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Installation view of Heman Chong's "Never, A Dull Moment" at Art Sonje Center, Seoul, 2015. Photo by Sang-tae Kim.

NEVER, A DULL MOMENT HEMAN CHONG

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In the age of Instagram, selfies and sharing online, there was not much to photograph in Heman Chong's solo exhibition. "Never, A Dull Moment," at Art Sonje Center in Seoul, was comprised of 14 works. Some of the more evident pieces visible from the front of the exhibition were: *Welcome!* (2015), a large, red banner hanging in a far corner, that faced away from the entrance; *Boiling Point* (2015), a pair of pots on hot plates with boiling water, which sat on a table in the middle of the gallery; and *Until the End of the World (Paused)* (2015), comprising a TV monitor with German auteur Wim Wender's 1991 film *Until the End of the World* on pause, which leaned against a wall.

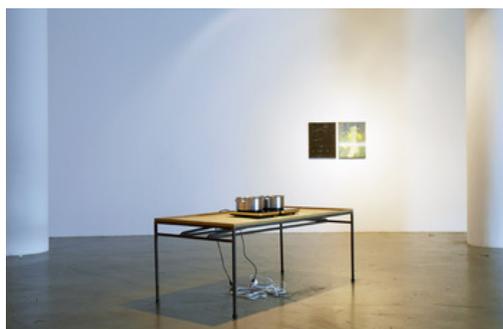
For those who were willing to take the time to understand why Art Sonje would dare show what appears to be much of "nothing," Chong's exhibition offered an illuminating treasure hunt. Exhibition pamphlets, stacked on the ground at the entrance of the show, held one of his works entitled *Never, A Dull Moment* (2015), which, according to the explanatory text, is "a short story that stands in as an exhibition text, printed on an advertisement banner, and lightbox, a poster, an invitation card, and circulated online via email, an e-flux announcement and a Facebook post." The textual piece tells the tale of "a non-profit space caught in a mid-life crisis" and initiates the idea that an exhibition is a form of fiction and an exhibition space is a means to tell a story. The museum, then, became an anthology of short stories, and Chong's exhibition a chapter within the history of Art Sonje's existence.



HEMAN CHONG, *Welcome!*, 2015, digital print on cloth, 1.5 × 7.5 m. Photo by Sang-tae Kim.

HEMAN CHONG, *Until the End of the World (Paused)*, 2008, performance, TV monitor, DVD. Photo by Sang-tae Kim.

Looking for Chong's other works in the exhibition, many of which were hidden in plain sight, turned into a revelatory encounter. Two ashtrays filled with cigarette butts placed by a window were props for the durational performance *Smoke Gets In (Your Eyes)* (2015), intended for visitors audacious enough to light up in the museum. *Leftover Triangle (with two shelves)* from "A Room of His Own: Masculinities in Korea and the Middle East" is a temporary wall that was left over from the 2014 exhibition at Art Sonje referenced in the work's title. Similarly, for the installation *Within, You Remain* (2015–), Chong instructed Art Sonje to leave the debris from the exhibition held prior to "Never A Dull Moment," as part of the latter's display. Viewers, then, were (un)knowingly shuffling around the by-products of a work of art.



Installation view of Heman Chong's "Never, A Dull Moment" at Art Sonje Center, Seoul, 2015. Photo by Sang-tae Kim.



Installation view of Heman Chong's "Never, A Dull Moment" at Art Sonje Center, Seoul, 2015. Photo by Sang-tae Kim.

The show's signature piece was *The Art of Production* (2015), which was inconspicuously placed on a small wall shelf. It is a copy of *Artforum's* October 2007 issue, hand-cropped by the artist at mid-length. Chong had kept an un-mangled version of the copy by his bed for the past eight years. At the press preview of the Art Sonje exhibition, he mentioned that this issue was one of his favorites from 2007, because it addressed the collective process of production in contemporary art. He also mentioned that the more he read through the issue, the more confused he got about why artists needed to make artworks.



HEMAN CHONG, *Smoke Gets In (Your Eyes)*, 2015, cigarettes, two identical ashtrays, durational performance. Photo by Sang-tae Kim.

Ironically, it was perhaps this subversive nature of Chong's works that coaxed viewers to put aside their cameras and directly engage with the pieces and the exhibition as a whole. And even if there were little provided to see, the show offered a lot to think about. In *Past, Lives* (2015), a stack of posters for visitors to take away, the titles of the 89 exhibitions previously shown at Art Sonje were recomposed into a new text—the entirety of the Center's existence reduced to an abstract index of past events. In an age where technology has made viewing art online more immediate, the digitization of information is devaluing the museum's role as a repository of knowledge, art institutions are in fierce competition with other forms of media as destinations of enlightened entertainment, and social media has taken on the role of cultural arbiters, Chong's exhibition was a concerned yet tender statement about the ongoing role of the exhibition and art institution.

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