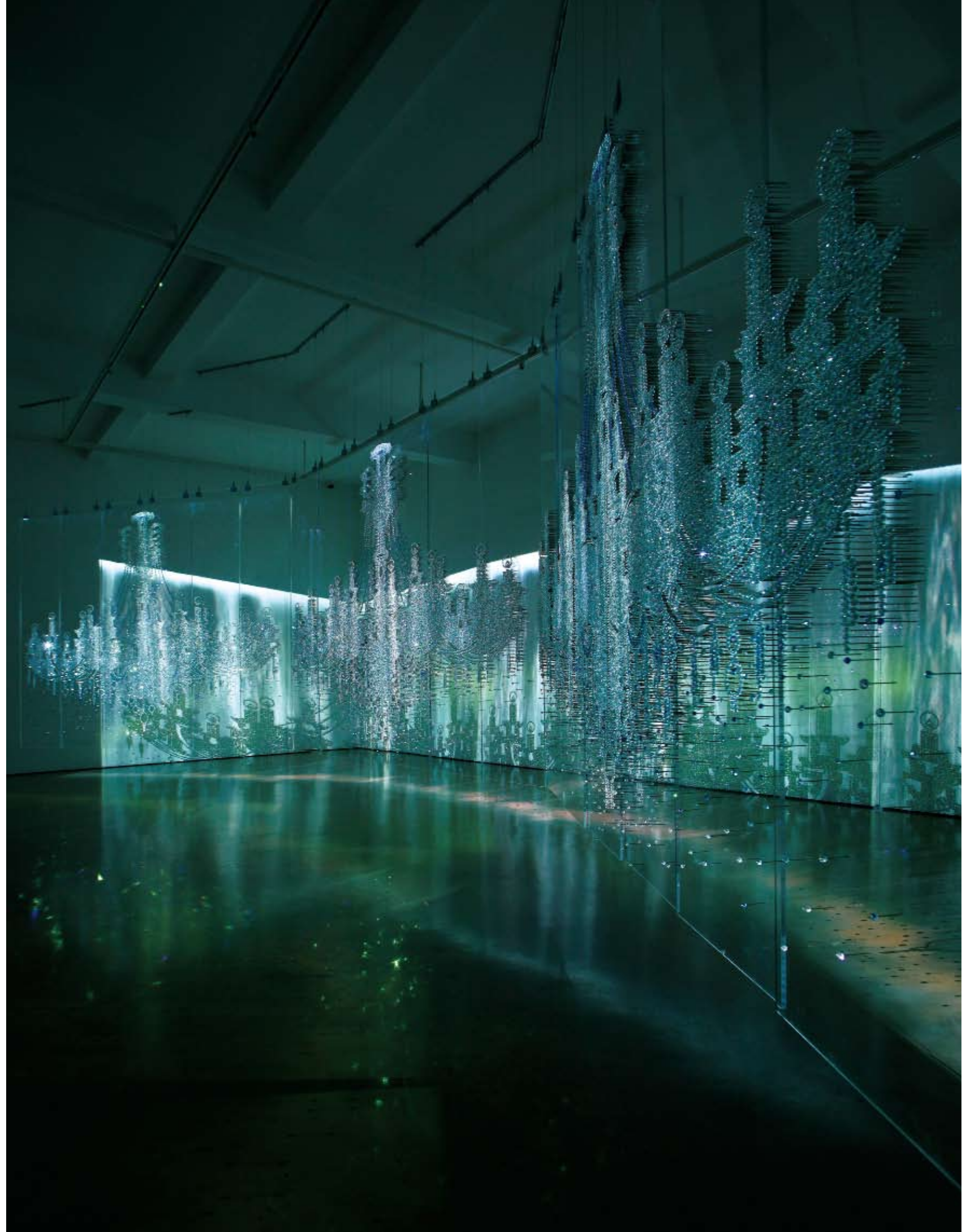
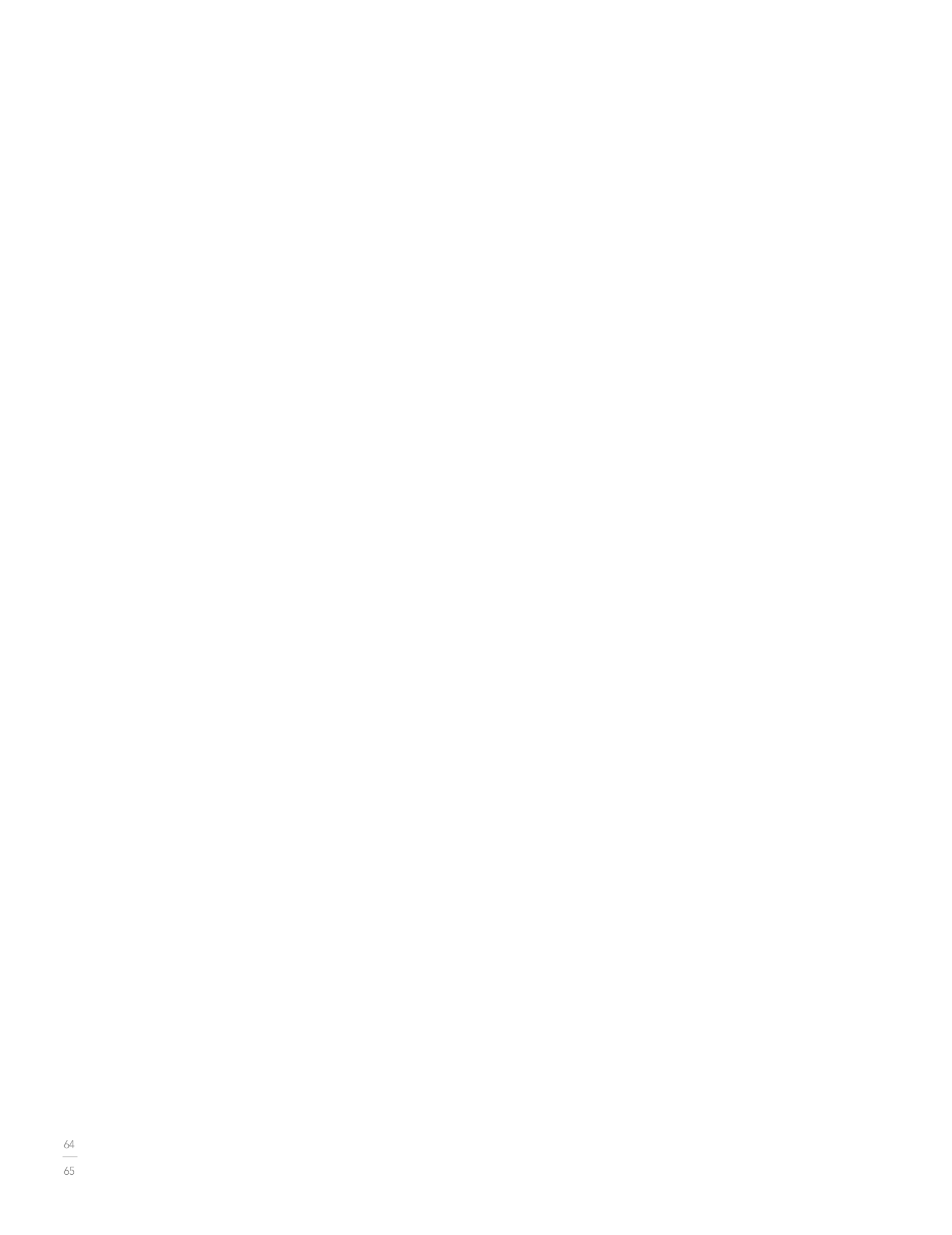


