



**ACAF**

# **Sonic Blossom**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

# *Lee Mingwei: Sonic Blossom Thinking Performance*

Asia Contemporary Art Week 2015  
Signature Exhibition  
Hosted by The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Organized by Leeza Ahmady and Limor Tomer  
An intimate stage with personalized performances of  
Schubert Lieder by professional New York vocalists.

October 30 - November 8, 2015



## A Curatorial Contemplation on *Lee Mingwei's Sonic Blossom* Metropolitan Museum of Art | ACAW 2015 Signature Program

In 2015, Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW) foregrounded performance as one of the most widely embraced mediums by artists across Asia, deeply embedded within the region's vast and diverse cultural histories. Performance has long been integral to artistic genres in Asia—spanning street performances, theater, dance, spiritual rituals, and healing practices. However, over the last 25 years, museums and galleries have increasingly institutionalized and compartmentalized performance art.

This year's ACAW signature programs sought to rethink performance beyond its contemporary art categorization. Performance, detached from the word "art," has existed since humans first painted caves and sang songs. Contemporary labels such as "performance art" are semantic frameworks institutions use, but the creative act transcends such boundaries. Performance, fundamentally, is an act of seduction—a process of being drawn to creative insight, undergoing doubts and questions, and finding the courage to act. It is a risky exchange with another, full of chemistry and magnetism, never entirely predictable in its impact.

A centerpiece of ACAW 2015 was *Lee Mingwei: Sonic Blossom*, co-presented with The Metropolitan Museum of Art from October 30 through November 8. The performance exhibition transformed **The Met's Blanche and A. L. Levine Court and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery** into intimate stages for personalized renditions of Schubert Lieder, sung by professional New York opera vocalists. Mingwei's concept for *Sonic Blossom* was born from his personal connection to **Franz Schubert's** music, which he experienced as a contemplative sanctuary. His desire was to share that transformative intimacy.

Throughout the exhibition, singers, adorned in custom-designed cloaks, gently moved among visitors, approaching individuals to ask: "May I give you the gift of song?" Those who accepted were seated in a specially designed chair for a private performance. This act of offering and receiving embodies Mingwei's signature approach to performance, rooted in the spirit of giving. His work, influenced by both Taoist and Sufi sensibilities, reflects a non-invasive yet intimate dynamic of connection—a meditative exchange that allows energy to flow, akin to the gentle touch of an acupuncture needle.



*Sonic Blossom* - Lee Mingwei, 2015. Performance exhibition as part of ACAW 2015 Signature Curated Program at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

My first encounter with Mingwei's work was at the Lombard Freid Gallery during his presentation of *The Mending Project* (2009). I felt immediately moved by his reflections on childhood experiences and cultural observations that permeate his practice. I watched him mend my favorite embroidered shirt from Central Asia as we spoke. His deliberate, intuitive process mirrored the profound attention to detail and generosity that defines his art. During a subsequent studio visit in 2013, Mingwei introduced me to *Sonic Blossom*, which had premiered in a museum in Korea and also at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. I immediately recognized its profound resonance with the core ideas of performance ACAW 2015 sought to explore. The act of a singer offering a Schubert Lieder to an individual within a museum—a space typically dedicated to silent observation—embodied the intimate, unpredictable, and magnetic exchange central to performance as an act of giving. It felt like a perfect intervention for The Met, creating a living dialogue between classical heritage and contemporary practice, where human connection in and of itself became the medium of art.

*Sonic Blossom* at The Met took nearly two years of planning, fundraising, and collaboration to realize. We are deeply grateful to the Taipei Cultural Center for their generous support. The exhibition, which opened on October 30, beautifully embodied the spirit of ACAW 2015's exploration of performance, bridging the classical and contemporary, the intimate and the universal.

#### Leeza Ahmady

Director & Curator, Asia Contemporary Art Week



*Sonic Blossom* - Lee Mingwei, 2015. Performance exhibition as part of ACAW 2015 Signature Curated Program at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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Organized by ACAW Director Leeza Ahmady. Special Thanks to Limor Tomer at Met Live Arts, Ambika Trasi, ACAW Managing Director Michelle Loh, ACAW 2015 Strategic Development Advisor and Lee Mingwei Studio Team.

## Select Publicity Materials & Press Coverage

[New York Times | James R. Oestreich | "In Lee Mingwei's 'Sonic Blossom' at the Met, Schubert Is Intimate Installation Art"](#)

[New York Times | Holland Cotter and Roberta Smith | "Best in Art of 2015"](#)

[The Village Voice\\_ACAW 2015 | Silas Valentino | "The Met Wants to Serenade You"](#)

[ArtAsiaPacific | HG Masters | "ACA W FIELD MEETING: "TAKE 3-THINKING PERFORMANCE"](#)

[Art Radar | Christine Lee | "Thinking Performance at Asia Contemporary Art Week 2015, New York Interview with Leeza Ahmady"](#)

[New York Times | Anthony Tommasini | "The Best Classical Music of 2015"](#)

[Observer | Alana Martinez | "Singers to serenade Lucky Museum Visitors One-on-One at the Met"](#)

[ABC 7 News | Lauren Glassberg | "Performance Art Stirs Emotion at the Met"](#)

[SinoVision TV | "Mysterious Gift at the Met"](#)

[OCULA | Sophia McKinnon | "No More Triumphs: A Report on Asia Contemporary Art Week \(ACA W\) 2015"](#)



In 2019, **Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACA W)** updated its name to **Asia Contemporary Art Forum (ACAF)** to reflect nearly two decades of programmatic evolution and growth. In 2014, the "n" was dropped from "Asian" in the organization's name to emphasize Asia as an expansive and inclusive artistic state of mind, transcending geographical and national boundaries.

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