

BONE SKY (Wyoming 2015)

By Sueyeun Juliette Lee



In 2015 I spent some time in the vast grass plains of Wyoming. The spare tones of the landscape in early spring deeply impacted me, as did the sense of immense expanse. I believe I was transformed during my encounter with the landscape and atmosphere there. I found I breathed and felt differently, that I was filled with an infinite sense of *light*.

My interest in light began nearly a decade ago. Succinctly, it transmits so thoroughly — it's an incredible messenger. Whether of stars' ages, planetary compositions, or the chatter from our digital newsfeed — it pours languages that we are still learning to understand. I started to take seriously the query, *what is light saying?* And then I wanted this transmission to be a dialogue. *How can I speak back into this agent which is always speaking into me?* I trust I am already always speaking into the light, too. But now I'd like to *with purpose*.



While in these spare grasslands, I sought to bring aspects of this place — and its incredible sky — into myself by moving intentionally with long sheets of *hanji* (Korean mulberry paper), seeking to magnetize the paper and myself to the environment. I then made sculptural objects from this “charged” hanji coupled with found materials (bones, sage sprigs, bark, grass). At the end of my time there, I destroyed these objects by setting them on fire. I wrote down nothing. I took some images of the objects, how they evolved, and then their remnants. I thought of them collectively as *Ash Poem*. That title feels inadequate for that effort; those objects were collectively part of a gesture I was making slowly — over the course of several days.

Fire has become one of my best communicative aides for speaking with the sunlight. I first started working with fire when I had been in Norway to study the long days of the summer solstice. I fell into the practice of burning as a way to write my poems directly into the sky. Fire moves and dances in ways that I strive to discover inside myself — completely responsively, with quick flicker and spurts, or with a slow, seeping durational appetite. In Wyoming, its soft warm tongue licked at the air and the objects I had made, devouring the faint oily prints my hands had left on them. The hanji burned neatly, with hardly a trail of smoke and without leaving much behind. Whether the sky responded in turn wasn't something I could mark or objectively register, but my body felt that the transmission was complete. A satisfaction.

My aim during this period was simply to *open* — to listen and develop a capacity to discern what I might hear. Whatever may have spoken into me did so quietly, but with purpose. To this day, I do not feel I can adequately transcribe what fell through me. Perhaps my drive to burn everything at the end was my best effort at speech — to write with the sky, to leave a receding gesture in the air.

I am still not certain how to describe the work that I engaged in during this period. The best I can do is offer these few images that captured moments from this process. As I reflected on how best to encapsulate this series of experiences — this cascade of subtle environmental encounters — the only words that sped through me: *Bone. Sky.*

"Grasslands, No Wilds" (2015)

[EXHIBIT](#): A representation of a project that may or may not have taken verbal form.