

Cornell Council for the Arts (CCA) Biennale, 2014  
Intimate Cosmologies: The Aesthetics of Scale in an Age of Nanotechnology

**Artist:** Kimsooja

**Title:** *A Needle Woman: Galaxy was a Memory, Earth is a Souvenir*

**Date:** 2014

**Medium:** steel, custom acrylic panel, laminated polymer film, mirror

**Curator:** Stephanie Owens (Director, CCA; Professor of multi disciplinary studies, art & architecture)

**Collaborator(s) Credit:** Jaeho Chong (Architect); Professor Ulrich Wiesner (Materials Science and Engineering); and Wiesner Group researchers: Hiroaki Sai, PhD (Materials Science & Engineering); and Ferdinand Kohle (graduate student, Chemistry and Chemical Biology); Erik P. Eshelman (Architectural Engineering)

**Date/Time of exhibition or event:** September 15-Dec 22, 2014

**Installation location:** Cornell University, Arts Quad, Ithaca, NY

**Hours of accessibility:** Daylight hours until dusk; Appointment necessary for view inside. Contact [cca@cornell.edu](mailto:cca@cornell.edu) for available viewing times.

**Artist Talk – “The Dimensions of a Needle”:** Thursday September 18 (5.30pm – 7pm)

**Panel Discussion:** Friday September 19 (11am)

*Kimsooja in conversation with Professor Ulrich Wiesner of Cornell's Department of Material Science and Engineering, curator Stephanie Owens and architect Jaeho Chong*

**Opening Reception:** Friday September 19 (6pm – 8pm)

<http://cca.cornell.edu/?p=cca-biennial>

### **Description of the Project:**

As part of the 2014 CCA biennale, Korean-born conceptual multi-media artist, Kimsooja has created a new work in close collaboration with architect Jaeho Chong and the Wiesner Nanomaterials Lab at Cornell University.

"An inward directionality found in visual perspective employed by nanoscience convinced me how much nano-techniques are an inverse expression of our perspective of the universe, as well as being related and interconnected to observations in art making."

Kimsooja

Inspired by the perspectival direction of nanotechnology and French philosopher Henri Bergson's thoughts on memory as related to metaphysical perception, Kimsooja explores the notion of the needlepoint as an intersection between distance and memory threading across a cosmic scale.

*A Needle Woman: Galaxy was a Memory, Earth is a Souvenir* is a 46 foot high, 4.5 foot diameter needle-shaped steel structure made for an intimate exterior and interior experience. The structure's grid-like, sleek, volumetric spine is fleshed out with acrylic panels to form a crystalline, transparent pavilion when seen directly. At a raking light, each of the panels, which have been individually treated with an iridescent nanopolymer, transforms the transparent pavilion into a radiant spectrum with color as the polymer refracts various wavelengths of natural light dependent on the angle from which it is viewed.

“Working at an architectural scale inspired us to transform a micro-molecular phenomenon at the nano-scale into a tangible structure, thereby unveiling a new spatial dimension to the human senses. Once installed, the iridescent needle form gave the entire Arts Quad an artistic definition.”

Jaeho Chong

Created in collaboration with Cornell nanomaterial engineer and chemical scientist Ulrich Wiesner, the molecularly engineered ‘block copolymer’ is precisely structured to maximize the refractive qualities of natural light. Similar to the iridescence that occurs in nature on the wings of butterflies or shell of beetles, the color of the pavilion is physically interactive, where the various spectral colors appear as a radiant glitch in the fabric of reality. The interior floor of the structure is mirrored, doubling its scale and light effects so that it appears to extend simultaneously into the earth and the sky.

“The most enjoyable part was to see how enthusiastic and excited the students were about what they were working on. To spend time on a project that was going to provide a person not knowledgeable about nanotechnology a way to appreciate the work of scientists via a piece of art was a dream come true for everybody involved.”

Uli Wiesner

While the announcement of earth as a ‘souvenir’ in the title suggests an object or gift, the idea of Earth as a readymade or readymade object functions as an aperture through which to view Kimsooja’s artistic evolution. Expanding from the notion of needle as form and concept, this project addresses the needlepoint as both a void and a point of departure in time and space on an architectural scale.

“The fact that Kimsooja’s work often materializes the phenomenal forms in nature, made it clear to me that she would be a wonderful artist to engage not only with the intangible realm of nano-scale science, but with the philosophical and cultural questions that are posed by the synthetic manipulation of the elemental components of life. While some artists are experimenting with nano technologies because it offers new forms, Kimsooja’s ability to bring us to the threshold between cultural and natural worlds allows us to connect with this unimaginable scale by pulling it, with vibrance and light, into our everyday reality.”

Stephanie Owens

By presenting a morphological form that assimilates the perspective of scale at the heart of nanoscientific practice as well as perspective in art and the universe, the artist aims to explore the possible shapes and points of view that reveal the invisible as visible, physical as immaterial, and vice versa. *A Needle Woman: Galaxy was a Memory, Earth is a Souvenir* is a continuation of Kimsooja’s decades long exploration of the concept of the needle and the notion of *bottari*, both of which have been explored in a number of site-specific projects, most recently in the Korean

Pavilion in the Biennale di Venezia, 2013.

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

<http://wiesner.mse.cornell.edu>

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