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# RIT

## **Pins**

by

Inhwan Jeon

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Fine Art in Metals and Jewelry

School for American Crafts  
College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology  
Rochester, NY  
July 30, 2024

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## **Abstract**

*Pins* aims to portray the societal landscape observed and experienced by me as an international student, highlighting sociological concerns like hatred and hate crimes instead of focusing on surface-level metrics such as the risk and fatality rates of COVID-19. Through this work, I want to remind the audience of the multifaceted nature of society and the emotions evoked by COVID-19, prompting reflection on the role of art during times of crisis.

While transforming my original medium of metal objects into an installation art format, I explored concepts such as spacing, installation, cognition, narrative, and multiple senses. I integrated these elements into a unified format called theatrical installation art.

In *Pins*, the "bowling" is used as a narrative to evoke a sense of "distance" and various emotions among the people. Objects created to visually portray the idea of "distance" represent individuals during the pandemic. Objects harmonize with the exhibition space, various devices, and sounds, revealing the societal imagery of the pandemic era and its profound feelings. The attempt to present objects made with traditional raising techniques in a contemporary way transforms objects into a component of theatrical installation art. When this transformed object encounters the audience in the exhibition space, it acquires a fresh interpretation, is imbued with new meaning, and serves as a form of art. Simultaneously, it provides a platform for discussing humanity's role in the upcoming crisis post-Covid-19.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	1
List of Illustrations	3
Introduction	4
Body of Document	
Section 1: Context	5
A. After Pandemic	
B. Cultural Recession	
C. Narrative	
D. Reference	
Section 2: Evolution	13
A. Installation? Theatrical Installation	
B. Figure as a Performer	
C. Beyond Hammering	
Section 3: The Body of Work	18
A. Pins	
B. Spacing – Curatorial Approach	
C. Bowling Pins	
D. Cage	
Conclusion	23
Bibliography	25

## List of Illustration

Figure 1. Suh, Doho. "High School Uniform". 1997.....	10
Figure 2. Yang, Hye-gue. "Handles". 2019, MOMA, USA, New York.....	11
Figure 4. "Canopic Jars" .....	15
Figure 5. "Matryoshka Dolls" .....	15
Figure 3. "Venus of Willendorf" .....	15
Figure 6. Jeon, Inhwan. "Pins". 2023, Installation View .....	18
Figure 7 Jeon, Inhwan. "Pins", 2023.....	21
Figure 8 Jeon, Inhwan. "Cage". 2023, Installation view .....	22

## Introduction

Starting in late 2019, COVID-19 quickly evolved into a pandemic, earning the designation of a 'major transformation,' marking a clear divide between the world before and after the infection and causing lasting shocks and distress worldwide. This viral outbreak, driven by individual interactions and societal pathways, disrupted fundamental human activities and societal dynamics, concurrently evoking collective anxiety and distrust transcending national boundaries.

The challenges posed by the infectious disease, including the worldwide breakdown in communication and the isolation of individuals, motivated me to delve deeply into the pandemic era. My ongoing fascination with human emotions and communication methods meant that the pandemic catalyzed my exploration during this period. Drawing from this interest, I initiated my analysis of the pandemic era by concentrating on the prevalent individual 'anxiety' as a critical area of study. However, it became evident upon closer examination that the pandemic extended beyond mere discomfort and survival threats, challenging our usual perceptions.

Social distancing measures intended to safeguard people from infection became a symbolic boundary. Essentially, the concept of 'distance' had a dual impact—it offered physical safety but also triggered psychological instability and anxiety. Under the influence of this distance, to sublimate the various social problems and human psychology and emotions that arise into works, I brought the narrative of bowling to make the overall composition of my exhibition. Due to the nature of the game of bowling, the constant sense of distance that the pins strike each other and the chain relationship that arises from it were suitable for expressing various problems arising from distance during the pandemic.

Prior to Covid-19, humanity faced historical hardships like numerous wars and plagues. Despite threats to human existence, art has endeavored to document the era's atrocities and represent the complexity of human emotion. For example, *Guernica* (1937) by Picasso expresses the horrors of wars and human suffering by depicting the Spanish Civil War. The historical endeavors of art and contemporary endeavors to bring life back to humans have inspired me as an artist, motivating me to create a record of my experiences and observations during the pandemic era.

Being a part of this era, the pandemic has caused humans to experience intricate and potentially lethal psychological side effects beyond mere survival concerns. The effects of COVID-19 can be categorized into pathological, psychological, and sociological aspects, and my research focuses on the sociological dimension. It would hold greater significance if we viewed the pandemic not merely as a fleeting crisis to be forgotten but as a pivotal event that should be remembered as an integral part of the history of human crisis. Therefore, in my exhibition, I aimed to recreate a stage where individuals can relive the shared complex emotions experienced during the pandemic.

## Context

### *A. After Pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic, marked by a substantial loss of life, not only posed a direct threat to global survival but also inflicted significant economic, social, and psychological distress. Amidst this global crisis, I personally faced physical and psychological challenges during the pandemic. Upon arriving in the United States to pursue a master's degree, I encountered numerous challenges, such as adapting to language and cultural differences with limitations in direct communication due to mask-wearing and social distancing. This unexpected hurdle triggered by COVID-19 in the early stages of my academic journey abroad profoundly impacted my research method and topic. Firstly, my work process changed from collaborative efforts to more independent pursuits, and the research topic has also changed to focus on visualizing the negative emotions of humans and delineating personal boundaries under external scrutiny.

