



The Landscape and Historical Ecology of Tan Tans' Garden

The Consequential World Birthed by American Imperialism

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by

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To my Haraboji, who I miss everyday,
my Halmeoni, Umma, Appa, and my partner Oliver

I am seated in a high chair, watching my mother. She stands at the kitchen sink, in a loose cotton jumper—sleeveless and short, in lavender pink—her long hair free and her feet bare. My mother’s delicate hands are under a running faucet, rinsing a soft leaf of fermented cabbage until every flake of chili washes away. She tears the leaf into small strips with her fingers, first length-wise, then pinching with the nails of her thumb and forefinger, she cuts the strips crosswise. I can see her slim nut-brown hands in great detail—her fingers long and tapered, the quicks of her nails reaching the edges of her fingers. They work swiftly to remove the heat from the kimchi. She brings the little pieces to me and feeds me with her fingers. “Not too spicy, Grace-ya?” she asks. I eat. She says, “Oh, kimchi jal meog-neunda! Good girl!” She is smiling, pleased to believe that I have already developed a taste for kimchi.

As I became more lucid, the image remained and I knew with all my senses that it was not a dream. It was my earliest memory of eating, and my earliest memory of my mother. I closed my eyes to be with her again, to see the look of comfort on her face as her hands poised to feed me, to hear her say, “Ja. Kimchi deoh meog-eu-rah. Grace-ya, you can endure anything.”

Grace M. Cho, *Kimchi Blues* 2012

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
ABSTRACT: Preparing the Ingredients	3
KEY TERMS: Ingredients for Fermentation	9
1 The Fermented Byproduct	19
2 Exploring Tan Tans’ Garden	
2.1 Who is Tan Tan?	25
2.2 The In-between & How to Recognize Tan Tan’s Name	31
2.3 The Garden	41
3 Nourishing the Contaminated	49
4 The Cloning of Grief	59
CONCLUSION	69
LIST OF WORKS	77
NOTES	81
REFERENCES	83

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ABSTRACT

Preparing the Ingredients

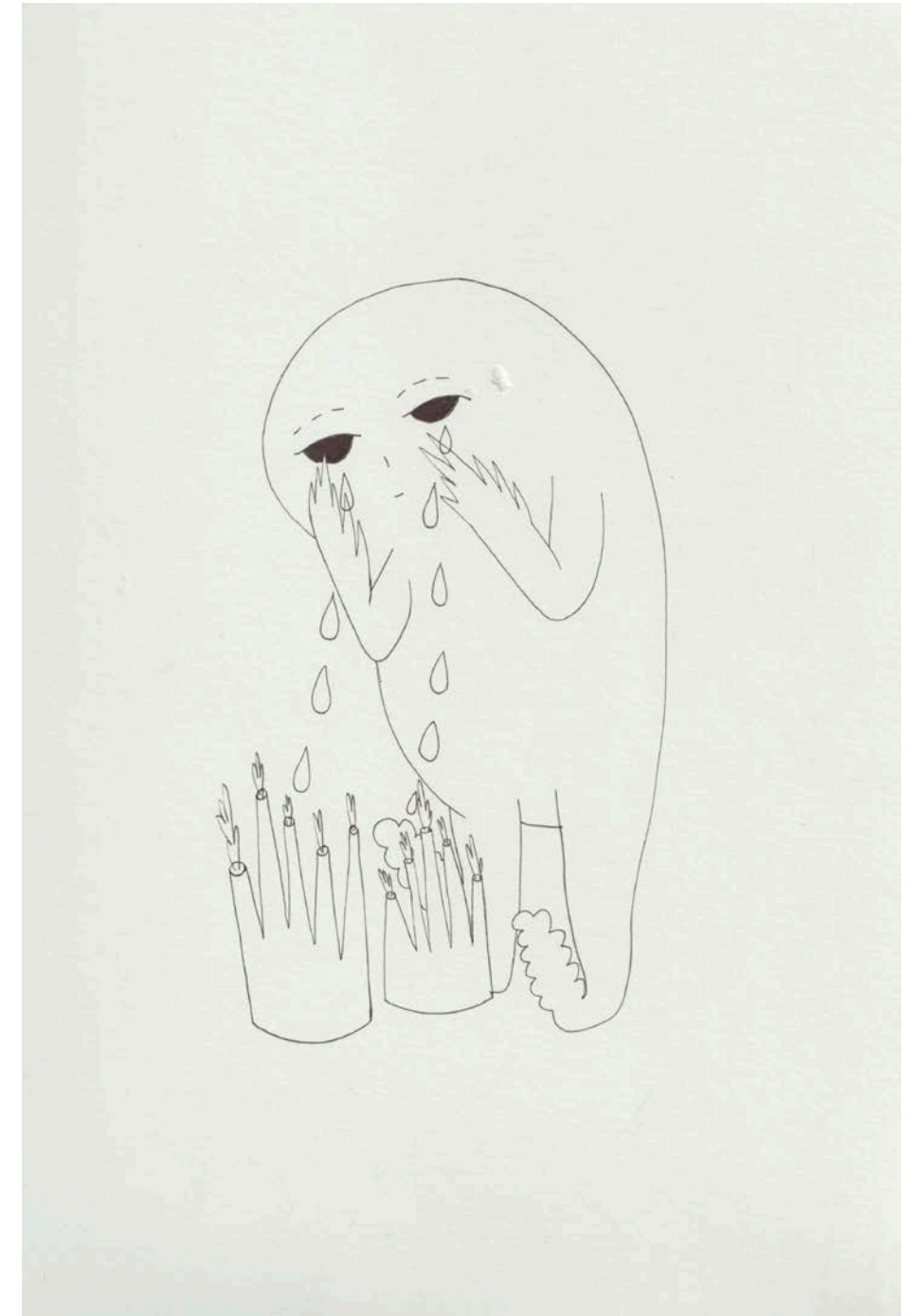
Tan Tans' Garden is a research-based practice deeply rooted in the creation and dissection of a parafictional world. *Tan Tans' Garden* is a metaphorical parallel universe birthed by the affects that American imperialism had on the Korean Peninsula, the Korean culture, and the Korean diaspora. In this paper, I discuss the creation of this world along with the studies of its landscape and its historical ecology from the perspective of a young millennial artist as well as a kin to generations of colonial trauma.

The creative process manifests itself through critical analysis of histories and creative approaches to world building, bookmaking, letter writing, collages, drawings, storytelling, object making, and video documentary. At the same time, the practice mutates itself into narratives of science-fiction and notions of post-humanism. Throughout this practice, I refer to the storytelling method in the context of geopolitics. I am heavily interested in how vulnerability, fermented memories—a term I will later explain—and the process of mourning can be utilized to explore the radiating violence of American imperialism. The works in *Tan Tans' Garden* invite you to a fictional world in which the personal insights and intimate effects of being a byproduct of U.S. imperialism can be explored.

This paper is sectioned by differing subject matter. The *Key Terms*

are there to help guide you through the barriers of translation that I do not attempt to clarify or negotiate. *Tan Tans' Garden* remains an ongoing practice and I am not seeking to find a pure conclusion to this work. Here, I am only trying to understand why it took so long for my grandparents to understand their own internalized trauma and memories, and why it took another 50 years to find words to their fermented memories. In this paper, I am only attempting to reiterate the stories that were told to me during the creation of this parafictional world. Here, the goal was to be vulnerable, without hindrance.

Note: The collection of works and research findings presented in this paper were studied and created through the times of Covid-19. Having faced limitations to physical spaces of studio practice and research, these works were made in a personal household space. Initially what felt like a barrier ultimately became a realizing haven.



.....fig.1..... Tan Tans' Garden: Tan Tan's Tears Make the Plants Grow (detail)



.....fig.2..... Tan Tan's Garden: Tan Tan and Mountains (detail)

KEY TERMS

Ingredients for Fermentation

Fermentation

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *fermentation* can be defined as the process of chemical change caused by the action of yeast or bacteria, often changing sugar to alcohol. A lot of the staple ingredients of Korean food include this process of fermentation. Ranging from jangajji (장아찌) and soy sauce to jeotgal (젓갈), gochujang (고추장), and kimchi (김치). It is a collaboration of sonmat¹ and time. The product will not be an instant reward but one that will be rewarded through time, able to be consumed when it is ready to be digested. Fermentation exists as a fundamental bedrock of Korean cuisine and has been studied intensely through scientific research. World Institute of Kimchi is one of the institutions that focuses on the food science research of kimchi and its natural fermentation process. Their research is heavily focused on developing industrial technologies and globalizing the taste of kimchi to a more palatable taste. On the other hand, food scientists like Young Je Cho, Yeong Sun Im, Hee Yeol Park and Yeung Joon Choi study the changes of components in the salt-fermentation of anchovies. In their research, *Changes of Components in Salt-Fermented Anchovy* (2000), the scientists research the different degrees of fermentation that are found inside fermented foods that use the *Engraulis Japonicus* (anchovy species that lives in

the East Sea) as the active fermenting ingredient. Their research measures the important effects that time has on the changes in reaction within the fermented anchovies. Their results show how an increase in the generation of amino acids which happen over the course of time, create a much smoother smell and taste for easier consumption. From this research alone, you can see the deep and inseparable relationship that aging and time have within the processes of fermentation.

