

In their fifth solo exhibition, *Conversation, about the Root*, Diana Band have created a temporary environment in SeMA Storage, where objects of diverse forms and shapes interact with one another. The objects' communication systems are programmed to send their respective sound-language to the other objects and to either respond accordingly or not. The artists refer to this ecosystem of objects created within the limited space of exhibition space as the "world-energy."

In the rectangular Exhibition Hall no. 4, objects that look different but share the name "fishing float," form a collective ecosystem, in which they spin around or bounce up and down to communicate with one another. Constructed within the even more spacious, square-shaped Exhibition Hall no. 5 is a unique ecosystem of diverse objects—variously blue or yellow, long or wide, or curled up—that roll, stop, spin, clank, or flicker in conversation with one another.

In their previous exhibition, *1 and 12 128th Seconds in the Prince's Room*, and the current exhibition, *Conversation, about the Root*, Diana Band have focused on the network of objects created in the time and space of an exhibition. Diana Band's interest in networks has been an extension of their critical awareness stemming from a series of participatory projects that they have worked on from 2015 to 2018. During this period, however, Diana Band focused more on the relationships of people rather than those of objects, and people would form a temporary community for each project and scatter afterwards. This was an attempt through art to resist against a modern society that prioritizes growth centering on effectiveness and usefulness.

"We wanted this network to be temporary, rather than continuous, and avoid becoming a political power. Instead, we wanted to share with people the experience of forming an 'enormous body,' in which the 'connections' spread instantly like the proliferation of cells or the spread of a virus, and of participating in the formation and operation of that temporarily 'connected body.' (...) We were curious to find out if or when that enormous body is revealed, whether threatening entities with enormous influence and 'body' from the onset—capital, corporations, government, speeding heavy-duty

사물들이 내는 소리는 의미를 이해하지 못하면 소음에 불과하지만 서로 간의 상호작용이 이루어지는 장으로 이해했을 때 그것은 언어가 되고 대화가 된다. 관람객은 네트워크의 외부자로서 대화의 장에 포섭되지는 못하지만 대화를 이해하기 위해 귀 기울임이 필요해진다. 요컨대 사물들의 네트워크가 이루어진다는 사실에만 단순히 그치지 않고 사물을 이해하려는 노력이 수반된다. 그 결론은 인식의 전환이자 언어의 재구축이다. 주체의 도구로서 사물을 대하지 않고 사물을 나와 같은 위계의 존재자로 인식하게 되면 용례가, 동사가 변하게 된다. 일례로 나는 전시장을 둘러보다가 선반에 올려진 돌멩이를 보고서는 그것 또한 대화를 하는 비인간-존재인지 고민하였고 전시장 바깥의 사물들이 일으키는 소음들이 전시장 내의 사물들에 미칠 영향과 대화를 상상하였다. 그리고 다이애나밴드에게 사물의 '선정' 방식에 대해 질문을 던지다가 문득, 사물이 '초청'한 방식을 묻게 되었다. 우리가 인간인 이상, 언제나 인간 중심으로 사고할 수밖에 없다. 우리는 영원히 비인간-존재를 이해하지 못할지도 모른다. 하지만 이해하고자 하는 '지향성'을 가지게 되면 우리는 더욱 다층적인 관점에서 비인간-존재를, 환경을, 세계를 인식할 수 있게 된다.

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"세상을 가득 채운 존재자들이 기술적 대상이든 그렇지 않든 서로가 서로에게 긴밀하게 연대하고 있다는 것. 그렇기 때문에, '나'라는 세포 덩어리가 생존을 달성하고, 의식을 개발했으며, 숨을 유지하고 있다는 것에 대해서 생각한 적이 있었어요. '인간들의 연결된 몸'에는 여전히 관심이 있어요. 이 작업은 참 재미있는 구석이 있거든요. 그런데, 앞으로는 뭐랄까, 그 '커다란 몸'의 모습 속에 그 연결을 지어주는 네트워크적 존재자들-사물들이 구체적으로 드러났으면 더욱 좋겠다고 생각해요. 그들의 차분하고 견고하고 단호한 존재성은 우리가 형성한 몸에게 그런 인상을 더해줄 것 같아서 기대가 되요."