Reflecting on these experiences, the trigger of my study was centered around protecting me during the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19, the escalating caution among people, and my firsthand encounter with self-protection measures have shifted my research focus from its original topic to pandemic-triggered social anxiety.

The pandemic underscored a global preoccupation with physical "survival," evident in daily mortality rates and infection statistics. Google Trends data for 2020, showcasing "COVID-19" as a top search term, underscores the heightened public interest in pandemic-related survival concerns. (Google) Based on Google's 2020 trend data, the coronavirus was the most searched term overall. In specific categories, "Together at Home" led the concert section, "Among Us" topped the game category, and "Dalgona coffee" was the most popular recipe search. These trends highlight the significant impact of COVID-19. As social beings, humans experienced social isolation during the pandemic and sought to alleviate existential anxiety by engaging in online activities with many others. In essence, this reflects how humans were deeply concerned with both physical and psychological survival during COVID-19. Although survival was the primary focus during the pandemic, I have observed that COVID-19 leads to social side effects stemming from national survival responses and negative emotions such as distrust and vigilance towards others during infectious disease threats.

The impacts of COVID-19 can be categorized into pathological, psychological, and sociological side effects. Among these, I focused on observing the sociological aspects of these side effects. Especially, Social Isolation of humans itself has created many crises in various dimensions. (Hosseinzadeh)

The primal fear caused by infectious diseases led to a surge in severe hate crimes driven by specific racial biases. Statistics indicate a significant rise in reported hate crimes in the US against Asian Americans, from 158 cases in 2019 to 746 cases in 2022. (NEIL G. RUIZ) Analyzing these hate crimes and related interviews reveals that these incidents stem from the "blame game" initiated during the COVID-19 outbreak. These hate crime statistics highlight the profound impact of COVID-19, not only causing direct physical and psychological harm but also stimulating discussions about the origins of infectious diseases and national responsibilities from a different perspective.



During the pandemic, maintaining a physical "distance" from others was crucial to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, leading most countries to implement social distancing measures. For instance, in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended a minimum safe distance of 6 feet, while in Korea, many people adhered to a social distance of 2 meters, similar to the US guidelines. However, because these 6 feet or 2 meters were not always strictly observed, it occasionally led to individual conflicts and arguments. These results from the social distancing guidelines could be interpreted as safety measures that inadvertently cause increased wariness and distrust toward others.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic's social implications, including psychological and social consequences, my focus shifted from mere 'survival' to examining the interpersonal 'distance' crucial for survival. The physical distance between individuals reflects their psychological separation, with the boundary set by their desired protection forming a psychological barrier that may lead to guardedness towards outsiders. This notion of interpersonal distance rapidly permeated our society's physical and psychological realms. Observing the impact of this social distancing, including issues beyond infectious diseases, heightened my interest in exploring its nuances. I interpreted this observed 'distance' as a tangible physical measure, like 6 feet, and simultaneously a psychological boundary. Integrating this concept into my project, I aimed to evoke in the audience a reflection on the intricate emotions experienced by individuals during the pandemic, revealing the profound human emotions underlying the instinct for 'survival.'

## ***B. Cultural Recession***

Apart from the fundamental aspect of human survival, COVID-19 has profoundly impacted various facets of society, including art. Notably, visual art spaces that rely on audience gatherings have faced significant challenges. Art professionals, artists, and enthusiasts alike have experienced numerous effects due to the pandemic. From 2020 to 2021, many art platforms such as museums, exhibitions, special showcases, art fairs, and small galleries limited their capacity or postponed events indefinitely. This limitation in showcasing artworks translated into missed opportunities for artists to connect with audiences, reducing public consumption of 'culture.' As we observe these cascading effects, it's clear that the pandemic is not just a health crisis but a cultural recession we are all experiencing together.

Amidst the cultural recession, the art scene shifted to attempt online exhibitions to bridge the gap between audiences and indefinitely postponed showcases. This shift involved relocating artworks from physical spaces to online platforms, allowing art galleries, exhibitions, and competitions to explore virtual showcases. One notable example was the 2021 Loewe Craft Prize, an annual competition highlighting craft artists worldwide. The Loewe Crafts Exhibition presented an impressive online showcase featuring finalists' works in a meticulously crafted 3D space that closely mimicked the experience of viewing the artworks in person. (MAD Paris) This enhanced online exhibition highlighted the progress made in human creativity and technological advancements amidst challenging eras.