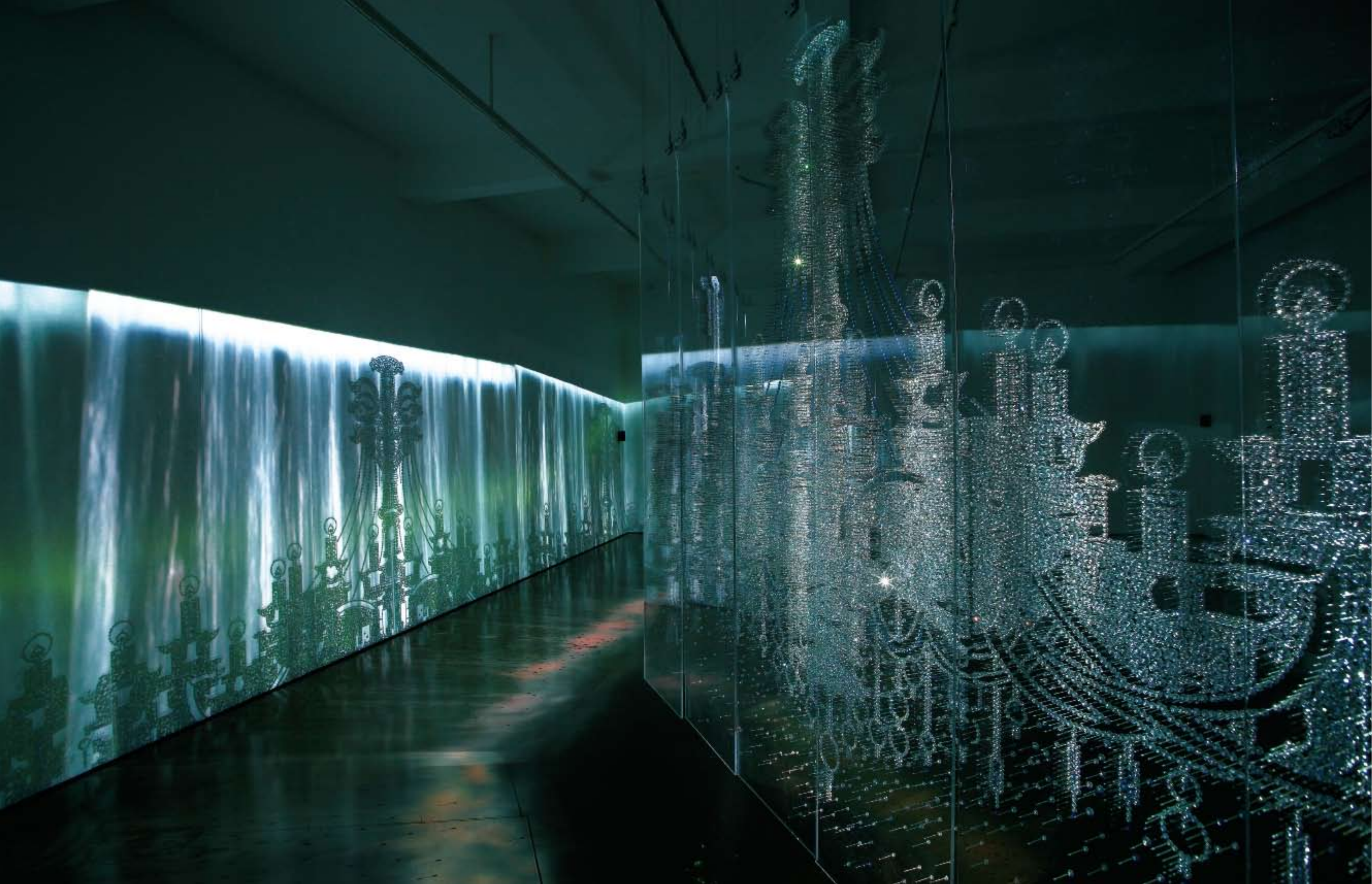