Even though my art practice does not involve the direct process of fermenting a certain object, the process of fermentation exist in multiple areas of the process—from research and data collecting to character development. The process of understanding fermentation is one of the main frameworks used in my research. As mentioned in the term, *fermented memories*, my practice is based on methodologies to understand oral stories shared through genealogy and the time it takes to have the space needed to share these stories. In *Tan Tans' Garden*, I describe how prolonged memory of war translates and materializes itself into a process of fermentation.

Fermented Memories

Foods consumed by the Korean diaspora such as deonjang (된장), gochujang, and kimchi are all foods processed through the methods of fermentation. Similarly, I use the term *fermented memories* when referring to moments from the past that back then, could not be consumed and understood; rather, those moments required the help of time in order to metabolize and age into a fermented state, becoming much more digestible in the consumption of history and truth. This term was developed as my response to Grace M. Cho's *Kimchi Blues* 2012, on Gastronomica, in tandem with my own understandings of grief and Han through the fermentation cycle of both kimchi and generational trauma that is passed on through our families and amongst the Korean diaspora.

Forgotten War / Korean War (1950–1953)

The *Forgotten War* mentioned in this paper will always be referring to

the Korean War that occurred between 1950 and 1953. Even though the physical war on the peninsula has ended, the country is stalled in a ceasefire. The war is still in place in the minds of the people and the ceasefire only created a never-ending tension between the two Koreas that began as one.

Han (한/恨)

Han is a feeling caused by another person, or others, which has been preserved, fermented, and mourned through the narratives of a fictional post-nuclear landscape. Han is a feeling similar to the weight that depression can cause on the soul and heart. The process of Han can also cause a bottling up of emotions.

The origin of this terminology comes from a culturally shared emotion throughout the Korean diaspora, originating and widely used since the Joseon dynasty. The term was adopted by the population that faced any and many forms of oppression by the society's set rules of hierarchy, i.e. gender, class, etc. The usage of the term was exploited by the Japanese during colonization in order to downplay the immense damage they made on Korean society and culture, ultimately limiting the internal feelings the Korean diaspora could express and feel through their own language.

Hanpuri (한풀이)

The term *hanpuri* describes the dismantling, letting go, and solving of Han. In the following texts, hanpuri is not used with the implication of a “freeing” from colonialism, but rather, a process towards the freedom from the colonial (as I believe a complete “freedom from” colonialism is not fully possible at this current time that this text is being written).

Kawaii

Described by the Oxford English Dictionary as “The quality of being cute, or items that are cute”, *Kawaii* is a term adapted from Japan

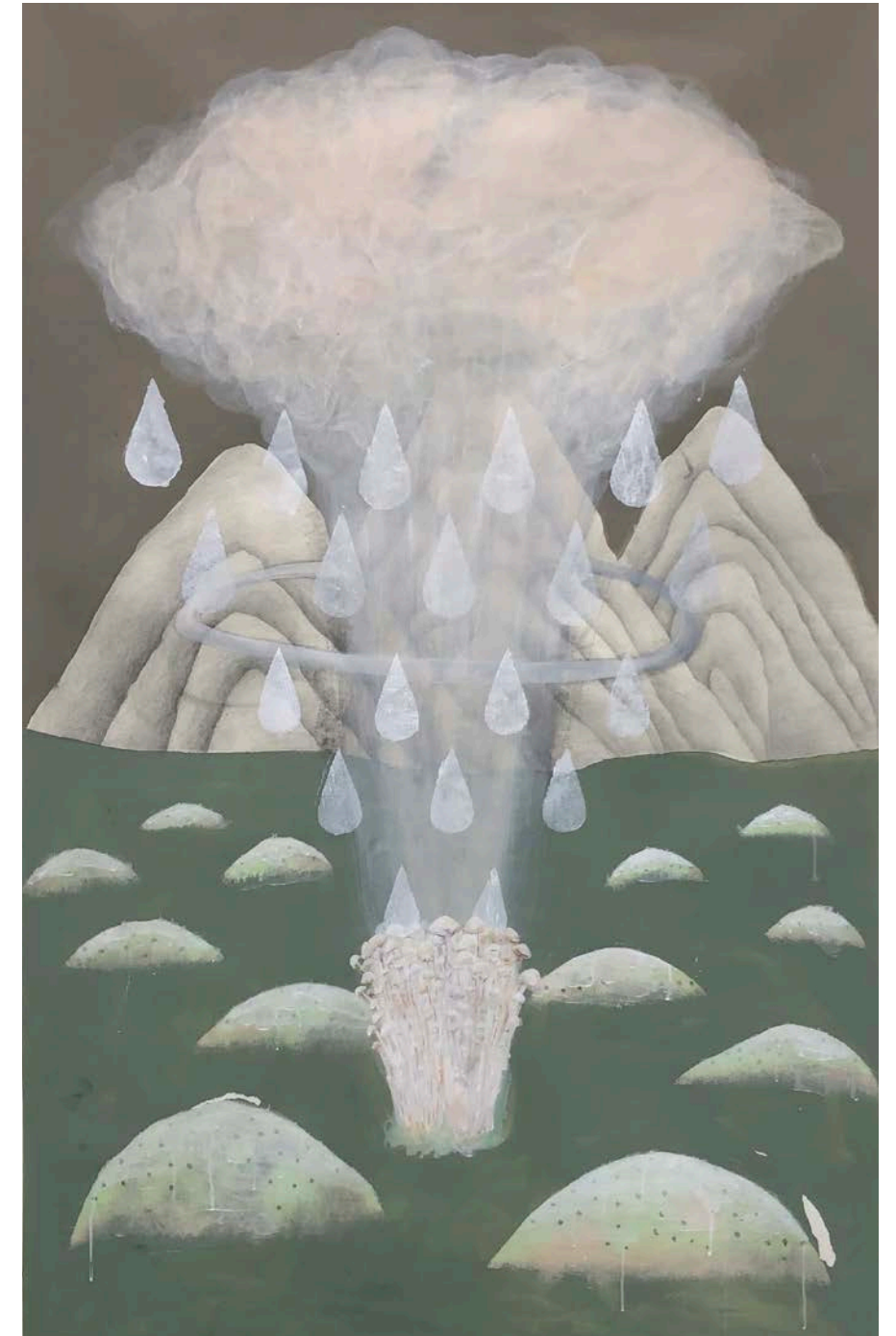
and widely used throughout the world. The aesthetics of Kawaii has adapted itself as many forms of objects and in turn, has helped Japan's economy boom into that of North America. This debut of aesthetics and goods was the birth of Kawaii's globalized audience, a phenomenon described as "Pink Globalization" by Christine R. Yano, which she describes as "labeled kawaii (glossed in English as "cute," but with a different cultural nuances)". I am using this term here to describe the cuteness in East Asia and the translation of cuteness to the West, both aesthetically and economically—specifically, the idea that Kawaii and its newly found market in the West formed a new economic relationship between Japan and the West, post WWII.

Preservation

In this paper, I question the power and recollection of *preservation*. Here, preservation is defined as the method in which something is preserved; specifically, it defines how the many identities of my homeland have been remembered by the West and in many ways, not preserved, but destroyed. This lack of desire to preserve was demonstrated from the bombings of American imperialism. The leftover artifacts from the aftermaths were then stolen and now exist in Western museums. In this paper, I attempt to reclaim the methods of preservation through parafiction, narrating and visualizing stories that have been fermenting for over 76 years. I focus on these ideas of preservation to challenge the boundaries of anti-preservation and to challenge American imperialism and its anti-preservation of lands and its erasures of history through military power and control. The ideas of preserving memories and histories is heavily explored in this body of work.

Radiation

Radiation is a fundamental aspect to *Tan Tans' Garden* and its ecosystem. It is the nightmare that broke apart Tan Tans' Garden. It is the invisible violence that haunts the garden everyday. It is the element that forces the creatures to adapt, evolve, and co-exist. It is a source of energy that brought destruction but also, the energy that fuels



.....fig.3..... Tan Tans' Garden: The Mushroom Cloud

capitalism and allows it to thrive. The invisible violence of radiation radiates through Tan Tans’ Garden every moment, creating a parallel ecosystem of destruction that seems so invisible on Earth, yet so vivid in the Garden.

Sound of the Bomb

The *sound of the bomb* represents the waves of aftershocks that occur while the land is manipulated and destroyed. The sound of the bomb represents the sound of fear and the expansion of capitalism. It is a sound disguised as a notion of peace from afar—a kind of silence—yet, so deadly in reality. The sound of the bomb in Tan Tans’ Garden is depicted through dots that also evoke a kind of silence. The sound of the bomb represents the state of turbulence it brings to one’s body, memory, time, space, and land—it is an unforgettable sound of unforgettable trouble ahead.

Parafiction

In this writing, the term *parafiction* refers to the term used by Carrie Lambert-Beatty in her essay *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*. In this essay, she refers to the term parafiction as “not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art”² but rather, one that is within the exterior, stepping into the real world. For Lambert-Beatty, parafiction differentiates itself from traditional fictional narratives and the imaginary landscapes based upon the real world. In contrast, the imaginary intersects with the current lived world, creating fiction that is to be experienced as fact.

Translation Against Translation

“I talk... more human soon. You say... if I speak bad.”
“Badly,” *she corrected*.
“If I speak badly?”
“Yes.”
There was a long silence. “Also, goodly?” *it asked*.