These extensive endeavors aimed at overcoming the cultural recession in the art world and emphasizing the significance of art even during crises like pandemics prompt profound reflections on the essence of art for humanity. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, humanity faced various challenging periods throughout history, including numerous wars and plagues. Art has been a constant companion to humanity, capturing historical moments, exposing the horrors of challenging times, and providing solace to humanity. Considering the ongoing artistic endeavors spanning historical epochs to the modern era, I contemplated my potential role as an artist who has observed and lived through a pandemic. Therefore, I sought inspiration from a page in art history, and the immediate reference that came to mind was the 'art and craft movement,' a pivotal moment in the evolution of modern crafts. Both the Arts and Crafts movement and the contemporary art scene faced a common challenge during the pandemic: navigating crises. This translated to grappling with the reduced interaction between artists and audiences in the art world. Simultaneously, for the Arts and Crafts movement, it meant confronting the impacts of industrialization on traditional craftsmanship and artistic standards—a crisis that the movement's founder saw as a regression in art during their era. Consequently, I aimed to identify the shared endeavor of combating the decline of art during a specific historical period and draw parallels to the current crisis of the pandemic era.

Originating during the industrialization period in the late 18th century, the art and craft movement was founded on the idea that standardized, mass-produced items, inferior in quality compared to handcrafted goods, undermine human creativity and individuality. The leadership of William Morris and John Ruskin in the Arts and Crafts Movement aimed to revive the quality and beauty of handicrafts to enhance the lives of struggling individuals. This philosophy significantly impacted artisans, writers, and designers of that era. (Victoria and Albert Museum)

However, a significant drawback of the art and craft movement was its approach to the concepts of 'value' and 'ownership' of artworks. Due to the labor-intensive nature of handcrafted items, they were often priced exorbitantly higher than the mass-produced goods of the era. This discrepancy contradicted the movement's fundamental goal of providing quality goods to enhance people's lives, leading to exclusivity and accessibility issues as these items were often reserved for the wealthy or nobility.

Drawing inspiration from the arts and crafts movement's focus on revitalizing the quality of life, it is a valuable source of motivation to counteract the current COVID-19 cultural downturn. I aim to contemporize and adopt the movement's fundamental principles, which seek to enrich people's lives with meaningful and aesthetically pleasing creations. This includes establishing a deep bond between the artist, their creations, and their practical utility in daily life, underscoring the significance of human emotions and utility in the project.

I address the contemporary cultural downturn by reinterpreting the essence of the art and craft movement, which sought to restore the value of "life." It was imperative to depart from the notion of 'ownership' of artworks to achieve this. This factor contributed to the challenges the art and craft movement faced, including the loss of valuable works. Therefore, the project was designed to be inclusive, not tied to any individual or specific audience, but rather accessible and impactful for anyone who could appreciate the work. In other words, I believe the project reached its full potential by prioritizing "one-time" experiences and immersive encounters. These elements are intrinsic to the art ecosystem through the medium of "installation art," which I chose to employ.

### *C. Narrative*

Upon deeply analyzing the societal impact stemming from COVID-19, I sought a narrative to transform this into an empirical project. Initially, I grew weary of the ambiguous nature of contemporary art labeled as 'formal abstraction.' I aimed to engage the public with a conceptual project that was more accessible and easier to understand. In crafting a captivating stage experience that is immersive, conceptual, and time-constrained, it was imperative to weave a narrative into the stage within a specified timeframe.

By chance, I stumbled upon a game of bowling, and realized there was a metaphorical link between bowling pins and humans during the pandemic. Bowling pins – constantly knocked down and rearranged – mirrored human experience during the pandemic. Regardless of social status, gender, race, or other factors, physical and psychological anxiety was nearly universal due to COVID-19. Many endured the discomfort of movement restrictions and grappled with feelings of distrust among people. Nevertheless, it seemed each individual persevered day by day, believing that things would eventually return to normal. Just like the process of being knocked down and standing back up, we, too, had to rise again after experiencing a fall.

In addition to the connection between bowling and humans, the historical origins of bowling also fascinated me and served as a compelling narrative for this project. According to “Historical Dictionary of Bowling” written by John Grasso and Eric R. Hartman, Bowling has multiple origin; most compelling to me is a religious ritual in medieval Germany because in that ceremony, knocking down many wood-carved ‘Kegle’ was considered a symbol of deep faith and there is an opinion that this religious ceremony has become 9-pin bowling in America. (Pluckhahn)

It's intriguing to consider that the origins of bowling, rooted in demonstrating religious faith, reflect the human experience of persevering and enduring challenges with steadfast beliefs. Bowling's origin lies in falling over, and from the perspective of the bowling pin, it's about repeatedly standing up only to fall again. It resembled individuals holding their ground amidst a situation akin to a giant bowling ball called the Pandemic constantly rolling. I aimed to incorporate this bowling analogy of resilience and cyclical perseverance as a central narrative for my installation. Centralizing this narrative to my project allows for a relatable and engaging interaction with viewers, offering a sense of kindness and intrigue that differs from complex contemporary art.

#### *D. Reference*

In envisioning the project, I aimed for a composition rich in elements like "curiosity," "multisensory experiences," "human presence," "ambiguity," and "identity." Artists such as Doho-Suh, Hyegue Yang, and John Cage deeply inspired me with their strong focus on these elements.

The primary focus of the project centered on being a 'time-limited event' and 'appealing to a wide audience.' I aimed for my work to transcend the idea of 'ownership' and serve as a realm of experiential engagement. The initial genre I considered for this purpose was performance art, given its inherent one-time nature and how every aspect of the process contributes to artistic expression. Particularly intriguing to me was the element of uncertainty inherent in performance, and one piece that exemplified this was John Cage's (1912-1992) 1952 composition "4 Minutes and 33 Seconds," a work I've been fascinated by since childhood.