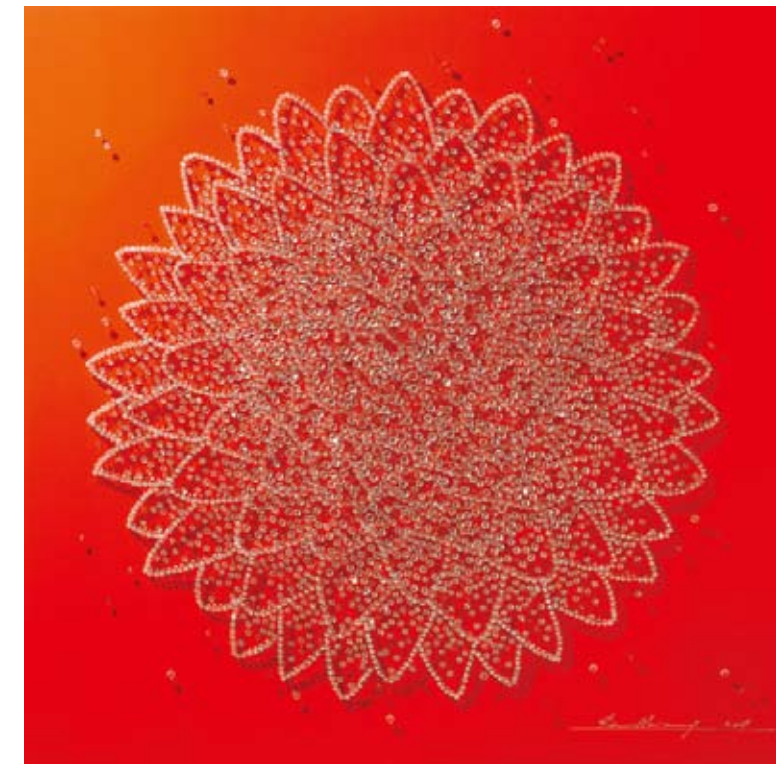
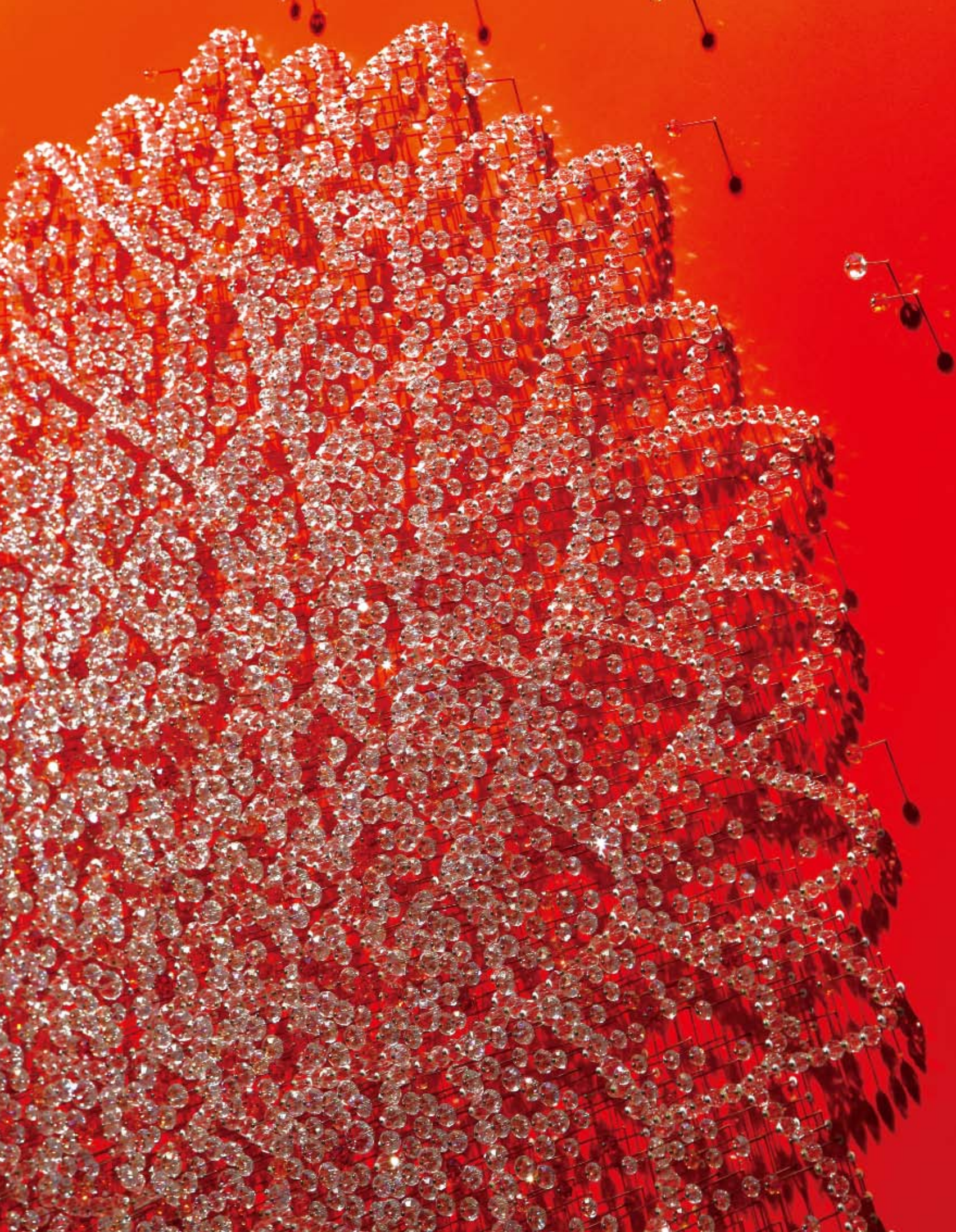