“No, not goodly. Well.”
“Well.” *The child seemed to taste the word. “I speak well soon,” it said.*

Octavia E. Butler, *Dawn*³, 1987

I believe resistance comes from the exhaustion of trying to be understood. The act of translation over time has been building up many bitter layers in my mouth that can be perceived as resistance, protection, and critique to the English language in this paper.

Translation of Korean in this Text

In this paper, I use a translation method called “Revised Romanization of Korean” to spell out the Korean words as they are phonetically pronounced. This way of translation was made to fit Korean letters into the Western system, developed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of South Korea in 2000. I am open to any corrections and suggestions of translations that exist throughout the text.



.....fig.4..... Tan Tans' Garden: Ecofacts (detail)

CHAPTER 1

The Fermented Byproduct

Capitalism drives South Korea into what we think is moving forward from the past—maybe that is why my family chose this path and way of life. I was born in South Korea, raised in Shenzhen, China, and Hong Kong, Hong Kong. My parents made sure I was always comfortable and getting the best education possible, wherever we were. Maintaining our middle-class privilege was their priority in life. They wanted me to be able to assimilate into what they thought was a soon-to-be global world.

I am an able-bodied, cis-gendered queer woman of colour. As I am a settler on Turtle Island, these works have been developed on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, which include the territories of Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, Musqueam and Halkomelem. I want to acknowledge this opportunity I have been given to attempt to tell the unforgettable forgotten stories and to unlearn and decenter Western-dominated narratives that exist in every corner of this war-driven capitalistic world. I am also writing this to you in my third language, while suppressing the desires to scream this in my mother tongue—Korean.

I was raised by my grandparents and they made sure when I was growing up that I knew about the concept of War and its repercussions—all that becomes invisible but never truly disappear. We would go to the

.....fig.5..... Tan Tans' Garden: Tan Tans #2

War Memorial of Korea, a museum built on the former military headquarters, to remember and maintain the past war histories of Korea. We would spend hours talking about their past and the differences between the war-torn Korean they grew up in, and the present Korea in which they raised me in. While we were walking through the museum, my grandma would tell me her personal stories: how she would run away with her family to the mountains surrounding DaeGu in order to hide from the soldiers that were occupying their town, how she would walk the streets that were vitiated with propaganda posters on every wall, and how she and her sisters jumped into lakes in order to escape military soldiers.

When my family moved to the city of Shenzhen in 2004, my relationship with capitalism took an intense turn. Shenzhen is a city located in the southern province of China. The very last train stop is located there, called Luohu, filled with fake goods in every form you could ever imagine. It is now also home to the world's largest electronic companies, surrounded by factories that produce the goods that the rest of the world depends on and desires. I witnessed how a small fishing village could develop into the world's most important tech hub, at a speed too fast to be digested by the people once living there. What governments do to fit into the narrative of globalization, even at the cost of erasing their own, shocked me.

A few years went by and the city of Shenzhen went into full production mode. I would wake up to the noise of dynamites bombing the ground—a sign of land being manipulated in order for developers to shape the land into whatever state they wanted. I remember sitting on the windowsill of our apartment, looking outside with my grandpa, counting when the dynamites would go off. We would talk about the differences between the bombings he experienced as a child in the mountains—set by the Japanese and Americans while they were occupying our lands—and the ones I was seeing at the time. Reflecting on this memory, I was able to then feel, sense, and grow on how different bombs, from nuclear to those that were used for land expansion purposes, were connected as tools for the growth of capitalism.

My grandpa's experiences are rooted in him being born into Japanese

colonization and the Korean War, without any room for the Korean diaspora. Somehow, my own experience seemed inseparable to his—the Korea that I was born into was directly the result of the war state in which he lived, as South Korea will always be a country birthed from divisive war. The world that my grandparents saw at their age of 12, paralleled the world that I saw at the same age, if for no other reason than that of American imperialism. In the world that followed after my grandpa's experience, the Korean diaspora has not had any ownership of its own narrative in the global dialogue. No matter the growth of capitalism or the rising speed of globalization, South Korea as a nation state is nonetheless still stuck in the images and the notions of the past, oppressed by American imperialism and Japanese colonization. Coming from a land that has always been subject to division and battle, I am attempting to convey the Han¹ of the Korean diaspora—from the nuclear bomb that ended our colonization from the Japanese to the homes, both figurative and symbolic, that we lost, censored and forgotten by the west. Through my work, I am continuing to unravel the lingering trails of war and U.S. imperialism that the Western world refuses to acknowledge but regardless, exist deep inside my guts. I hope that throughout my practice, this fictional universe of Tan Tans' Garden can visualize the realities of our parallel worlds becoming apart rather than being silenced and censored from our memories by those that want to preserve a *forgotten war*.



.....fig.6..... Tan Tans' Garden, Landscape of the Present (detail)

CHAPTER 2.1

Exploring Tan Tans' Garden:*Who is Tan Tan?*

Tan Tans stems from my colonial name—Tania. The name Tania was adapted to TanTan when I was growing up in Shenzhen and Hong Kong. People around me who spoke Cantonese decided to adapt the name into something that sounded more familiar—TanTan¹.

Tan Tan is a character that was developed as a fictional character who is not scared of being vulnerable, sad, and raw, unlike *TanTan*, the person they stem from. Tan Tan, with a space in between Tan and Tan, is a persona who is not shy to be Korean. This is shown in their name - as Korean is the only language within Chinese, Japanese, and Korean to include spacing in between their words. They are the main species that nurture and sustain the parallel world of *Tan Tans' Garden*. They are part of a cycle where the end is beginning to be dreamt about but still hard to imagine.

Tan Tans' Garden was initially created by a singular state of thought particles, parallel to the creation of the United States' Manhattan Project in Earth Time² 1939. As the thought particles grew, the initial singular state entered a period of high density, parallel to Earth Time 1945 (when *Little Boy* was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan). Upon the dropping of the bomb, Tan Tans' Garden expanded, creating an entire world. This world embodies an alternate landscape of nuclear clouds and plants; memories of nuclear warfare are explored through



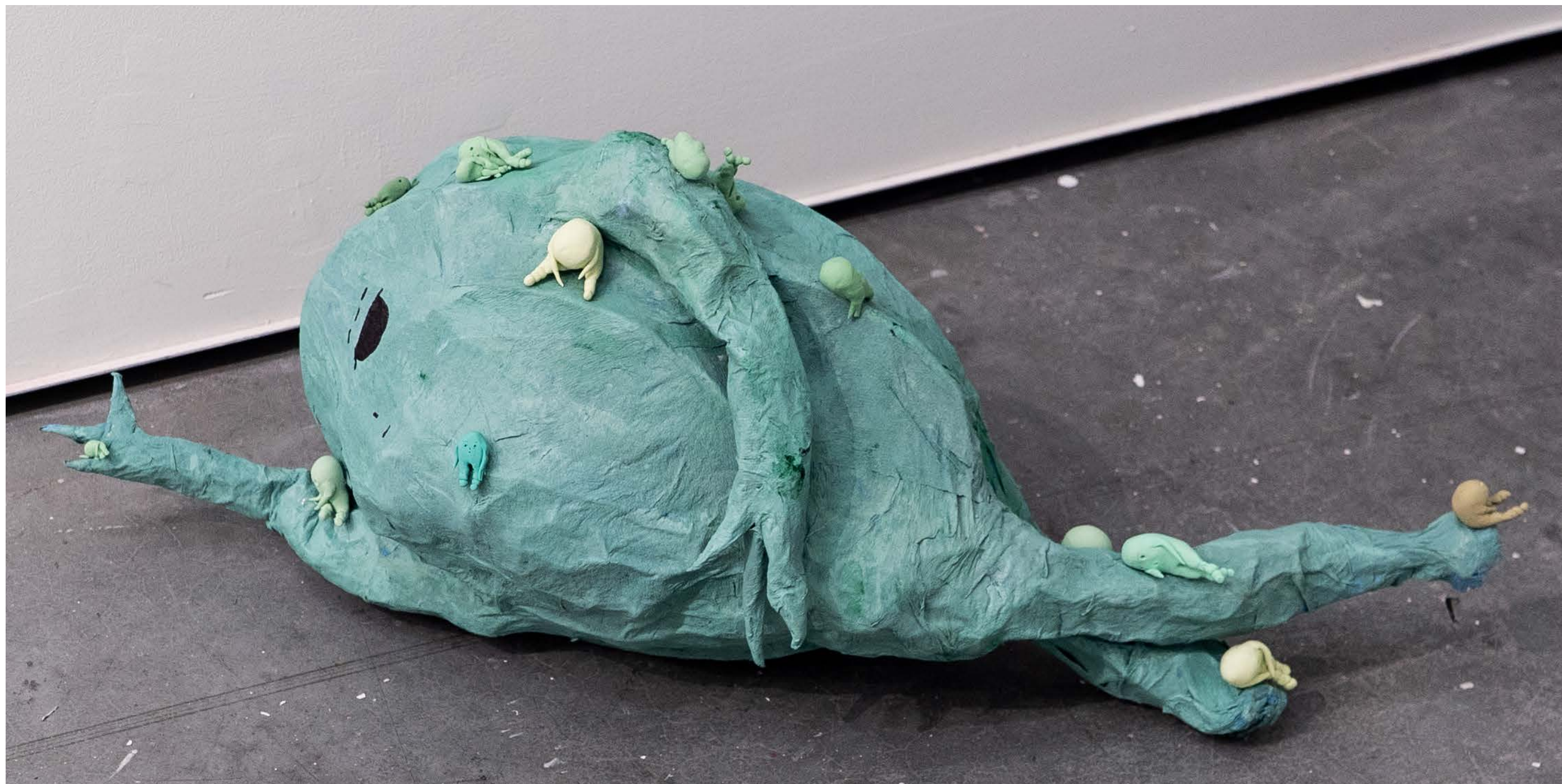
.....fig.7..... Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning

botanical metaphors and the Garden embodies pain, trauma, love, and notions of Han.