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신원정, 이두호 2인으로 구성된 콜렉티브인 다이애나밴드는 서로 다른 성향을 가진 창작자가 전시마다 일시적인 합일점을 찾아내고 다름의 격차 속에서 다양한 관계를 구축해나간다. 따라서 다이애나밴드는 두 명으로 구성된 콜렉티브라는 사실보다 두 다이애나 사이의 진동 속에서 만들어내는 관계(band)에 보다 방점을 맞추어야 한다. 이들이 관심을 가지고 있는 네트워크는 작업방식에서부터 이미 시작되고 있다.

trucks or vehicles that refuse to stop at crosswalks—would stop or take a look at us. Our main focus was to develop tools and methods to make them do so, and practice them together.”

With sound as the medium of community, a variety of people gathered and created sound together whilst maintaining their individuality. The following are representative examples: *Citizen Band* (2016), in which participants walked in the areas around Ansan, while creating sound through their smartphones; *the Positions Standing Up or Sitting Down* (2017), which embodied an idea of collective action on the part of people who exist both as a whole, yet in isolation, performed at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA); *Choir Practice* (2017), in which participants created a temporary community of sound with smartphones at the Nam June Paik Art Center.

44 For Diana Band, sound is important in and of itself, but the body as the soundbox through which sounds are created is also important. Sound generated through the vibration of material is produced so long as bodies stay in the same space, dispersing after that moment passes. It is a useful tool for a community that is formed temporarily and disperses afterwards, to which Diana Band aspire. Also, even if something is not visible but remains audible, it is a sign that something exists in the place where the sound is coming from; hence the exchange of sound becomes a primary medium, with which people form invisible networks in an invisible manner. Sound suggests the generation of something, but it is not uttered in language. Possibilities of evading language are realized in the encounters of sounds that pass through bodies.

“Sound comes from vibrations. Whether the vibration is subtle or strong, sound starts from the point of contact. I believe the presence of sound presupposes connection and relationship. Even as I sit at my desk writing this, I am surrounded by sounds. If I were to include the sounds that are inaudible to me, I could say that the world is filled with innumerable sounds. If we think of beings that have sounds or vibrations, they would include almost every being. I think sound is

most appropriate as a method of connection arousing empathy and understanding in people beyond culture or language.”

*A Parade of Objects* (2015), which was held at MMCA, showed the artists’ interest starting to expand from humans to objects. Here, the artists proposed to form a new relationship that derives from uselessness by removing usefulness from artificial objects produced as the means or tools for efficient and convenient human living. They assigned new characteristics to objects and named them “object friends,” a list of which includes Tom-tom walker, Pingpong cart, Melody walker, Bouquet-phone, Double microphone lamp, Ringer amplifier, Tape measure orchestra, Graffiti flashlight, and You-should-speak-out lamp. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that objects exist as instrumental means, whose existence depends on the manner through which human beings assign use to them. Whether an object artificially produced or material obtained from nature, the object acquires meaning for existence only insofar as humans perceive it. Since the meaning of an object is acquired only through the agent, events among objects that occur in places where nobody is looking, in his view, would have no meaning.

*A Parade of Objects* subverts the existing purposes of objects, such as that of a tambourine being made to create jingling sounds, a tape measure to measure length, and a lamp to light dark spaces, and they instead acquire different purposes. These purposes comprise anti-capitalistic and artistic relationships in that they are unproductive uses. However, even if they are purposeless, as in the case of a baby walker that plays drums, a lamp that plays the tambourine, and a tape measure that makes sounds based on the length of the tape, these are still purposes assigned by humans and arbitrary relationships designated by humans, and thus objects remain instrumental beings.