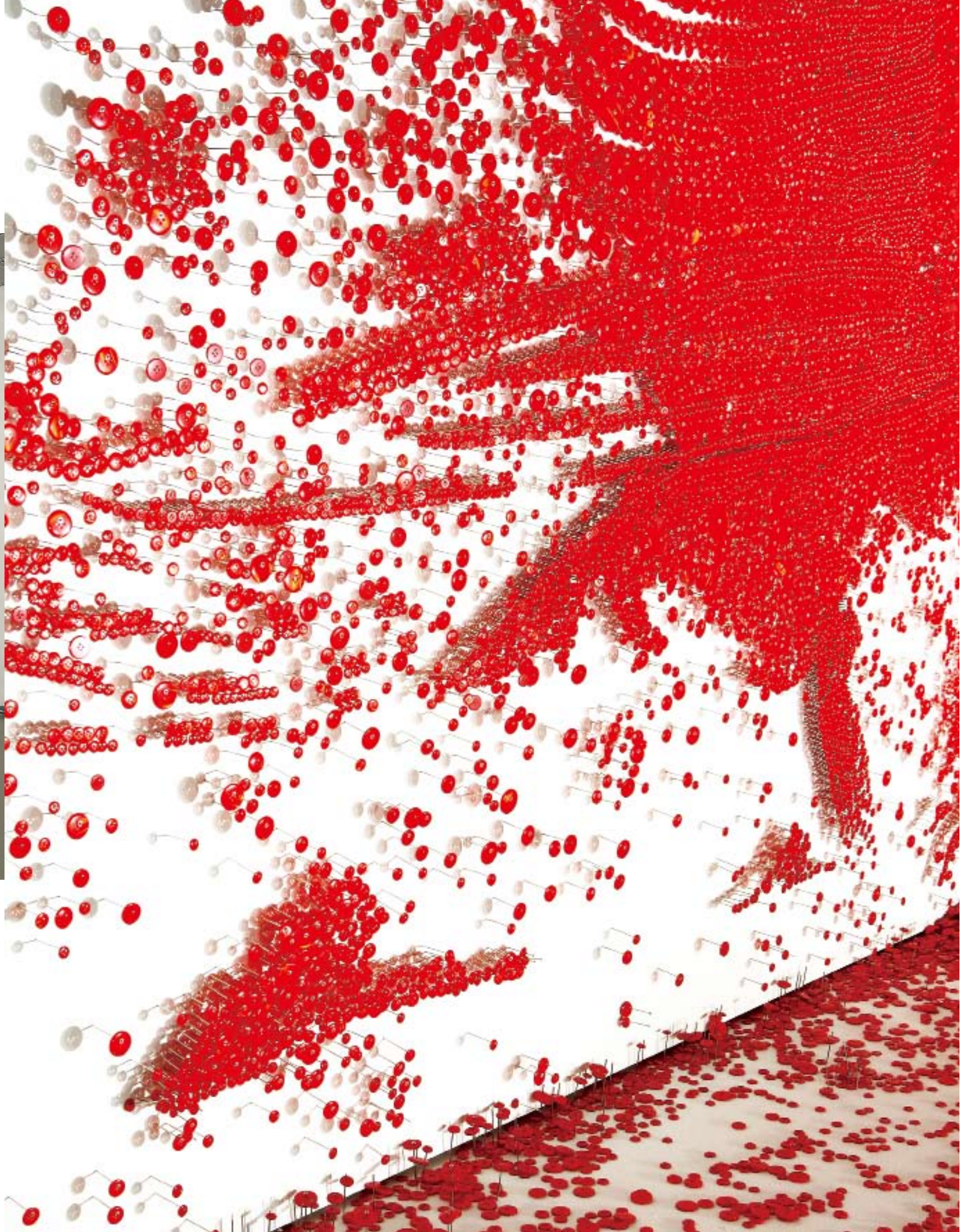
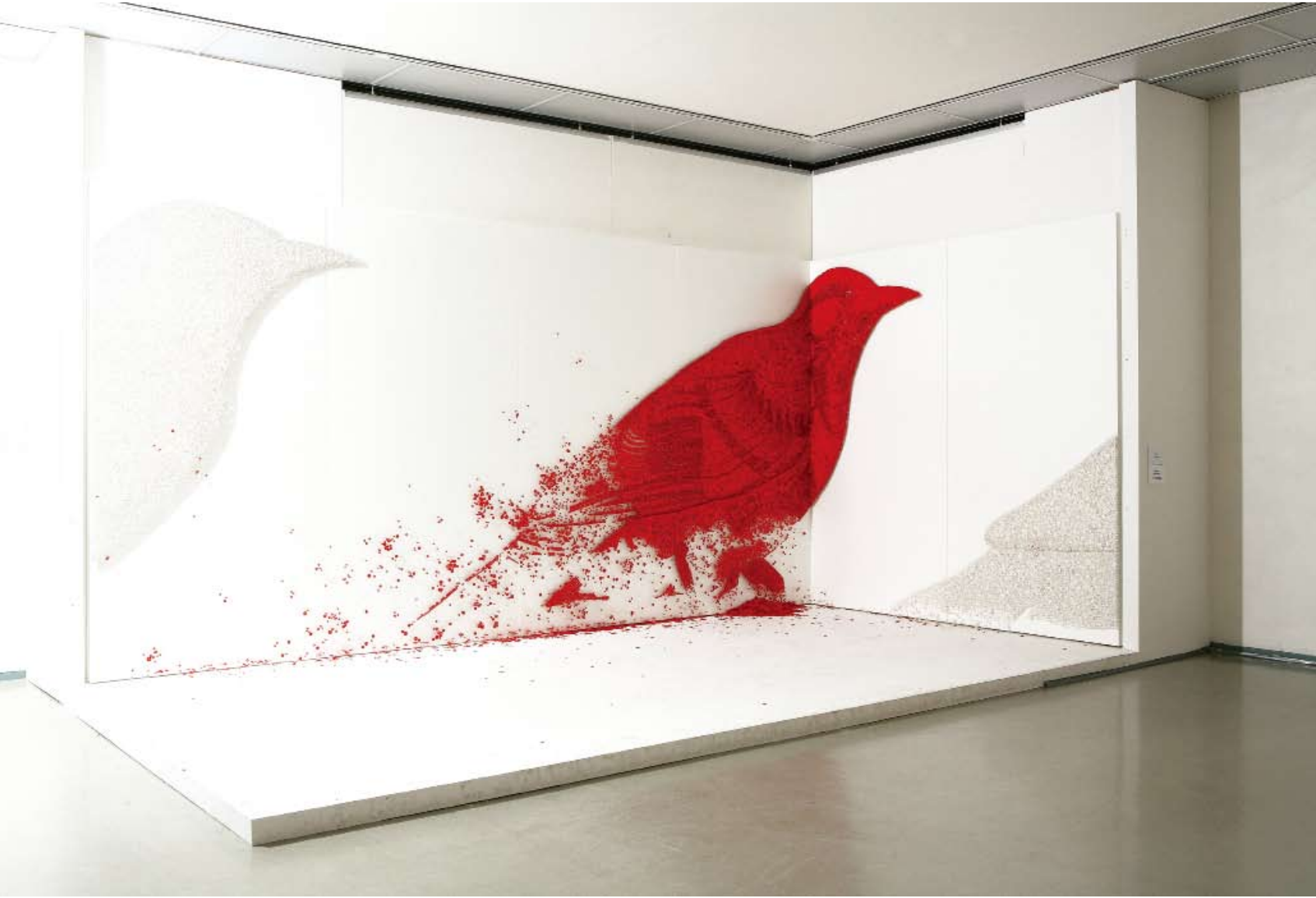