I see the year 1945 in Earth Time as a critical moment in history for U.S. imperialism. Earth Time 1945 was the year nuclear weapons were used in war for the first and also, the last, time by the United States. The bombing of Little Boy on Earth Time August 6, 1945, and successively, the bombing of *Fat Man* on Earth Time August 9, 1945, brought instant mass destruction to reality—together, the two bombings marked a visible introduction to the *Nuclear Age*. The beginning of the Nuclear Age demonstrated the U.S. military's capability in mass destruction. From Earth Time 1945, the U.S. military has slowly built up their nuclear weapons. Currently, around 6185 nuclear weapons are under the U.S. military's possession, according to the *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*.

Earth Time 1945 also marks a critical point in history for the scope of U.S. imperial control over Korea. Following the bombings of Little Boy on Hiroshima and Fat Man on Nagasaki, the Japanese military finally surrendered and withdrew their military occupation of Korea. That was a year colonization in the Korean Peninsula seemed to have come to an end. However, this would only be a momentary illusion of peace. The land and the country was divided by foreign engagement over Korean politics. Rather than allowing Korea to freely determine its own government, the United States enlisted the next government of Korea, ultimately refusing to recognize any government systems that were unwilling to follow the orders of U.S. imperialism. As the United States and other dominant Western countries continued their military power play, nuclear, cultural, and sociopolitical bombs broke my homeland into parts throughout the course of Earth Time 1950 to 1953. What was once a united Korea became divided lands, through man-made borders and lands built by political grids, all disguised as a sign of peace. The military occupation of Korea ensued. Geopolitically, South Korea served as an ideal location for the U.S to deploy nuclear weapons under the name of defence. From Earth Time 1958 - 1991 the U.S military has deployed more than 950 weapons to South Korea leading to its withdrawal in Earth Time 1991. Under the pretence of protection and under the pretence of a *protecting* nuclear umbrella,

U.S. imperialism bled through the Korea Peninsula. This false sense of protection not only bled through the physical landscape of South Korea, but also, stained the ceasefire of the war. To this day in Earth Time 2021, my homeland continues to grow and mutate itself into a capitalistic garden of self destruction—without a peace treaty to mark the end of the Forgotten War, the country, its people, and the Korean diaspora are left with a constant cycle of destruction looming over the past, the present, and even into, the future.



.....fig.8..... Tan Tans' Garden: Tan Tans #1



.....fig.9..... Tan Tans' Garden: The Beginning in 1945 (detail)

CHAPTER 2.2

Exploring Tan Tans' Garden:
The In-between & How to Recognize Tan Tan's Name

J A E H Y U N

This is the name I was given by my family—my birth name. I was told by my grandmother that she had visited a monk who gives names, and this was the name given to me.

T A N I A

Tania was my colonial chosen name. I chose this name when I was 6 years old at an English academy. That was my first encounter with the English language. Tania was one of the only names I could remember from the list of English names my teacher told out loud to me. I have stuck with that name since and that is what most people outside of the academic context know me as in North America.

T A N T A N

TanTan is the name that was developed by my friends and close ones in Hong Kong. I used the name Tania as it felt easier to go by amongst the people I grew up with, especially while going to an English speaking school. Living in Hong Kong, I encountered people who found it easier to call me TanTan instead of saying the name Tania. As it grew around me, it felt more comfortable for me also. As it grew onto me, I



.....fig. 10..... Tan Tans' Garden: Inside and Outside (detail)

changed my Internet personality to TanTan and began to reclaim myself as TanTan, taking a departure from Tania through the dismantling of my English name.

T A N T A N

Tan Tan is singular—it is used to describe and address the creature Tan Tan.

T A N T A N S

Tan Tans is plural of Tan Tan—it is used to describe the creatures as a group.

In the earlier stages of developing the character *Tan Tan* and researching through the timeline, I looked towards Doraemon—a cute, blue, circular shaped cat robot manufactured to nurture human children. Unlike other robots, Doraemon could not meet the quality check of the manufacturer and this gave him a special ability to be able to be more relatable than the other robots. He was born in a utopia of high-tech engineering where technology and humans co-exist without destruction. Though I enjoyed all the individual episodes of Doraemon the show as a child, the movie *2112: The Birth of Doraemon* (2112年 ドラえもん誕生) directed by Yoshimoto Yonetai and written by Fujiko Fuji in 1995, was how I reconnected with Doraemon. In this movie, inspired by the animated television show, Doraemon goes back in time to fix the source of unhappiness in the past. I was interested in the origins of Doraemon and its backstory—Doraemon was a signifier, bringing me back to the time period when animation was still hand-drawn for mass production, a historical time in visual documentation. In my practice, Doraemon has been an influence and index, reacting with the microorganisms of time and the fermented memories of my own, bringing me back to the moments when my grandpa would tell me I am watching too much TV. It was then, that I left Doraemon’s utopia to listen to the stories my grandpa wanted to tell.

Unlike Doraemon, *Tan Tans* are not interested in the utopia of technology or fixing the past for a better future. *Tan Tans’ Garden* is about

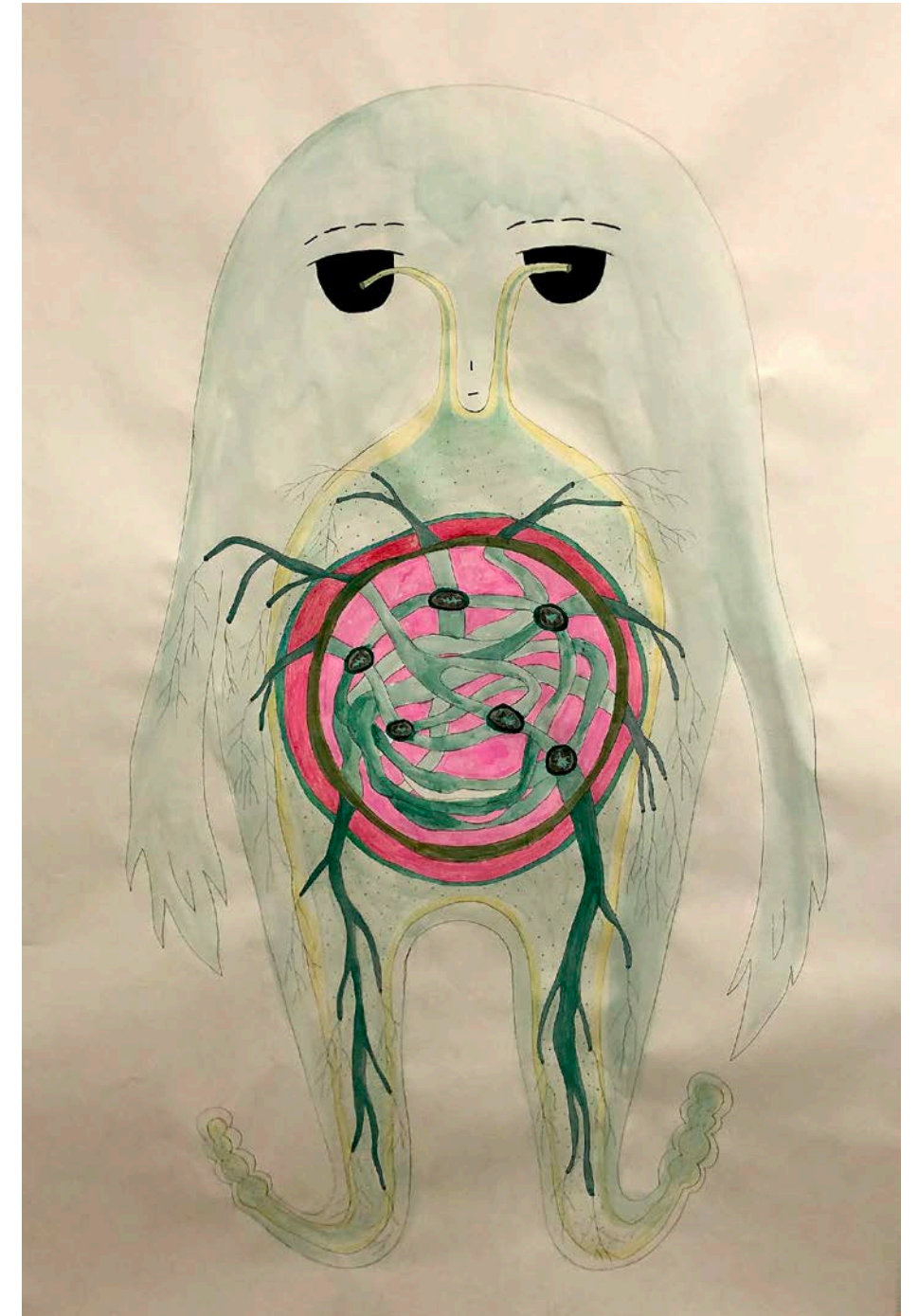
nourishing the present from the past and not glorifying the past, present, or the future state of capitalism. Although, like Doraemon, Tan Tans embody notions of cuteness as consumption, I depart from these notions and talk about Tan Tans as a cute yet vulnerable creature. Tan Tans are not intimidated by vulnerability. Instead, they embody their internal emotions, always confronting what they are feeling. They are about metabolizing the past and foraging the decaying memories, nourishing the present through those microorganisms of the past. In this way, Tan Tans are always vulnerable.