The title '4 minutes and 33 seconds' of John Cage's musical composition is a clear indication of its unique nature. The performer refrains from playing any instrument for the specified duration, breaking free from artistic conventions. Cage's bold endeavor to defy the ordinary has been a significant inspiration for me as I transitioned from creating art tied to physical objects to exploring new forms. This exploration led me to envision an exhibition plan that would provoke a sense of anticipation and uncertainty in the audience—a feeling of not knowing what to expect. This became the driving force as I conceptualized the exhibition space and embarked on this project.

Looking to John Cage as a guide for tapping into the psychology of uncertainty within the audience, I drew inspiration for the composition of the installation and the interaction between the audience and the artwork from the works of Artists Doho-Suh and Hyegue-Yang. This choice stemmed from Suh Do-ho's (1962-) status as a prominent artist shaping contemporary art globally, while Yang Hye-gyu's (1971-) approach involves engaging the audience 'sensory' through everyday objects.



Figure 1. Suh, Doho. "High School Uniform". 1997

The primary inspiration for this installation came from Suh's artwork "High School Uni-Form (1997)." Suh, belonging to a generation familiar with school uniforms and military culture, extensively incorporates uniforms into his art, a practice stemming from his own experiences wearing them during his school days and continuing to do so in Korea. For Suh, the school uniform symbolizes a product of totalitarianism that suppresses individuality, prompting questions about one's 'identity.' His artwork features numerous mannequins clad in these uniforms, evoking a discourse on identity.

In Suh's work, I found not only thematic inspiration but also a structural reference through the repetitive appearance of the uniforms. Reflecting on the totalitarian nature of uniformity, I deliberately varied the figures' sizes, volumes, and colors, imbuing them with a sense of individual 'personality' amidst uniformity.

Suh's work resonated with me as a powerful means of expressing societal themes. It highlighted the everyday experiences within a society reminiscent of the shared era of the pandemic. I aimed to capture this idea in my installation, focusing on portraying individuals within society or crowds to amplify the psychological tension experienced by individuals, akin to fan dramas.

Secondly, artist Yang Hye-gue utilizes everyday objects that are easily found in daily life, reinterpreting their actual function and context and arranging them into a unique visual language. Yang Hye-gue is known for creating immersive exhibition environments that engage all five senses, incorporating elements like wind and fragrance. I admire Yang's experimental and delicate approach, as their comprehensive sensory stimulation enormously captivates audiences and deepens their appreciation.



Figure 2. Yang, Hye-gue. "Handles". 2019, MOMA, USA, New York.

One of Yang's notable installations is "Handles," commissioned by MOMA's Maron Atrium in 2019, which served as a significant reference point for my installation planning. "Handles" stands out for bringing together various artworks, performers, and spatial elements to create a new collective "Installation." I was particularly struck by how sound, touch, and the interaction between the artwork and the audience were intricately woven into the installation's context. These aspects heavily influenced my project. "Handles" inspired me to conceptualize each distinct aspect of an exhibition—like the artwork itself, sound, lighting, and exhibit layout—as components of a unified project. This allowed me to see the artwork from a new perspective,

not just as an isolated object but as an integrated experience. Essentially, disparate elements are brought together within a single space to convey a shared message, creating a harmonious whole.

## Evolution

I realized the necessity of transforming my artistic approach from a focus on tangible objects to encapsulating themes of personal anxiety, the idea of distance, and the artistic calling I felt during the challenges of the pandemic era, drawing inspiration from other artists' works. The central aim of this project was to explore the diverse emotions and interpretations arising from the interaction between my creations and the audience rather than having my work seen merely as an object owned or temporarily possessed by someone. Consequently, the work for this project had to surpass my previous art forms to fulfill its intended purpose.

Fortunately, the educational environment during the inception of this project allowed me to encounter and explore these innovative endeavors naturally. Surrounded by the works of numerous artists, students, and lectures, I discovered that the interpretation of a piece could be profoundly altered based on its expression. For instance, when a spherical artwork is recontextualized alongside other objects or media like photos and videos, and this reinterpretation is repeated multiple times, the core concept of the original work may undergo significant transformations throughout this evolutionary process.

This experience reshaped my initial understanding of what constitutes 'work,' prompting me to reconsider the limitations of my existing methods and embrace the opportunity for enhanced productivity through format changes. With this in mind, I envisioned crafting a specific 'Environment' through integrating space, objects, and sound, aiming to dissociate my 'work' from conventional notions of objects and ownership within this project.



### ***A. Installation? Theatrical Installation!***

The central concept of "creating an exhibition atmosphere" lies in the idea of "offering an experience" and aims to incorporate the style of contemporary installation art within this endeavor. Initially coined in the 1960s, the term "installation art" originally denoted the manner and methodology of showcasing artworks in galleries during that era. However, it evolved in the 1970s to encompass three-dimensional arrangements and environments. (Lee)

Since then, the contemporary definition of installation art encompasses an exhibition format that occupies and transforms a space, offering viewers a tangible spatial experience to engage with the artwork. This spatial dimension creates a synergistic effect, influencing how viewers perceive the artwork as an integral part of the environment. Unlike traditional sculpture or art forms, installation art strives to deliver a holistic "experience" that transcends the isolated meanings of individual pieces. (Tate Modern) I aimed to articulate the nature and objective of this exhibition by incorporating the concept of 'theatricality' into installation art, which fundamentally aims to provide immersive experiences.