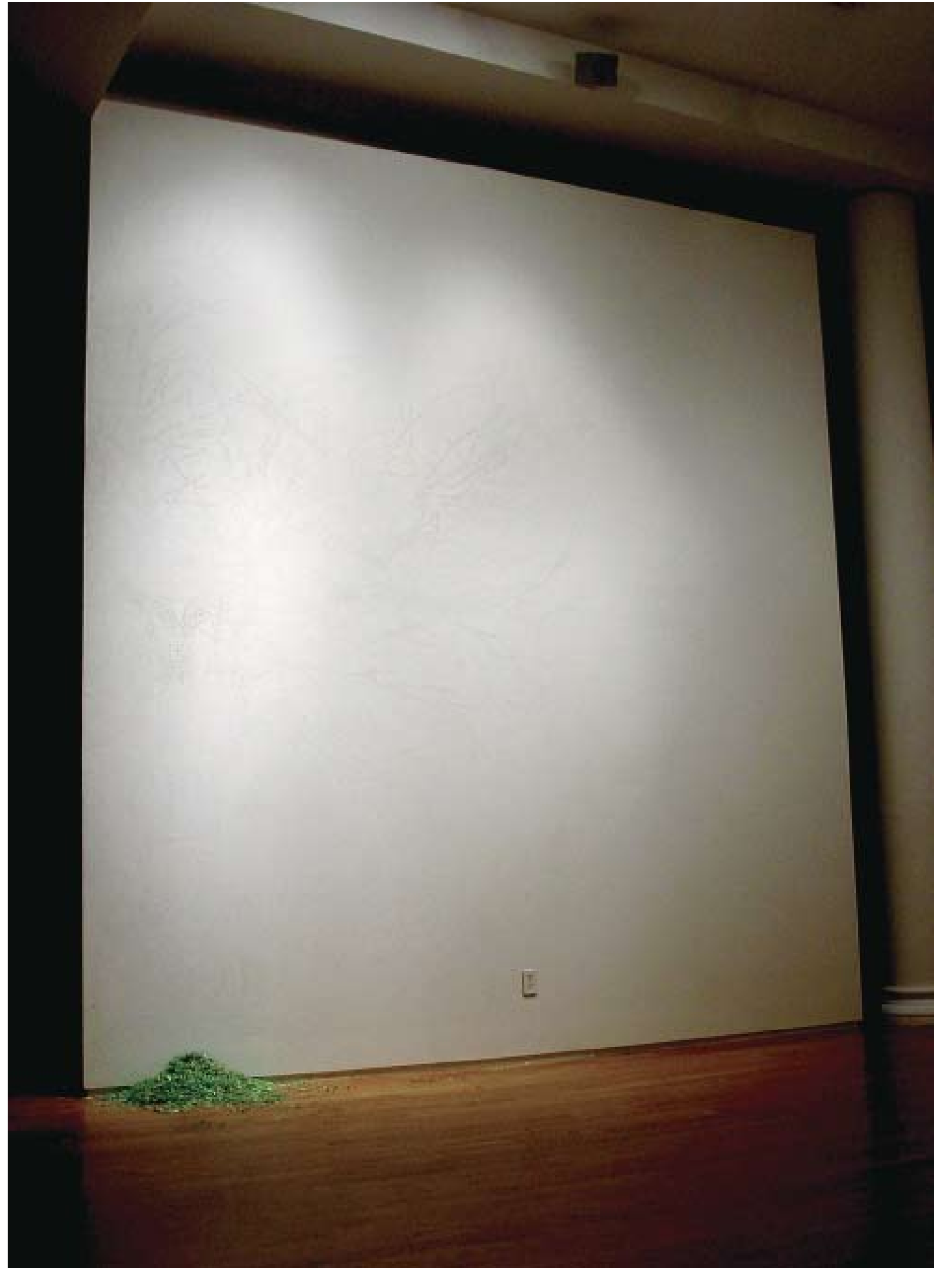
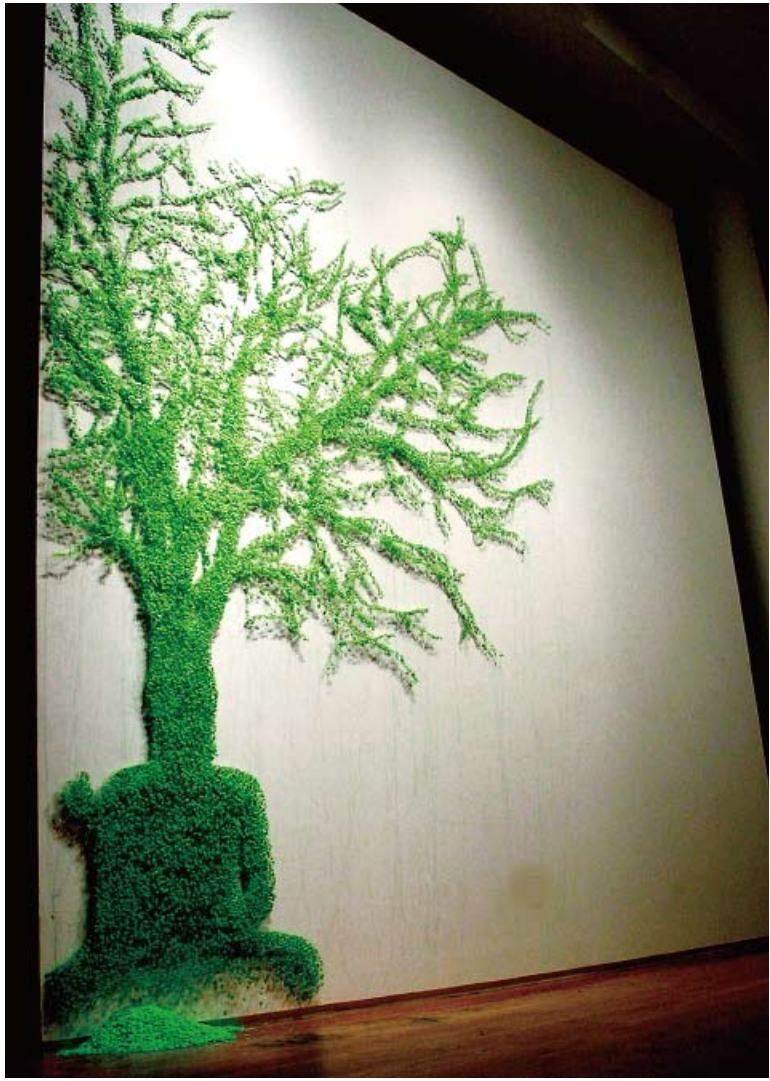