Tan Tans outer cuteness and inner vulnerability are portrayed in my work *Inside and Outside* (fig.10, p. 32; fig.11, p. 37). Similar to an anatomy diagram in biology textbooks, this piece displays the functionality of each of the organisms of Tan Tans. *Inside and Outside* seeks to display the internal process of memory, the state of invisible violence, and the powers of Tan Tans’ metabolism. Tan Tans’ Garden and the existence of Tan Tans are focused on the *fermentation of memory* and the unpacking of notions like Han—feelings and ideas that are internally brewed and metabolized without an end date. Moments, such as historical events, are symbolized as microorganisms that need time to go through the processes of fermentation, eventually aged enough to be understood, digested, and consumed by future generations. The microorganisms metabolize and brew within the Tan Tan organism—it is fermenting the stories of trauma and pain caused by Japanese colonization and U.S. imperialism. Some of these stories were told to me by my grandparents but none of these stories were ones my parents have heard. In my family, time was a necessary force to make room for vulnerability. Here, I attempt to make a world where maybe, Tan Tans can be the necessary force.

“The end result is that I am freer for having exhausted it as an important determinant in my life, while it simultaneously gains public status in the eyes of the many who apprehend it. The experience of the Mythic Being thus becomes part of public history, and is no longer a part of my own.”¹

Adrian Piper, *Notes on The Mythic Being*, 1973

There is a long history of artists like Adrian Piper, Eunsoo Jung, Jayson Musson a.k.a. Hennessy Youngman, Mariko Mori, Aya Takano, Sun Ra, Kwok Mang-ho a.k.a. Frog King, and Nikki Lee, who experiment with the ideas of alter egos, personas, avatars through fiction, parafiction, and the in-betweens of world building. These individual artists have influenced the character of Tan Tans and the world building of Tan Tans' Garden. These artists have allowed me to be who I thought I couldn't be—they gave me the permission to explore beyond myself. Detaching myself from my birth name and self, in Tan Tans' Garden, I give myself the permission to be vulnerable, cultivate the microorganisms of memory, be unapologetically cute, and create a space to understand the meaning of being a byproduct of U.S. imperialism rather than be objectified by it. Unlike Piper, this character is not in drag or in an indirect engagement with the public through performances. Tan Tans are not a persona of mine but rather, they are an outlet to explore the political and social matter of our embodied bodies. I am at times, doubtful about calling Tan Tan a character or a creature—she feels too much to be categorized or molded into a category.



.....fig. 11..... Tan Tans' Garden: Inside and Outside



.....fig.12..... Parallel Time of the Creation of Tan Tans' Garden

CHAPTER 2.3

Exploring Tan Tans' Garden: *The Garden*

For many in the West, the garden is a religious symbol—a beginning of a cycle. Similarly, but also, differently, the garden was a personal family space for me. Growing up in my grandparents' house, they had a small garden of bonsais. It was a place of storytelling and love. The garden served as the stable ground for one of the few moments when I had a stable family, before globalization pulled us all apart. It was a shelter for me: walls of green providing safety. This home was the first home my grandparents had built for themselves. My grandfather was a high school math teacher and my grandmother was a homemaker. Together, they were parents to 4 daughters, my mother being the first one. They managed to have a stable life and built their dream home where they could nurse their children till they had to say goodbye. The garden was located near Sincheon¹, across from Camp Henry² and it was the first home for my grandparents that had not been demolished by the U.S. military or for the Miracle of the Han River³. They would take me to places which are now apartments or dams, pointing into those spaces and remembering their childhood homes. The memories of their homes and families were overshadowed by the memories of bombs, explosions, and the American troops they had to evacuate from.

I find the garden as a space where pain, trauma, and the forgotten histories are disguised as comfort, peace, and stability. However, walking away from the immediate sense of comfort given from the tamed and

.....fig.13..... Installation view of *Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning of Grief*

controlled landscapes of the bonsai garden, I could see and feel the colonial histories that became a part of my grandparents. The colonial ideals implanted in my grandparents bleed through the garden from their choices—the structure of the house, trees, bonsais, and the grass covering the front yard making it no longer a madang⁴. Even though my grandparents resisted the layers of colonialism and imperialism they were faced with, it was hard for them to differentiate the hierarchy of value that was taught, manipulated, and weaved into society through all forms of oppression ranging from language to ways of life. My gaze from afar allows me to see the colonial histories clearly but what happens when others look at my home and its landscapes from afar?

Tan Tans' Garden is an parafictional garden that mimics the destruction caused in the Korean Peninsula—it is a place birthed by American imperialism but a place where its creatures are not chased after or controlled by U.S. imperialism. Within the Garden, Tan Tans as a species are allowed to process their emotions, mourn, and be vulnerable with the cause and effect resulting from the disturbance of the ecological system. No matter the level of destruction, the intensity of continuous war, and the oppressions of colonization, Tan Tans can be present with the truths of their world.

In tandem with the Garden and the visualizations of the Garden, I created the *Parallel Time of the Creation of Tan Tans' Garden* (fig.12, p. 38) and the *Number of Nuclear Testing in the World from 1945-2020* (fig.15, p. 46). In both of these paintings, the white dots represent the nuclear radiation emitted from nuclear testings and nuclear events that took place on Earth. The radiation emitted is paralleled to the history of the Garden. Unlike the radiation that we cannot see, the radiation in Tan Tans' Garden carry a visible imprint, visualizing the very long lasting effects of radiation—effects that will never disappear in any of our life times. Spreading throughout the timeline and beyond the borders of the DMZ⁵, the two paintings represent the lines we as Korean people are prohibited from crossing due to the residues of the lingering stains of the Forgotten War.

In the book *Gardens in Art* by Lucia Impelluso, she states “With the ad-

vent of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and Rousseau's social contract, the garden became a symbol of the new liberal political system. It broke free of the artifice in which it had been bound and became part of nature itself, free to express itself in full. With a continual conversation between geometrical artifice and the 'picturesque' natural element, the art of gardens evolved in a variety of forms, each proper to its own historical era”⁶. A garden is a confined space, maintained by human control and manipulation. In contrast, a garden is also a place of nourishment, continuously providing a space of cultivated goods and rest. This co-existence of contradicting notions of the garden captivated my attention on expanding the imaginative world of Tan Tans into a Garden.

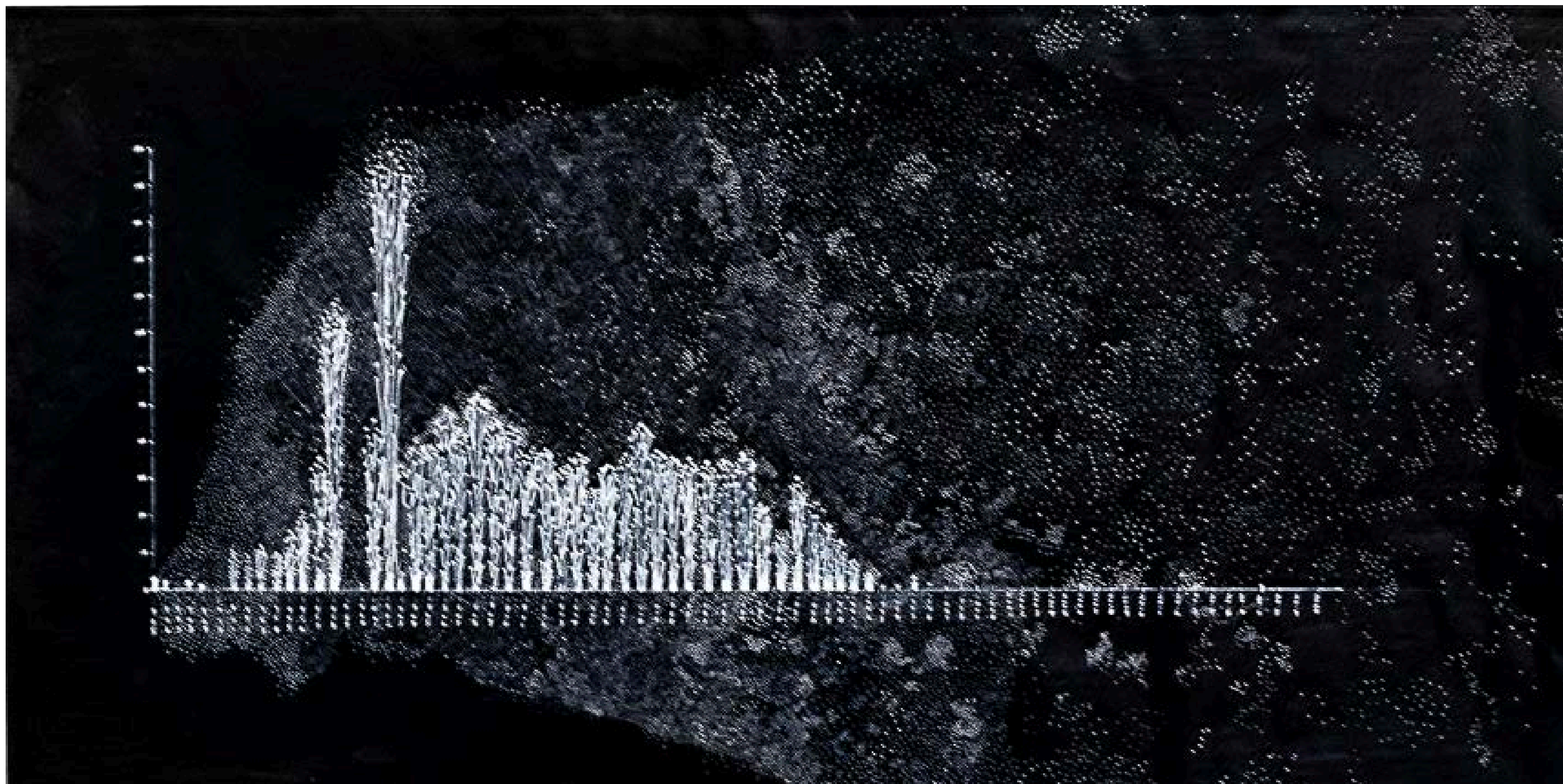
Tan Tans' Garden's most recognizable tree is the persimmon tree. The persimmon tree, known as hibakujumoku, is one of the trees that survived the nuclear explosions in Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945. The trees managed to survive even though man-made structures had collapsed all throughout the city. Their survival give depth to the stories of the landscape. The neon orange used throughout my drawings gives the persimmons a radioactive connotation that signifies the radioactive climate of the landscape. All the persimmons are placed or handled with care by Tan Tans' suggesting their importance and significance to Tan Tans' survival, as well as highlighting the methods of existence in this landscape. I am actively calling them “persimmon trees” and not “Japanese persimmon trees”, as an attempt to reclaim the origins of the tree itself, as well as to challenge the Japanese-dominant origination of names that are used to explain multiple Asian entities shared among many cultures and diasporas. By calling it the persimmon tree, I am highlighting the biological diversity that becomes overly simplified by the Western language.