The phrase "theatrical installation art" is in use, but it hasn't solidified into a formal dictionary or artistic definition yet; ongoing efforts are being made to define it. Essentially, "theatrical installation art" represents an emergent term that exemplifies the boundary-breaking nature of contemporary art. Through repeated experimental endeavors and the convergence of genres (such as theater, visual art, and installation art), this term showcases the fluid and evolving landscape of artistic expression, marked by continual experimentation, conflict, and synthesis between different media.

Jaemin Lee, a Korean professor of German literature at Kangwon National University had written thesis (Lee) about the nuanced differences between installation art and theatrical installation art, highlighting a critical aspect where the latter does not inherently contain meaning within the artwork itself. This concept is elaborated upon in a Korean paper, which academically explores theatrical installation art. Within the realm of installation art, which encompasses a wide range of artistic forms, "theatrical" installation art stands out as works that derive their significance only through interaction with the audience. This distinction is summarized through three defining elements: temporal nature, audience interaction, and interpretation as art. First, like many performing arts, theatrical installation art emphasizes the live and time-limited experience. Second, these works rely entirely on interaction with the audience, where every interaction and occurrence when the audience engages with the artwork becomes part of the artistic expression. Lastly, the act of audience members communicating within the installation space, essentially the audience's interpretation itself, can be elevated to the status of an artistic creation, underscoring another characteristic of "theatrical" installation art.

According to Jaemin Lee's definition, theatrical installation art can be synthesized as having a transient nature with a clear beginning and end, incorporating audience participation and all resulting situations into the artwork. Aligning the four elements of a play, particularly that of the performer or actor, with the perspective outlined in the paper reflects the essence of the theatrical installation art I aim to create.

## *B. Figure as a Performer*

I have structured my project like a play, reinterpreting the four traditional elements—1) actor, 2) stage, 3) text and 4) audience— within the context of bowling. To link these four components to my interpretation, 1) actors as my art figures, 2) stage represents the exhibition space, 3) text as narrative of this exhibition, and 4) audience as visitors of the exhibition. In this theatrical installation art endeavor, my involvement in 'theatrical' installation art encompassed three elements of the play, excluding the last element, 4) audience. One of these elements, "Figure," takes on the role of 1) actor crafted by me, occupying a significant portion of time and effort among the prepared play elements.

The figures in this exhibition were crafted as bowling pins, symbolizing individuals observed during the pandemic. While the inspiration behind the bowling pin figure stemmed from the narrative of bowling itself, the transformation of these bowling pins into human-like figures was a profoundly personal interpretation. The ten figures, each resembling a bowling pin, vary in color, size, volume, and proportions yet maintain a consistent outline. The aim was to convey a universal human essence by stripping away distinguishing factors like gender, race, and physical abilities. Through these ten-bowling pin-shaped vessels, the intention was to evoke a persuasive sense of humanity within the exhibition.

The simplicity of the bowling pin shape allowed for a straightforward interpretation as a human figure. One key aspect is the similarity in proportions. Bowling pins, with their division into a head and body, share proportional similarities with humans. This resemblance is supported by numerous historical and cultural references that have depicted humans in ways that resemble bowling pins. Examples include the Venus of Willendorf from 20,000 years ago, canopic jars containing organs of the deceased from ancient Egypt, and Russia's Matryoshka doll, invented in the 19th century and close to modern times.



*Figure 5. "Venus of Willendorf"*



*Figure 3. "Canopic Jars"*



*Figure 4. "Matryoshka Dolls"*

The religious ceremonies of Ancient Germany during the 3rd and 4th centuries are regarded as one of the historical roots of modern bowling. In literature from that period, objects akin to modern bowling pins, known as "Kegel," were interpreted as representations of "Heide," referring to the heather plant, or "Heiden," meaning demons. This association continued through medieval Europe, where demons were often depicted in a humanoid form. The transition of this pin form into a human-like representation over centuries underscores the enduring link between the bowling pin shape and human imagery. (Pluckhahn)

The second reason why bowling pin shapes can be seen as human figures lies in the cognitive evolution of Homo sapiens. In Yuval Harari's book "Sapiens," he explains how humans achieved dominance over other species primarily due to the development of "imagination" during this cognitive revolution. Imagination, a hallmark of human cognition, sets humans apart from other animals by enabling them not only to survive by understanding basic concepts like "There is a lion" but also to store and convey more detailed information such as "There is a lion near the curved river, chasing Bison," facilitating predator avoidance and hunting bison herds. (Harari)

This human capacity for imagination also manifests in a phenomenon called pareidolia, particularly concerning human forms. (Dictionary) This imaginative faculty, a product of human cognition, is a crucial factor that has allowed modern humans to grasp abstract concepts. It serves as a compelling rationale for representing humans in the simplified form I intended, leveraging the persuasive power of human cognitive abilities.