ART WORKS LIST

2005-2012

page 10-15

East Palace

2011
59inch x 118inch / 150cm x 300cm (2panel)
Buttons, Pins, Beads on Wood Panel



page 36-41

Whimsical Dream

2011
59inch x 197inch / 150cm x 500cm (5panel)
Buttons, Pins, Beads on Wood Panel



page 48-53

Sweet InYean

2010
71inch x 94inch / 180cm x 240cm (2panel)
Buttons, Pins, Beads on Wood Panel



page 72-73

Reality Game

2010
59inch x 118inch / 150cm x 300cm (2panel)
Beads, Pins on Wood Panel



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Unknown-US

2009
94inch x 70inch / 240cm x 180cm
Shell Buttons, Pins on Wood Panel



page 83-87

Dreaming of Joy

2008
195inch x 101inch x 95inch (h)
495cm x 257cm x 240cm (h)
Buttons, Pins on Wood Panel, Steel Cage



page 16-20

East Wind

2012
70inch x 141inch / 180cm x 360cm (3panel)
Buttons, Beads, Pins on Wood Panel



page 42-43

Another Soaring

2010
472inch x 118inch x 138inch (h)
1200cm x 300cm x 350cm (h)
Pins, Wires, Beads, Metal Threads,
Stainless steel bars



page 54-69

Garden of Water

2010
90inch x 118inch
230cm x 300cm (6panel) x 3set
Crystals, Beads, Pins on Plexiglas + Video



page 74-75

Empty me S-II

2010
83inch x 142inch / 210cm x 360cm (4panel)
Buttons, Beads, Pins on Wood Panel



page 79

Unknown-UT

2009
94inch x 70inch / 240cm x 180cm
Thread, Pins on Wood Panel



page 88-89

Self-discovery

2005
Installation View
Buttons, Pins, Thread, Wire



page 23-35

Healing Blossoms

2012
66inch x 325inch / 170cm x 826cm (7panel)
Paper Buttons, Beads, Pins on Wood Panel