Studies by Edward J. Klekowski Jr., conducted in Nagasaki, Japan, regarding the plantation affected in and around the location of the bombing, show that the plants that have managed to survive the explosions have gone through genetic mutation and no longer have the ability to produce fern that can reproduce on its own. Instead, the mutated plants evolved to produce clones. Similarly, *Tan Tans* are a species that were birthed from the dust particles of the nuclear explo-

sions of Fat Man and Little Boy. As time went by, Tan Tans went through countless mutations as the war driven capitalistic worlds grew on the Earth's side and continuously affected Tan Tans' Garden. Tan Tans are clones of themselves—an idea that stems and borrows from the mutation of clones throughout hibakujumoku. This is also my attempt to untangle the stereotypical Western gaze against the Korean diaspora of how we all “look the same” and are not seen as individuals but rather, a homogeneous group. I wonder, will my audience ever see beyond Tan Tans and their kawaii (cuteness)? Will the audience ever see them beyond the conditions of their pre-existence that stem from the history of the nuclear bombing and warfare?



.....fig. 14..... Tan Tans' Garden: The Beginning in 1945



.....fig.15..... Number of Nuclear Testing in the World from 1945-2020

CHAPTER 3

Nourishing the Contaminated

Tan Tans' Garden was growing and morphing itself into shape during the summer of 2020, right after the peak of quarantine isolation, due to Covid-19. In South Korea, preventing the spread of Covid-19 and having some sort of control over its citizens became another success in controlling the image of the nation to the global audience. Yet again, South Korea was perceived by Western governments as the model minority country. But, on the other side of the world, Asian people were affected by stereotypes of the “Chinese virus”. The discrimination continues today. While keeping these moments in mind and experiencing the effects firsthand in institutions, society and beyond, I continued developing *Tan Tans' Garden* and researching the circumstantial virus that is the byproduct of our push against the limitations of what our ecosystem can handle upon our capitalistic demands.

Tan Tans' Garden: Landscape of Mass Birth (fig.17, p. 51) is the latest of the series of drawings of *Tan Tans' Garden*. It is the most populated drawing of the *Tan Tans' Garden* series, as it depicts the process of reproduction and mourning. *Tan Tans' Garden* is a journey towards the acceptance of vulnerability—in this landscape, vulnerability is shown in a range of forms and blended into the atmosphere of mourning and haunting. Due to the nature and context of the ecosystem, I have found that watercolour gives a more successful depiction of the Garden than other medium. A more subtle vibrancy in colour feels closer to

.....fig.16..... Tan Tans' Garden: The Beginning in 1945 (detail)

the natural landscapes and colours of the Korean Peninsula that are symbolized in Tan Tans' Garden. The landscape of *myo*¹, the landscape of mourning the dead, the process of learning and nourishing oneself from the grieving, and the post-mortem cycle continue to be demonstrated throughout this landscape.

With the *Tan Tans' Garden: Landscape of Mass Birth*, there was an internal attraction to make this drawing into a folding screen, turning the drawing into a free standing sculpture. Byung Poong² is commonly used as a tool to hide the dead body in funerals from the old Joseon times. As an object used in the process of mourning, it felt natural to shift this drawing into an object—an object that divides the two worlds, the dead and the living. Here, it creates an illusion of the two parallel worlds. The landscape and the folding screen is a tribute to the Shipchangsangdo. “Koreans were very simple. Longevity, fortune, wealth, honour and many sons were the principal desires. Shipchangsangdo are a category of folk paintings that depict in a sophisticated way the wish to live a long life free from illness.” (127 Yoon). Shipchangsangdo also come in a format of Byung Poong with ten screens. The landscape painting included the moon, sun, five mountains, two waterfalls, and many pine trees. Similar yet different, both describe a fictional landscape drawn from stories and poetry. For the Koreans in the past, the Shipchangsangdo captured the relationship with the landscape that the Korean artists had at the time—mythical and full of care for longevity.

As my research continued and I completed more drawings of the Garden, there came a point where I wanted to make physical elements of this parafictional landscape. The narratives of *Tan Tans' Garden* was coming together in a series but an entry point felt missing. I decided to switch the passage into this mythic garden from the original entry point I had planned. I turned away from the controlled drawings of the Garden and turned to building the brutal realities of U.S. imperialism and its damage to land.

Ecofacts of Tan Tans' Garden (fig.19, p. 55) is a sculpture presented as *ecofacts* of what is known as Tan Tans' Garden. In this context, *ecofacts* are an excavated piece of evidence consisting of natural remains,



.....fig.17..... Tan Tans' Garden: Landscape of Mass Birth



as opposed to an object of human workmanship. It is a contrast from *artefact*. The sculpture is divided into multiple platforms inspired by the stacking of Jaegi³. While the traditional methods of these dishes are used in a memorial ritual, the purpose of jaegi is to serve food that is to be consumed by the ancestors, ghosts, and spirits. Traditionally, jaegi is made out of bamboo or other type of native tree found in the Korean Peninsula. Here, I have mimicked the stacking of different types of jaegi with candle sticks creating a mixture of hierarchies consumed on a table-like platform, almost creating penjing⁴. This sculpture is not only inspired from the stacking of jaegi but also mimics the landscape of Tan Tans' Garden represented in the drawings—creating a post-nuclear landscape. The sculpture is the only physical part of this fictional land that the visitors are physically in contact with in a gallery space. Placed at the center, the sculpture offers the visitor to continuously look back at the sculpture while going around the room discovering other elements of the Garden. If you look closely into the sculpture, you will see one Tan Tan that is encased and surrounded by persimmons.

The materials that were used to make this sculpture were gathered one-by-one throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. One-by-one, I foraged everyday materials and stored them away in a bag, waiting for it to all come to its repurpose. The hanjijuk⁵ was also made from found paper ranging from intimate notes of memories, newspaper articles, stained paper, and journaled pages. Like the process of making Kimchi, all the elements of hanjijuk were mixed together and blended into one like yangyumjang⁶. With my own sonmat and the fermentation from different glues, the individual papers held onto the sculpture like memories over time. The hanjijuk was then slowly smeared on the table and other parts of the stacked islands, turning itself into the Ecofacts of Tan Tans' Garden.



