

[Cheonsurim's Modern Photography Walk+] The Right to Lecture

Seba Kalphukeo, Som Supaparinya

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The Mekong River, which runs through Asia, is called the "Mother River" (Mae Nam Khong) and is considered sacred. The Mapuche indigenous people of Chile are no exception, viewing water (Ko) as the source of territory, healing, and life. As ecological problems become increasingly serious worldwide, we might ask this question: Can rivers, like humans, have legal rights as persons? Artists Seba Calfuqueo and Som Supaparinya answer this question in their exhibition "Undercurrents: Waves Walking on Water," currently on view at the 2025 Sea Art Festival in Dadaepo, Saha-gu, Busan, where a mountain (Amisan Mountain), a river (the Nakdong River estuary), and the sea (the South Sea) meet. Seba Calfuqueo

, "TRAY TRAY KO," "KOLLOF Series"



Seba Calphukeo, "Rising Water." 2022, video performance, 4K, 6 minutes 14 seconds. (Photographed by Sebastian Melo)

Seba Calpuqueo's "TRAY TRAY KO (Big Waterfall)" (2022), presented at the 2025 Sea Art Festival (September 27–November 2), is a single-channel video performance that deeply explores the artist's core themes: Mapuche identity, ecological resistance, and the relationship between the body and water. "TRAY TRAY KO" means "big waterfall" in Mapuche.

The blue cloth visually symbolizes a stream (river), metaphorically expressing the Mapuche worldview that the life force of the trayenko flows far and wide through the forest and exerts influence. A figure wearing a deep cobalt blue dress enters the forest. From behind, the figure evokes a river goddess, but gender is irrelevant. In the latter half of the performance, the artist drags the cloth into the flowing river, ultimately disappearing beneath the waterfall. The artist considers water (Ko) as territory, healing, and the source of life, and her cobalt blue dress symbolizes the river.

Through this sacred ritual, the artist suggests the connection of the human body to nature and the cycle of life. Seba Calpuqueo is a visual artist and activist of Mapuche origin born in Santiago, Chile. Through various media such as installation, ceramics, performance, photography, and video, he presents a critical perspective on the social, cultural, and political status of the Mapuche indigenous people in contemporary Chilean society and Latin America, adopting a decolonial perspective. The artist, who is also of Mapuche origin, has consistently spoken out on climate change, water shortages, and privatization.



Seba Calpuqueo, "Guilt." Video performance, full HD, 9 minutes 11 seconds. 2023. (Photographed by Diego Argote)

This work, which contains a critical message about the privatization of water and environmental destruction, is one of the artist's representative works, suggesting the traditional cosmology of the Mapuche people and the ecological wisdom of indigenous people as alternatives to today's problems. It particularly mentions the deep connection with lawen, a medicinal herb that grows around Trayenko. Seba's work, displayed in the Dadaepo area, an ecological boundary where the Nakdong River estuary and the sea meet, prompts reflection on the concepts of "water" and "boundaries." Seba will

present the "KOLLOF Series," a photographic installation, on the sandy beach of Dadaepo Beach in Busan, where the Nakdong River and the sea meet. "KOLLOF," an installation composed of people, landscapes, and thread, is named after the Mapuche language (Mapudungun), an indigenous language of Chile and Argentina. KOLLOF (*Durvillaea Antarctica*), a brown seaweed found in Chile, is also used. Cochayuyo, a large brown algae resembling seaweed, is known in the Mapuche region of Chile as "cochayuyo." It symbolizes indigenous life and ecological resistance, serving as a symbolic medium linking colonial exploitation.

This series features installations, photographs, and videos centered around cochayuyo, a common species found along the Chilean coast. Indigenous cultures, including the Mapuche, cochayuyo was used not only as a food source but also for traditional transport and storage containers. The artist interpreted this seaweed, which breaks off from the seabed and propagates by drifting (rafting) long distances, and its healing ability to quickly recover from wounds, as a symbol of the Mapuche's tenacious resistance and resilience. Also on view are Seba Calpuqueo's video performances "Rising Water" and "Waterfall-like Flow."

Som Supaparinha's "Two Sides of the Moon"



Som Supaparinha, "The Two Sides of the Moon." Video installation, single-channel video, 5.1 sound system, black and white, 31 minutes 15 seconds. 2021.