page 44-47

Ephemeral Blossoms

2012
47inch x 70inch / 120cm x 180cm (3panel)
Buttons, Beads, Pins on Wood Panel



page 70

Rest II

2009
108inch x 60inch / 275cm x 153cm
Buttons, Beads, Pins on Wood Panel



page 76-77

Looking for Myself

2010
70inch x 94inch / 180cm x 240cm
Threads, Buttons, Pins on Wood Panel



page 80-81

Flower in Desert _ O

2009
41inch x 41inch
105cm x 105cm
Crystals, Beads, Pins on Wood Panel



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Buddha Camp

2006
Installation View
Buttons, Pins on the Wall





RAN HWANG

Queens Museum of Art, New York, 2006

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITION

- 2012 Conference of Birds, CYNTHIA-REEVES Projects (C-R P).
 Mana Contemporary, New Jersey
 Art Dubai 2012, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, United Arab Emirates
 Fifth Annual Queens Art Express, Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning, Jamaica, Queens NY
 'A Day in the park @ kwun Tong', Kwun Tong, Hong Kong
 VIP Art Fair 2.0, Leila Heller Gallery, New York
- 2011 Aha Moment!, Hangaram Art Museum, Seoul Art Center, Seoul Korea
 AHL Foundation Annual Auction, Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York
 Sofia International Paper Art Biennale 2011, Sofia, Bulgaria
 SCOPE Basel 2010, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Basel, Switzerland
 Art Paris, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Paris, France
 Art Dubai 2011, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, United Arab Emirates
 Finding Flow, Jeju Museum of Contemporary Art, Jeju Island, Korea
 Art Stage Singapore, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Singapore
 India Art Summit, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 2010 ART ASIA MIAMI, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Miami, USA
 KUNST10, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland
 AHL Foundation, Gala Auction, Arario Gallery, New York
 B.I.E.N.N.A.L.E + ONE, Kwang-ju, Korea
 Fokus Lodz Biennale 2010, Lodz, Poland
 KIAF 2010, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 ART TAIPEI 2010, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Taiwan
 SCOPE Basel 2010, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Basel, Switzerland
 Art HK10, Hong Kong International Art Fair,
 Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Hong Kong
 Art Dubai 2010, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, United Arab Emirates
- 2009 Kaleidoscope, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland
 Beginning of New Era, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul
 KIAF (Korea International Art Fair), COEX, Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul
 Triple of Light, mnav (Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales), Uruguay
 Art Dubai 2009, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, United Arab Emirates
- 2008 Art Asia, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Miami
 ACAF (Asian Contemporary Art Fair), 2x13 Gallery, Pier 92, New York
 Art Paris Abu Dhabi, Emirates Palace, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery,
 Abu Dhabi
 KIAF (Korean International Art Fair), COEX, 2x13 Gallery, Seoul
 Facial of Art- 20 Years Anniversary exhibition,
 Seoul Art Center Museum, Seoul
- 2007 Asian Contemporary Art Fair, Special Exhibition-SimulAsian, Pier 92,
 New York
 Incarnation, Hammond Museum, New York
 Drawing the Line - Against Domestic Violence-Auction,
 The Metropolitan Pavilion, New York
 Woman in Love, Tenri Gallery, New York
 Mi Art Fair, Milan, Italy
- 2006 Queens International 2006, Queens Museum of Art, New York
 Funsters, Seoul Art Center Museum, Seoul Korea.
 Affordable Art Fair New York City 2006,
 The Metropolitan Pavilion, New York
 Drawing the Line - Against Domestic Violence-Auction,
 Helen Mills Theater, New York
 City Art Auction, Chelsea Art Museum, New York
 Asian Art Works, Silent Auction, Helen Mills Theater, New York
 Third Annual Award, Silent Auction, AHL Foundation, New York

EDUCATION

B.F.A., School of Visual Arts, New York

M.F.A., Graduate School of Arts Chung-Ang University, Seoul, Korea

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITION

- 2012 Leila heller Gallery, New York
 2010 Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 2009 Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland
 2008 ACAF (Asian Contemporary Art Fair), Pier 92,
 Special Exhibition, New York
 2007 2X13 Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 2006 Hass Gallery, Bloomsburg University, PA, USA
 2005 Open Studio, Vermont Studio Art Center, Jonson Vermont, U.S.A
 2004 Hutchins Gallery, Long Island University, New York
 2002 Hudson River Gallery, New York
 Yee Mook Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 2001 Hudson River Gallery, New York
 2000 Arsenal Gallery, Paris

SELECTED TWO PERSON EXHIBITION

- 2005 Refresh!_ Curated by Lilly Wei, 2x13 Gallery, New York
 When Art Encounters Fashion, Space Shin Choi, New York

- 2005 The Artville, 2x13 Gallery, New York
 Joy, Arts and Gallery, Milan Italy
 Contemporary Asian artists, Hammond museum, New York
 Beyond Acculturation, Stimulus, Response and Mutual Benefit,
 Tenri Gallery, New York
 Eight Korean Artists, 2004/2005: AHL Foundation
 Visual Arts Competition Winners, White Box, New York
- 2004 Night of 1000 Drawings, Artist Space, New York
 Green Light, Korean Cultural Service-Gallery Korea, New York
 Dumbo Arts Under the Bridge Festival, Dumbo Arts Center, New York
 The 1st Keum Kang International Nature Arts Biennale
 -Special Exhibition, GongJoo, Korea
 The Repetition, Gana Insa Art Center, Seoul, Korea
- 2003 Seoul Art Fair, Seoul Arts Center Museum, Seoul, Korea
 Generation 1.0, Representing 100years of Korean Immigration,
 Korean Cultural Service, Washington D.C.
 Visual Delights - NYC Winter Festival 2003, Binky Mana Gallery,
 New York
- 2002 Eat Art 5, HEAR art Co- Gallery, New York
 1st Korea International Art Fair, Busan BEXCO, Korea
 A Room of Their Own, Korean Cultural Service, Washington D.C.
- 2000 Abstractions in Mixed Media, School of Visual Arts Westside Gallery,
 New York
- 1997 Modeling '97 Chung-Ang University Graduate School of Arts Alumni,
 Jongro Gallery, Seoul, Korea