.....fig. 19..... Ecofacts of Tan Tans' Garden



.....fig.20..... Installation view of *Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning of Grief*

CHAPTER 4

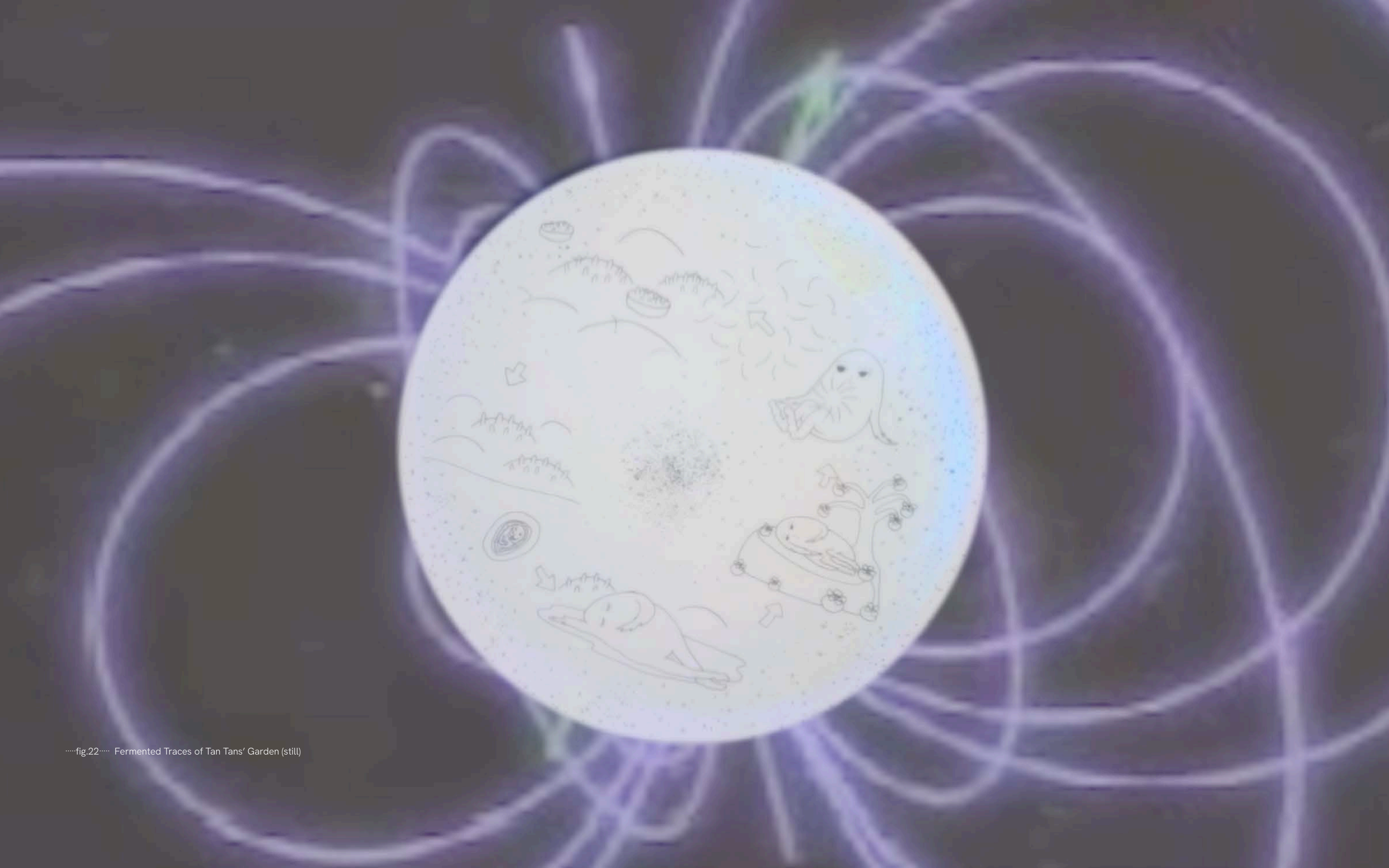
The Cloning of Grief

After creating all the individual moments and organisms of *Tan Tans' Garden*, I was troubled with its intersecting elements. How can this interconnected Garden be delivered and understood by the audience? *Tan Tans* are about the internal metabolizing of war memories—moments as microorganisms from 1945 to the present. I wanted to create an eye-to-eye experience to tell Tan Tans' story in order to explain without being stopped. I wanted to create a space for the audience to understand the stories the Tan Tans are willing to give away.

The style of a documentary came to mind as a method of putting these broken pieces of microorganisms back together. The relationship between film documentation and war is inseparable due to the reproductive nature of the machine, especially at that time. Film documented the state of the war and through it, the narratives of war could be manipulated. From preservation of memory to propaganda promoting anti-preservation of truth, film could do everything, even in times of destruction and horror.

“Imperialistic war is a rebellion of technology which collects, in the form of ‘human material,’ the claims to which society has denied its natural material. Instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities; and through

.....fig.21..... Fermented Traces of Tan Tans' Garden (still)



.....fig.22..... Fermented Traces of Tan Tans' Garden (still)

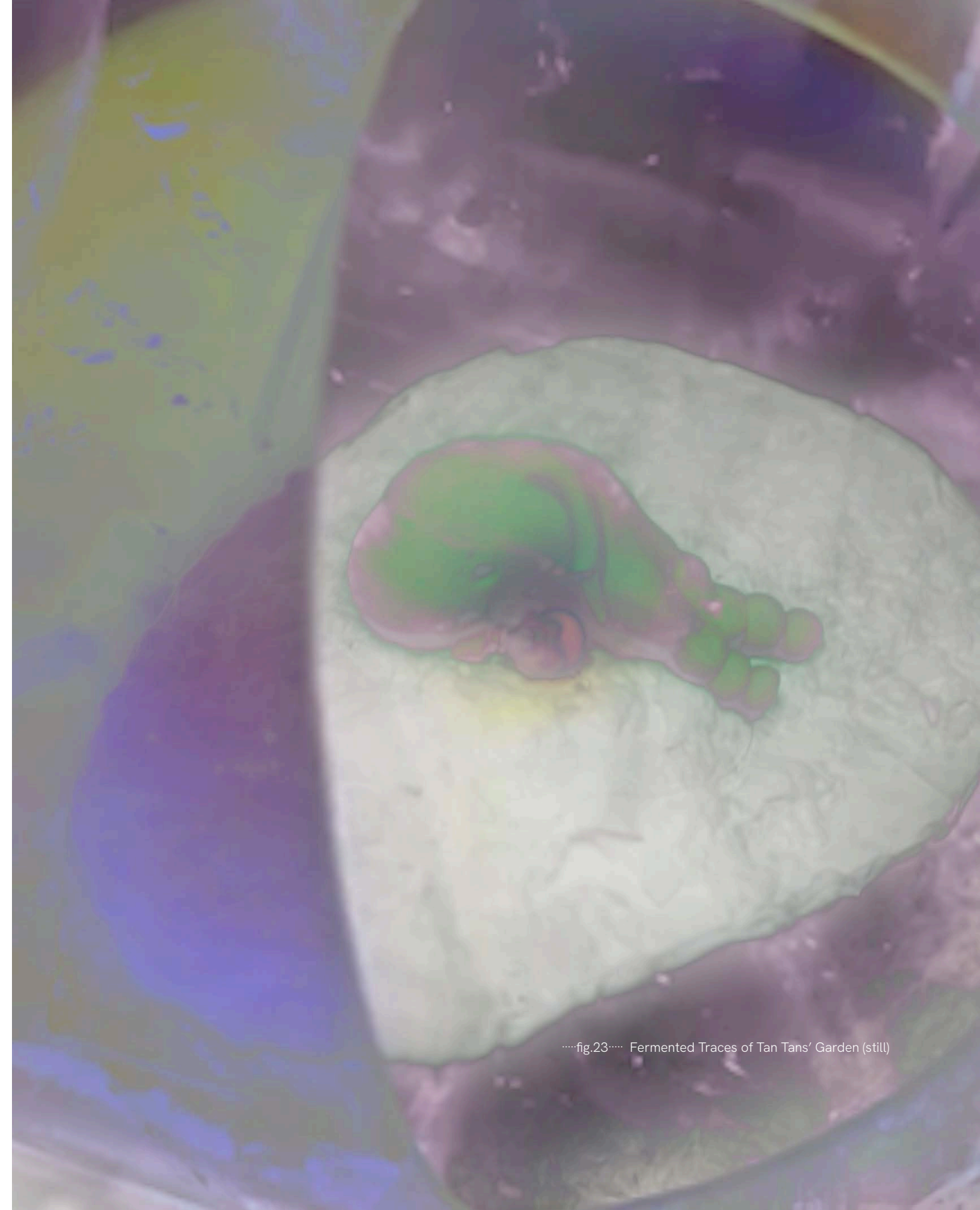
gas warfare the aura is abolished in a new way.”¹

Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 2008

For Benjamin, documentation proved the true nature of war. Moreso, it was through mass reproduction of these images that the image had the potential to stir ideas about capitalism, causing society to disassociate from the conditions of capitalism. In my film, *Fermented Traces of Tan Tans’ Garden* (fig. 21-24, p. 58-64), I am actively choosing to reproduce the individual images I have created into a moving image, as an attempt to challenge the narrative that felt so dissected. While making this film, I also turned towards the world of found footage. The compilation of footage—from soybean crystallisation to thermal imprints of bodies, from Manhattan Project tests to explosions of Fat Man and Little Boy, from industrial manufacturing processes of kimchi to mowing of myo—created an archive of the manifestations and the reproduced memories of Tan Tans’ Garden. As the eco facts, drawings and sculptures were reproduced and thereby accumulated throughout the film. In this way, my drawings and sculptures were cloning themselves as the byproducts of radiation, much like the microorganisms reproducing themselves as clones as a form of survival within the garden of invisible radioactive violence.

Within the *Cloning of Grief* installation, *Fermented Traces of Tan Tans’ Garden* was shown through a screen installed inside of a sculpture. The sculpture was mimicking a rotten persimmon that was not able to be preserved and thereby, not able to be consumed. The film along with the sculpture were shown in this way to reflect upon the distance that time has created from the past realities of the stories and events to our current understanding of them in the present.