Due to the factors mentioned above, I rely on the likelihood that the figure shaped like a bowling pin will be perceived or interpreted as a living performer, essentially a human, by visitors to the exhibition.

### *C. Beyond Hammering*

My most fundamental skill is hammering, particularly angle raising, one of humanity's oldest methods of working with metal. (McCreight) Shaping through hammering has remained unchanged for centuries, emphasizing physical labor and requiring significant time investment. Hammering is essential in producing bowling pin shapes for this installation, though its significance – including the labor involved – may not be immediately apparent to visitors without a background in hammering techniques. Using such traditional techniques has become increasingly rare in today's advanced technological era.

Hammering in this project holds significant personal and symbolic meaning, akin to many historical art forms and associated technologies that have renewed significance in contemporary works. Arthur Danto's perspective on the end of figurative art, influenced by Andy Warhol's "Brillo Box", challenges traditional notions of art by emphasizing the importance of the artist's intent and the act of creation itself. In "After the End of Art", Danto suggests that art should no longer be judged solely by its outward appearance or symbolic function. Instead, he proposes that any action or meaning imparted by the artist's hand can transform into a work of art. (Danto) Arthur Danto's perspective enabled me to reinterpret conventional artistic techniques in a contemporary manner, emphasizing the importance of imbuing meaning within the act of creating artwork itself.

Hammering represents a sense of disconnection and solitude. Due to capacity limitations in the metal studio during the pandemic, and many first-year students who couldn't physically attend, I spent extensive periods alone in the studio's side room. As I tackled technical challenges independently, hammering became a predominant aspect of my work, reflecting my solitary efforts. The image of me working in the serene atmosphere of the hammering room, devoid of conversations and exchanges, mirrored my existence as an individual amidst the societal isolation brought about by the pandemic. The ten figures crafted through hammering extend this notion of solitude, representing individuals during the pandemic, and embedding the symbolic act of hammering into the bowling pin objects themselves.

Hammering is physically demanding and challenging work. Achieving a symmetrical bowling pin shape requires me to maintain a machine-like posture throughout the process, hammering meticulously and continuously without any margin for error. This technique's inherent pain and effort resonates with the shared experiences of hardship and struggle people face during the pandemic. Thus, hammering becomes more than just a working technique; it becomes a vital link connecting the artist with the work itself, embodying the challenges and resilience of both the creator and the depicted individuals.

## The Body of Work

### A. *Pins*'



Figure 6. Jeon, Inhwan. "Pins". 2023, Installation View

To facilitate a more precise understanding of the exhibition – given the temporal nature of its installation – it is instructive to describe entering the space from a visitor's perspective. Before entering the exhibition space, viewers are faced with two blind curtain-looking panels attached to white metal frames. They are 6 feet tall by 2 feet wide, roughly matching the size of an average standing person, and have four separate convex and concave lenses attached to corresponding holes cut into them. Cast bronze fingers attached to those holes, stimulating the imagination as if peeking the view over panels to look inside the exhibition area. Upon encountering this panel, the viewer stands at a pivotal "choice" juncture, deciding whether to actively engage with the exhibition. This choice significantly impacts both the work's reception and the its narrative completion. Those who merely peer through the lens of the panel and those who venture into the exhibition space through it, facing the ten bowling pins, each form distinct and personalized impressions of the artwork.

If visitors opt to enter the exhibition space, they encounter an additional sensory element: the sound of a bowling ball rolling down a wooden lane. In this project inspired by bowling, as visitors progress through the panel and into a short zigzag corridor, the amplified sound of a rolling ball intensifies with each step. This auditory experience prompts the audience to envision themselves as a bowling ball approaching the ten bowling pins.

Becoming metaphorically aligned with a bowling ball represents a perceived threat to the bowling pins, symbolizing the anxiety many felt during the pandemic regarding interpersonal interactions. This includes concerns about personal safety when in contact with others and the fear of unwittingly transmitting infectious diseases to others—a collective unease echoed through the symbolism of the bowling ball approaching the pins.

Listening to the rolling ball sound, the audience who comes inside gets closer to the group of bowling pins. The image of the inner space viewed from the outside only through the panel's convex and concave lenses is distorted, and the overall scenery and detail could be better. Therefore, only after entering the space do the viewers become aware of the space's presence and the relationship between the space and the audience. This is when all four elements of the play—the audience, the stage, the actors, and the plays—finally meet as I intended.

Pins are arranged on pedestals at varying heights. Some pins rotate in different directions and speeds, while others appear disarrayed, with heads and bodies separated or fallen over. Some pins teeter precariously on the edge of their pedestals. Essentially, the ten pins, sharing the same outline and physical attributes, serve as reminders of one another while showcasing their performances. Simultaneously, the viewers' maintenance of their personal 'gap' is an integral element of this exhibition.

Upon entering the interior, the audience perceives the distance to the bowling pins as closer than expected and instinctively adjusts their proximity. Positioned within 6 feet of the figures throughout the interior space, this physical setup subconsciously evokes tension in the audience. Each person stands at self-selected intervals, becoming aware of their presence within the stage created through the harmonization of objects, sounds, and spaces, and gazes upon the performers of this installation—the bowling pins.