The solo exhibition, *1 and 12 128th Seconds in the Prince's Room*, is an exhibition in the process of transitioning from the relationship or network between object and human to object and object. As the focus is placed on “networks” of objects, objects that were instrumental beings move away from the hierarchy between

agent and object and stand as independent beings. The exhibition creates a space where a being called Prince stays temporarily. Twenty-something objects that are likely to be used by Prince converse among themselves while Prince is away. The conversation that carries through invisible networks connected via wireless communication become visible through movements and sounds. Visitors come across unexpected occurrences and face the events as witnesses rather than viewing the works from a position of safety. For people who grew up watching *Toy Story* in their childhood, the conversation between nonhuman-beings that escape the purpose assigned by humans in a room devoid of Prince/humans can appear quite delightful. Yet, at the same time, noises that cannot be interpreted by human perspective and movements that cannot be predicted may arouse unpleasant feelings due to their evasion of human control. These two contradicting emotions share commonality in that they are both emotions that respond to the environment itself from which humans were alienated.

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“Objects are Prince’s property, power, and ability. As for the objects, being connected to and used by Prince is the precondition, which allows them to continue to reside in his ‘room.’ Yet, in ‘Prince’s room,’ while such things as a rocking chair, mirror, clothes hanger, and key ring exist, the rocking chair rocks on its own, the hanger makes sounds when the sleeves are shaken, and the key ring drops the keys at some point. In other words, this room is an empty room where the ‘Prince’ has left. We wanted to show the parasitic mode of existence, which is revealed on the other side of the unnoticed environment/reality regardless of ‘Prince’s’ presence. Prince’s mighty power comes not so much from the fact that he is the prince of a country, but more from the fact that he is a ‘human,’ who ‘instrumentalizes’ the objects. They are well aware of this. That’s why none of them do anything to cross ‘Prince.’ That, however, does not make them eliminate or give up their parasitic existence. In the society of their own world/network, they enjoy their trivial conversations and get along happily, even though the Prince/humans can never intervene in that world.

In this solo exhibition, *Conversation, about the Root*, Diana Band focus more on creating an ecosystem of objects. Both exhibitions

share commonalities in that they created a network that allows independent responses by planting a communication system in the objects, and that they put visitors in the position of observer, unlike previous projects which placed them in a collaborative position, from which they took part in creating the work, based on the aesthetics of relation. However, largely two things set this exhibition apart from the previous one. First, it eliminates the human/Prince, who existed in the meta-position of the network of objects.

“First of all, it is a reestablishment of the hierarchical relationship between tools and parasites, which are two perspectives on the objects’ mode of existence. In ‘Prince’s Room,’ while the world of parasites is said to be the other side of the world of tools, it leaves a certain sense of secondariness. We came to think that it instead should hold equal, or even higher status. (...) In *Conversation, about the Root*, the Prince’s presence is gone, and the ‘forest’ of objects is created first and foremost, and we have shifted the direction of our work quite a bit for us/humans to have an opportunity to come in contact with that forest.”

Second, they tried to create the sound of objects in an analogic fashion as much as possible based on the characteristics of the objects such as material, size, and location, rather than designing or composing sounds and planting them digitally. When these artists were carrying out a series of projects in which their interest focused on human networks, they often utilized smartphones, which are the most technology-intensive item used on a daily basis. In *Phone in Hand* (2015), smartphones have been “transformed into interacting sound generators,” while being turned into a “third object” by utilizing different materials. Here sound was the digital sound generated by smartphones, and was open to as much transformation as possible. Visitors could expand the sound through items they additionally attached to the phones. In *Conversation, about the Root*, Diana Band minimized the possibility for artists’ intervention in order to minimize human perspective. This aligns with their efforts to not add any artificial sound and make active use of the soundbox of objects. Diana Band say that this was an attempt to realize the latent state of objects. They designed various sounds for each object but tried not to assign

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specific emotions to them. It is all too human to assign emotions to objects. After providing possibilities for nonhuman-beings to create sound, and designing a program in which they respond to one another and coming up with 'world-energy,' a virtual energy in which all objects can get involved, the artists stepped away and positioned themselves as observers like the other spectators.