The process of making this film was unlike the other works I produced during the duration of my MFA. Found and archived footage in tandem with elements of Tan Tans’ Garden all in a moving space created a new kind of reality within the parafictional world. Working with machines and documentation that come from machines juxtaposed the traditional ways of memory keeping and the storytelling of time.



.....fig.23..... Fermented Traces of Tan Tans’ Garden (still)



.....fig.24..... Fermented Traces of Tan Tans' Garden (still)



.....fig.25..... Installation view of Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning of Grief

Conclusion

Two years have passed since I began my MFA. Half my first year was spent getting to know a new city and familiarizing my surroundings. The rest of the time, I watched the world we live in absorb and reject the horrors of Covid-19 from the window of my apartment. It really wasn't what I anticipated or intended my graduate school experience to be like but new uncertainties and fluctuations to the understanding of time gave me different access to understanding and producing Tan Tans' Garden. Political uprisings all over the world brought attention to the preexisting conditions of societies and marked the new decade as a beginning of a new kind of change. If anything at all, this moment in history fuelled my desire and need to tell the story of Tan Tans' Garden.

I always had a hard time articulating the images and objects I was creating as well as the subjects I wanted to explore. In this series of writings, I was able to visit the root of where all of these works stem from. Exploring through the identities of TanTan to Tan Tans, I was able to write and explain the barriers of grammar and language—eventually, even articulating and making my own understanding of it. It was a challenge to explain *Han* in the English language, but this challenge gave me a new relationship with this colonial language and how I view its role within my writing, my work, my audience, and how I use it in my daily life within and outside of the institution. From the writings



fig.26 Installation view of *Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning of Grief*



.....fig.27..... Installation view of *Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning of Grief*

in this paper, I have learned to be a shapeshifter through language and confront the haunted ideas that are present within my work. Furthermore, my relationship with Tan Tans has shown me the power of understanding fermented memories and the stories within. It is through this relationship with Tan Tans and my work that I have found an ownership and an understanding of the harvestation of my own told history and the anger that lies beneath.

In the beginning, I did not believe that *Tan Tans* had the ability to tell the stories of the Forgotten War and the Han of the Korean diaspora but throughout my practice, I have found more hope that there can be a day when this act of unfolding fermented memories meets the moment of *Hanpuri*. I see this project unfolding itself beyond the boundaries of this degree; it may or may not look like the same forms of *Tan Tans*. Telling the stories of these entities have been a longer and denser journey than I expected; now, at the end of my MFA journey, to me, *Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning of Grief* is the opening—the portal to Tan Tans' Garden. The portal has finally been opened to share the stories and mourn in the wonders of a landscape birthed by American Imperialism.

Here, I am not attempting to rewrite history or speak for the Korean diaspora. I am only attempting to tell the stories that were retold to me, so that at the very least, I will not forget what happened to the land I was born in—the land I had to leave and the land I can only see from afar right now. I am a byproduct of U.S. imperialism and the war driven capitalism that was birthed from it—just like the *Tan Tans*. I will never forget the stories told from my grandparents about the bombs and destruction that echoed throughout their life—from the apartment windows that vibrated from the dynamites every morning to the continued destruction of South Korea's development to be on the global stage. I wish my grandfather was still here to tell me more about the times he lived through. I wish time had allowed him to have gotten to know Tan Tans. I can only hope and imagine that he has been able to feel and appreciate my retelling of his stories.

For now, *Tan Tans' Garden* still remains to be a site-responsive fragmented body of work, inseparable from the location and time which it

represent in parallel to our world. Tan Tans are surviving with hope, just like the rest of us, that the future has a brighter place where we can all be who we are—where we can all be understood.



.....fig.28..... Tan Tans' Garden: Tan Tans #2

List of Works

fig.1 p. 5	<i>Tan Tans' Garden: Tan Tan's Tears Make the Plants Grow</i> 2019 Fine marker on bristol 21 x 29 cm (detail)
fig.2 p. 6	<i>Tan Tans' Garden: Tan Tan and Mountains</i> 2019 Muk on Hanji paper 21 x 29 cm (detail)
fig.3 p. 13	<i>Tan Tans' Garden: The Mushroom Cloud</i> 2019 Acrylic on paper 165 x 85 cm
fig.4 p. 16	<i>Tan Tans' Garden: Ecofacts</i> 2021 Mixed media sculpture
fig.5 p. 18	<i>Tan Tans' Garden: Tan Tans #2</i> 2021 Mixed media sculpture

fig.6 *Tan Tans' Garden: Landscape of the Present*
p. 22 2020
Acrylic and muk on bristol
183 x 127 cm (detail)

fig.7 *Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning*
p. 25 2021
Book
10 x 15 cm

fig.8 *Tan Tans' Garden: Tan Tans #1*
p. 28 2021
Mixed media sculpture

fig.9 *Tan Tans' Garden: The Beginning in 1945*
p. 30 2019
Mixed media on bristol
165 x 235 cm (detail)

fig.10 *Tan Tans' Garden: Inside and Outside*
p. 32 2021
Multimedia on paper
170 x 100 cm (detail)

fig.11 *Tan Tans' Garden: Inside and Outside*
p. 37 2021
Multimedia on paper
170 x 100 cm

fig.12 *Parallel Time of the Creation of Tan Tans' Garden*
p. 38 2019
Acrylic and muk on bristol
117 x 67 cm

fig.13 *Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning of Grief*
p. 40 2021
Installation

fig.14 *Tan Tans' Garden: The Beginning in 1945*
p. 45 2019
Mixed media on bristol
165 x 235 cm

fig.15 *Number of Nuclear Testing in the World from 1945–2020*
p. 46 2020
Brush pen and muk on bristol
114 x 65 cm

fig.16 *Tan Tans' Garden: The Beginning in 1945*
p. 48 2019
Mixed media on bristol
165 x 235 cm (detail)

fig.17 *Tan Tans' Garden: Landscape of Mass Birth*
p. 51 2021
Mixed media on bristol
190 x 100 cm

fig.18 *Tan Tans' Garden: The Landscape of the Fullmoon*
p. 52 2020
Watercolour and muk on bristol
115 x 65 cm

fig.19 *Ecofacts of Tan Tans' Garden*
p. 55 2021
Mixed media sculpture

fig.20 *Tan Tans' Garden: Cloning of Grief*
p. 56 2021
Installation

fig.21 *Fermented Traces of Tan Tans' Garden*
p. 58 2021
11 minutes (still)

fig.22 *Fermented Traces of Tan Tans' Garden*
p. 60 2021
11 minutes (still)

fig.23	Fermented Traces of Tan Tans’ Garden
p. 63	2021 11 minutes (still)
fig.24	Fermented Traces of Tan Tans’ Garden
p. 64	2021 11 minutes (still)
fig.25	Tan Tans’ Garden: Cloning of Grief
p. 66	2021 Installation Video: <i>Fermented Traces of Tan Tans’ Garden</i>
fig.26	Tan Tans’ Garden: Cloning of Grief
p. 68	2021 Installation
fig.27	Tan Tans’ Garden: Cloning of Grief
p. 70	2021 Installation
fig.28	Tan Tans’ Garden: Tan Tans #2
p. 74	2021 Mixed media sculpture

Notes

KEY TERMS: Ingredients for Fermentation

1. Sonmat is known as the taste origination from the process of making food with your hands. Every individual is believed to have a different taste of their own sonmat.
2. Lambert-Beatty, Carrie. *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*. 2009.
3. Butler, Octavia E. *Dawn*. 1987.

1 The Fermented Byproduct

1. Refer to Han in Key Terms

2.1 Who is Tan Tan?

1. The specifics of the elimination of space and adaptation of this name is explained in Chapter 2.2.
2. Earth Time is how I reference the present time on Earth, currently in the year 2021.

2.2 The In-between & How to Recognize Tan Tan’s Name

1. Piper, Adrian. *Notes on The Mythic Being*. 1973.

2 Exploring Tan Tans’ Garden — 2.3 The Garden

- 1. A stream flowing through eastern Daegu
- 2. Camp Henry is a U.S. military camp located in Daegu, South Korea
- 3. Miracle of the Han River is a period of time ranging from 1961 to 1997, during the economic boom Korea experienced after the Forgotten War. Korea went through fast modernization through the remodelling of the landscape that was destructed during the Forgotten War.
- 4. Madang is a plain piece of land, usually covered in clay to aid different events, storage of foods and goods, and many more functions that supported the functionality of a Korean house hold. A madang can include wells, trees and others but usually it is a clear space in the center with objects pushed towards the walls.
- 5. Korean Demilitarized Zone - a border barrier between South and North Korea.
- 6. *Gardens in Art* by Lucia Impelluso quote add reference

3 Nourishing the Contaminated

- 1. Myo is a traditional Korean tomb, shaped like a small dump on earthy land. There are many different types of myo but here, I am referring to the version of myo which has been adapted since the Joseon times.
- 2. Korean word for folding screen.
- 3. Jaegi is a traditional Korean plate used in ancestral memorial rituals.
- 4. Penjing is a traditional Chinese art form of making a minia ture landscape using trees, rocks, moss, and other materials. It is known to be the art form that inspired the making of bonsai.
- 5. Paper maché.
- 6. Sauce

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