### ***B. Spacing – Curatorial approach***

The essence of this exhibition lies in enhancing psychological engagement through the fusion of spatial compartments and curatorial viewpoints, offering visitors a fresh outlook on a phenomenon. Because the constraints of a group exhibition limited my size and configuration options, I employed curatorial strategies to maximize the exhibition space's potential. The result is an installation that deliberately restricts visitor movement to effectively fulfill my exhibition's objectives.

The initial exhibition design aimed to create a delay between visitors and the ten figures by incorporating a narrow and elongated alley. This choice was driven by my desire to convey the uncertainty and tension experienced during the pandemic to visitors as they entered the alley. The intention was to spark their imagination regarding upcoming events while also providing them with time to contemplate the context of the artworks. Furthermore, drawing inspiration from bowling, the alley was conceptualized to allow spectators to envision themselves as bowling balls approaching the pins. This long alley at the exhibition's outset served as a strategic clue to effectively guide viewers into my initial narrative understanding.

However, the group exhibition required adjustments due to spatial limitations and the need for coordination with other students. After consulting with the gallery director, it was decided to incorporate a short alley into the square-shaped space enclosed by white walls on all sides. Consequently, additional elements were necessary to fulfill the initial role for the long alley.

Because the new alley was relatively short, I created a psychological illusion of length by installing a device(object) at its entrance. This device aimed to provoke visitors' thoughts, inducing feelings of anxiety and anticipation. Additionally, an auditory element/sound was integrated to extend the perceived distance synesthetically, enhancing the overall experience.

The exhibition space comprises a square area and a short alley as an entrance. Inside the square area, figures are installed along the perimeter and arranged in the center, allowing visitors to navigate around them. The width of the walkable space is intentionally narrowed to less than 6 feet, allowing only two people to pass closely, creating a deliberate sense of discomfort reminiscent of the cautious physical distancing observed during the pandemic. Furthermore, the inner area of the square is concealed from the outside view and is visible only through a panel at the entrance of the space, which serves as the entry point.

In conclusion, the final exhibition space for this project was realized by creatively addressing the spatial constraints and considering how visitors would perceive the exhibition from a visual standpoint. Constructing the exhibition space through this curatorial lens has been a significant experience, enabling me to connect with the objects I've diligently worked on from an "appreciation" perspective. It also showcased how objects with diverse shapes and characteristics could be integrated into a cohesive narrative.

### ***C. Bowling Pins***

Ten figures, crafted with identical materials and techniques, depict individuals observed during the pandemic. Some figures are shown as fallen, separated, rotating, or anxiously standing, symbolizing the diverse experiences endured by people during this time. My imagination concerning the pandemic was initially shrouded in vague negatives like pain and trials. However, as I observed and reflected on individuals during the pandemic while creating the bowling pins over an extended period, I realized the vast diversity among them.

Despite the pandemic being commonly labeled as a 'difficult' period, people experienced it differently. Some found comfort in moments of disconnection, while others benefited economically. This diversity in human experiences made it clear that the human image cannot be uniformly defined. To convey this idea, I varied the positions and arrangements of the pins in several ways. For instance, some pins were laid down, some had their heads and bodies separated, and others were placed on a rotating plate to spin continuously. Consequently, all the pins created to convey this enlightenment were installed in a variety of poses.

Aside from posture and shape, color played a crucial role in representing this diverse yet similar human image. Covid-19, being an unprecedented global crisis, affected people across continents, transcending races, ages, and social status. To embody these universal features in human figures, all pins shared the same copper material but varied in volume and size.

The copper material of the pins was colored using a heat-patination technique, where the same material changed to a variety of colors based on the temperature applied. With its ability to show various colors, copper was suitable for representing the skin tones of different races worldwide. As a result, the outlines of pins in the following image are similar but have different colors, making it look like people of various nationalities and races are gathered.



Figure 7 Jeon, Inhwan. "Pins", 2023.



## D. Cage

The two symmetrical panels, the curtain, and the initial gateway to my exhibition stage were individually named "Cage." These panels represent the foundational concept of this project and serve as the basis for the entire installation. They were inspired by my first memory of arriving in the United States.

During my initial two-week self-quarantine in a foreign residence upon arriving in the United States, I encountered the unfamiliar American Venetian blind, a type I had never experienced in Korea. Due to my unfamiliarity with this blind, I struggled to figure out how to operate it properly. Consequently, the primary activity during my self-quarantine period became turning the handle of the blind and peering outward through the slanted gaps. For two weeks, I anxiously gazed at the landscape of this unfamiliar land, struggling to familiarize myself with unfamiliar tools and surroundings.

Amidst the pandemic-era United States, I worried about how Asians were perceived and feared navigating a new academic environment. The cage-blind curtains symbolized this unfamiliarity and the first hurdle to overcome. To illustrate this, the blind curtain-shaped panel

had cast fingers on slats, appearing to look beyond the gaps. At the tips of these fingers, round lenses allowed viewers to peek through the curtain and see the exhibition space beyond. By alternating two types of convex and concave lenses made the view beyond the gaps distorted, encouraging freedom of thought and perspective of viewers. This is part of the theatrical installation, designed to make the audience more actively engaged in appreciating the exhibition. The cast fingers, made from molds of my own finger, which showed detailed fingerprints, indicating a personal narrative and my perspective on the exhibition. Eventually, the cage symbolizes my courage and realization to overcome this barrier, step into the unknown, and embark on a journey to navigate and explore a new reality.