SELECTED AWARDS

- 2011 PS122 STUDIO Residency Program, New York
 2006 AAI-Artist Alliance, Lower East Side-Rotating & Long Term
 Studio Program, New York
- 2005 Full Fellow ship, Vermont Studio Center Residency Program,
 Vermont, U.S.A
- 2004 Gold Prize, AHL Foundation Annual Arts Competition, New York
 1995 Gold Prize, Korean Watercolor Public Subscription Exhibition,
 Cultural Art Promotion House Art Hall, Seoul, Korea

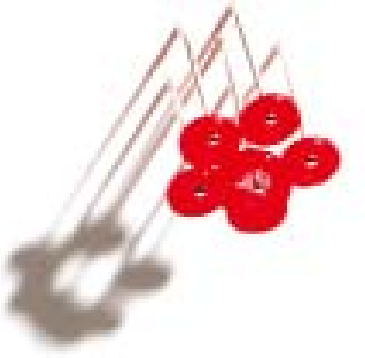
RELATED EXPERIENCE

- 2012 Artist Panel, ATOA-artist talk on Art : "Art as Ritual",
 Westwood Gallery, New York
- 2010 Special Lecture, College of Education in Kongju National University,
 Kongju, Korea
- 2006 Quest Lecture, Queens Museum of Art, New York, NY
 2005 Quest Lecture, Parsons School of Design, New York, NY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2012 Nina Edwards, On the button, 170p~174p, I.B.TAURIS, London
 2011 Installation Art-Ran Hwang, dpi
 (Design Popular Imagination Magazine) - Taiwan, October
 Jonathan Goodman, Ran Hwang - Hakgojae gallery,
 Sculpture Magazine, June
- 2010 Inhee Iris Moon, International Exhibition View
 - Art in America Magazine, November
 Von Simone Meier, Zurich Newspaper, Switzerland, October
 Mijin Kim, Pain & Agony embroidered by beautiful objet
 - Monthly Art Magazine Korea, August

- Jaekwang Im, Buttons more beautiful than jewelry
 - Public Art Magazine Korea, August
 Sweet & Reality painting by buttons, Culture & Meditation
 - MBC Broadcasting Korea, July 6
 Hyewon Jeon, Fatal Beauty with thousand buttons
 - Asia Today Newspaper, June 11
 Youngran, Lee, Great Art Medium-Buttons - Herald Media, June 10
 Kwanghyun, Lee, Hope from the line bet. live and death
 - Koomin Ilbo Newspaper, June 8
 Kumyoung, Kim, Illusion & Reality - CNB News Broadcasting Interview,
 June 7
 Art Basel Miami 2010 Broadcasting Interview, Miami, May
 Jyoti Dhar, At Art Dubai, Glimpses of an Evolving Market, ARTINFO,
 April 2
 Art Review, 60 galleries for Dubai art show - Middle East Interiors,
 March
- 2009 Beginning of New Era - KBS 9pm news Korea, October 21
 Korean Artist's work, La Republica - Daily Newspaper Uruguay,
 August 31, September 3
 Promoting cultural exchanges, El Pais - Daily Newspaper Uruguay,
 August 3
 Invited Artist's work, La Diaria - Daily Newspaper Uruguay, August 23
 Korean Artist's work, Galeria - Cultural Weekly Newspaper Uruguay,
 August 3, August 10
 Three Artist's work, TV Ciudad "En Cartel" - Cable TV Uruguay,
 August 11
 Thalia Vrachopoulos, Seoul 2x13gallery-Ran Hwang,
 Sculpture Magazine Jan/Feb
- 2008 Lynn Chen, AR:Live Blogs, Sheika-maker:
 At the Art Paris-Abu Dhabi art fair, Art review, November 24
- 2007 Benjamin Genocchio, Korean Artists Mix, and Nature Mingles,
 The New York Times, August 19
 Jo Min Jun, Ran Hwang's Opening Reception, Korea Tatler
 - Monthly Magazine Korea, July
 Jin Young Bae, People-Installation Artist Ran Hwang,
 Monthly Chosun Korea, June
 Hyun Joo Park, 2x13 Gallery Seoul open - Ran Hwang,
 Financial news Korea, June3
 Jonathan Goodman, Eternal Presences:
 The State of Contemporary Korean Art, Catalog essay, May
- 2006 Martha Schwendener, Art From Everywhere, All From Queens,
 The New York Times, December 15
 Today Plus-Bloomsburg University, Korean Artist exhibiting work at BU,
 October 19
 Michael Amy, Refresh!, Art in America, March
- 2005 Lilly Wei, Refresh!, Catalog essay, October
 Manuela Gandini, Joy-Art and Gallery News Paper, October
 Raul Zamudio Taylor, Women in Love-What Do Women Want?,
 Women in Love Catalog essay, October
 Thalia Vrachopoulos, Women in the Throes of... Love,
 Women in Love Catalog essay, October
 Eleanor Heartney, 2004/2005 AHL Foundation Visual Arts
 Competition Winners-Catalog essay, July
- 2004 Richard Vine, Present Absence: Dual Realities in the work of
 Ran Hwang, Catalog essay, December
 William Zimmer, Catalog essay, December
 Richard Vine, Seeing the Light, Green Light Catalog essay, November



RAN HWANG
T R A N S I T I O N

APRIL 5 - APRIL 27, 2012

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