Entering a container box installed on the sandy shores of Dadaepo Beach, you will encounter "Two Sides of the Moon" (2021), a documentary video work by Chiang Mai-based artist Som Supparinya. "Two Sides of the Moon" has been featured in major exhibitions, including the 2024 Bangkok Biennale. It

traces the contrasting lives of fishermen on both sides of the Mun River, a region transformed by the Pak Mun Dam. The artist documented the lives of fishermen at the beginning and end of the Mun River, where it joins the Mekong River on the border of Thailand and Laos. The black-and-white footage captures the fishermen's labor, including riverside scenery and fishing gear, as well as the environmental changes caused by the dam and the stories of local residents.

Through the testimonies of those who struggle to make a living along the destabilized waterways caused by dam construction and hydropower development, the work reveals the negative impacts on the lives and livelihoods of local communities. A fisherman's testimony, "In the dry season, there used to be no water, but there were plenty of fish," hints at the irreversibility of the ordinary. One community begins to learn how to fish, while another counts the names of lost fish and tools. As the title suggests, the metaphor of the light and shadow of the moon reveals the inequality and contrasting fates of the two communities.

Andrew Alan Johnson, in "The Mekong Dream: Living and Dying Along a Changing River" (2020), writes, "Since the dam was built, the way we lived with the river has failed. And as the river's familiar characteristics disappear, water reappears as something unreadable, something under the control of distant forces."

The artist has also addressed environmental issues in *When Need Moves the Earth* (2014), which documents two sites managed by the Electricity Generation Authority of Thailand, showing the turbine room, control room, and transformer of the Srinagarin Dam in Kanchanaburi Province, and the physical labor and explosions of the Mae Mo lignite mine in Lampang Province. The video installation *10 Places in Tokyo* (2016) also deals with places with high electricity consumption.



A panoramic view of Dadaepo Beach, the venue for the 2025 Sea Art Festival.

In "The Two Sides of the Moon," a fisherman climbs into a rusty jeep. He has long driven this vehicle to protest against the Bak Mun Dam. His gaze raises questions about the sovereignty of water. This question continues in another work, "A Separation of Sands and Islands" (2018). Images of streams, bridges, and embankments captured at various points in the lower Mekong River, suffering from dams, bear witness to the river as a vast observer. In

traditional Thai thought, a fusion of Buddhism and indigenous beliefs, the river is perceived as a space imbued with spirits or sacred power. For local residents, dam construction is more than just a physical act of blocking the river. The black

-and-white canvas, depicting the sea beyond the fishermen's daily lives, appears as serene as a sumi-e painting. This slow visual depiction invites reflection on the temporal rhythm of the Mun River. The artist describes "water" not simply as a natural environment, but as a political territory and source of life.

<About the Artist>

Seba Calfuqueo (b. 1991) lives and works in Santiago, Chile. Seba Calfuqueo is a multidisciplinary artist who works across video, photography, and performance, and actively embodies the concept of a holistic artist in her work. Her work is included in the collections of Tate Modern (UK), Centre Pompidou (France), Denver Art Museum (USA), Museo de Arte Málvaro (Argentina), Thyssen-Bornemisza (Spain), Collection Cadist (France), Rio Grande do Sul Museum of Modern Art (Brazil), Museo Nacional de Arte Contemporaneo (Chile), and Museo de Arte Moderna (Chile). Calfuqueo has been invited

to the Venice Biennale (2024), the Whitney Biennial (2024), the 34th São Paulo Biennial (2021), the 12th Mercosur Biennial (2020), and the 22nd Paiz Biennial (2020). She has received grants from the FAVA Foundation (2018), the Ibeam Fractal Fellowship Program (2020), the Ama Amoedo Foundation's FAARA (2023), and the Zona Maco Cuervo Award (2024).

Som Supaparinya (b. 1973) is a Chiang Mai-based artist. A visual artist, documentary filmmaker, and educator, Som Supaparinya explores themes such as history, the human impact on landscape, and censorship through various media, including video, installation, and photography. She founded the Chiang Mai Art Conversation (CAC) collective in 2013 to revitalize the local art scene and has exhibited her work at international exhibitions, including the Gwangju Biennale and the Bangkok Art Biennale.

Text: Cheon Soo-rim

Image courtesy of the Busan Biennale/Busan Sea Art Festival 2025

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