Having conquered my vague fear of the outside world, I viewed the world as something I could confront. I aimed to utilize the cage as a symbol in my project, prompting visitors to contemplate their choices before entering the exhibition. The purpose of the Cage device is to encourage active engagement, viewing from different perspectives, and thoughtful consideration before making a choice. It emphasizes that certain aspects can only be fully understood by approaching closely and experiencing them directly, highlighting the limitations of interpreting phenomena in a fragmented manner from a distance. The cage is a prelude to my considerable work, setting the stage for deeper exploration and engagement.



Figure 8 Jeon, Inhwan. "Cage". 2023, Installation view

## Conclusion

This project aims to recreate the social image and atmosphere of the pandemic, focusing on sociological issues such as xenophobia towards specific countries and hate crimes against Asians. These themes were among the various challenges that arose during the Covid-19 era. Central to this effort is the concept of "spacing," aimed at reigniting the tension and unease that individuals experienced towards each other or particular ethnicities during that period. I addressed this by strategically using sound, objects, and spatial arrangements within the exhibition space to maximize psychological stimulation.

Before COVID-19, humanity encountered numerous wars and plagues, and such crises are likely to persist. This underscores the importance of acknowledging the diverse sociological issues that emerged alongside the 'survival' challenges during the pandemic. It presents an opportunity to reflect on how we can address future threats effectively. Moreover, I encouraged reconsidering individuals' complex emotions and perceptions towards one another or specific societal systems during that period.

Drawing from the widespread impact of COVID-19, which affected survival and various aspects of people's lives, I delved into the art and craft movement. This historical movement prioritized the quality of life in art. However, considering the movement's failure attributed to the concept of 'ownership' in art, I shifted the form of my work towards an environment-based approach to distance it from the notion of ownership. I explored installation art and strategically placed elements within my exhibition space through this process.

Through this journey, my work evolved into a theatrical installation piece, coming to fruition as it engaged with the audience. Visitors immersed themselves in the various components of my exhibition space, absorbed its content, interpreted it, and exchanged opinions within it. To gauge the reception of the experiential stage I aimed to create, a qualitative survey/interviews were conducted with visitors for four days, from April 28 to April 31, 2023, coinciding with the exhibition's opening day. This investigation sought to understand how the audience perceived and embraced the experiential aspects of the project.

In the initial interview question, participants were asked whether they had read the explanation of the work displayed in front of my booth. Group A, which consists of 10 individuals who read the explanation of the work, all chose to enter the exhibition hall. They expressed that they could intuitively grasp the message I intended to convey and understand the roles played by all elements within the exhibition space.

Group A participants highlighted that having background knowledge about the work, as provided in the explanation, significantly aided their understanding of the artwork. Specifically, they mentioned that the "rolling ball sound" element contributed to the exhibition's heightened sense of presence. They also praised the exhibition's intuitive narrative about bowling, noting its accessibility and ease of understanding.

Group A participants were more inclined to recall issues and memories related to the pandemic during the interviews. They shared their experiences and opinions more freely, with a notably higher frequency of discussing personal experiences during COVID-19 than Group B.

In contrast, Group B comprised ten individuals who participated in the exhibition without reading the work's explanation. Given that the exhibition hall was situated within the Bevier Gallery, specifically the Art and Craft building, it was noted that a higher proportion of participants had prior knowledge of art concepts.

Among Group B, 50% (5 people) admired the bowling pins viewed through the panel at the start of the exhibition hall, which provided a fresh perspective on traditionally crafted vessels. These participants found the vessels within the exhibition and the exterior panel more impressive than the interior set up. By hiding behind the panel and peeking through the gaps, viewers could fully appreciate the intended concept of inducing a sense of concealment.

The remaining five individuals in Group B analyzed the work's elements separately. They inquired about the production process, the significance of specific sounds, the rationale behind the narrow entrance, and even contemplated whether it was appropriate for them to enter the installation.

The interviews provided valuable insights into the effects and significance of the elements incorporated into the exhibition. They also prompted me to consider and learn about critical areas and essential components that require further refinement and consideration in future installation art projects. Furthermore, the interviews underscored the significant role of an 'explanation' in appreciating art, reaffirming its importance in enhancing the audience's understanding and engagement with artistic concepts.

One of the two aspects that left me disappointed with the project was that discrepancies were noted between the setup of the figures inside the exhibition space and the set pictures, potentially confusing the intended message of the exhibition. Secondly, the timing of presenting the work could have been better. Regrettably, the display of the work coincided with a period of calm in COVID-19 activity despite the uncertainty about when the pandemic would end. April 2023, when Covid-19 had entered a lull, leading to a lesser degree of resonance and sympathy than initially anticipated.

Preparing for this project allowed me to reevaluate my work's humanistic aspect, a consistent theme. Furthermore, transitioning the work into installation art allowed me to expand my holistic perspective on art. This shift led to a deeper exploration of how I present my work and the dynamics of the audience relationship, contrasting with past experiences in which I primarily focused on creating the work itself.

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