"It just struck me, 'What if we called the non-verbal conversation or atmosphere, in which they did not get involved with one another directly but shared an 'environment' or a 'world,' an 'energy?'" Yet, we wanted to distinguish it from the energies that we are familiar with and can be sensed in the physical world, such as thermal energy, kinetic energy, sound pressure, or air pressure, and emphasize that it's an 'unknown energy.' That's why we added the prefix 'world-' to aggressively reinforce the unfamiliarity."

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The standpoint from which one attempts to view an object not as mere object but as an agent does not seem entirely new. Animism, which is a faith that believes spirits reside in everything from nature to artifacts, is established in us as a kind of collective unconscious. However, in Animism, objects are presumed to be supernatural beings that oversee or intervene in human life. Objects to which human desires are projected from a human perspective become a tool or material reinforcing mysticism, and are still limiting in that objects are considered as something separate from the agent.

By observing the objects, Diana Band try to exclude human perspective as much as possible and actively discover the characteristics of the objects themselves. This was prominently featured in the performance that was done during the exhibition. The performance presented by Yo Daham and Diana Band defamiliarized objects that are easily discovered in everyday life such as a water bottle, lantern, and balloon; rediscovered their sounds and forms; and created movements and sounds that imitated the characteristics of those objects. Through the bodily movements that drew them closer to the objects, while moving away from conventional understanding, they tried to reestablish the relationship between object and agent.

"When rhythmically transformed sound comes from a broken vent, I sometimes listen carefully to the sound not knowing where it is coming from or what it is that's making the sound. When I listen carefully, that sound which constantly changes in response to the external environment has a vitality. I can feel that the being approaches me as sound before its body is presented. Between sound, the being, and the body, there is a physical, phenomenal, and symbolic working that generates from the being itself, and within the relationship between beings."

These efforts by Diana Band seem to create an object-oriented ontology in the field of art. Object-oriented ontology, influenced by Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, is actively discussed by the likes of Graham Harman and Levi R. Bryant. It explains phenomena by introducing concepts such as actor and machine to remove the dichotomous distinction between agent and object and to establish equal status between agent and object by moving away from anthropocentrism and regarding humans and objects to have equal or independent values. Each philosopher is different in the way they perceive the range, definition, relationship, and mode of objects, but the theory holds significance in that it rethinks the Western dualism that has been passed down from Descartes.

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When the meaning of sounds created by each object is not understood, it is nothing more than noise, but when it is understood as a field of interaction, it becomes a language and conversation. The visitors, as the outsider of the network, are not included in the forum of conversation, but they need to listen carefully in order to understand the conversation. That is, the exhibition does not stop at simply creating the network of objects, but accompanies one's efforts to understand the objects. The result is a change of perception and reconstruction of language. When objects are not treated as a means for the agent and are perceived as beings that share the same hierarchical position as the agent, usage and verbs change. For instance, when I was looking around the exhibition space and saw a stone placed on a shelf, I wondered if it was also a nonhuman-being taking part in the conversation, and imagined how the noises coming from outside would impact the objects or

affect the conversation among them. And while I was asking the artist questions about how they 'selected' the objects, I suddenly went on to ask how they 'invited' them. Insofar as we are human, we are bound to think in an anthropocentric manner. We may never understand nonhuman-beings. Yet, if we hold onto the "directivity" to understand, we will be able to perceive nonhuman-beings, the environment, and the world from a much more multifaceted perspective.

"The beings that fill this world, whether or not they are technical objects, are joined in intricate solidarity with one another. I once thought that this is how 'myself' as a mass of cells could achieve survival, develop consciousness, and keep breathing. I am still interested in the 'connected body of humans.' There is something intriguing and fun about this project. Yet, I'd like to go on to feature the network of beings/objects that make the connection within that 'immense body' more concrete. I look forward to objects adding their calm, solid, and resolute presence to the body that we have formed."

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Diana Band as a collective of two artists, Wonjung Shin and Dooho Yi, who have different temperaments, find temporary points of agreement for each exhibition and create varying relationships within the gap of difference. Thus, we must focus more on them being a "band" formed within the vibration of two "Diana"s, rather than the fact that they are a collective of two. The network in which they take interest has already been conceived in their method of work.

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