

Durumi and I (2025)

Young In Hong

I am an artist. Have I had any choice about that? There is an interesting relation between being an artist and being a shaman, as the choice of your profession is not made but rather given. My longing to see in the world the result of the images and intuitions of my mind and thoughts are strong. My desire to communicate my longing to others is urgent. As an artist I travel restlessly, never quite at home, or by necessity. Now I have come here to Korea's demilitarized zone, a liminal space. But this time it is not to mount an exhibition for others to witness but to be a witness myself.

I know the cranes have risked their lives to get here. Must the birth of the sacred always be tied to mortal danger? I'm not the first to be drawn to the grace and weightlessness of the crane dance. Dr Archibald signed a contract in 1974, to come to Korea and to study cranes in the DMZ, agreeing if he were killed or captured, the UN would deny any responsibilities. There is something magnetic about cranes. In our human solitariness language and even art seldom seems to fully capture the richness of our inner experience, its beauty, joy and sadness. But in the dance of the cranes nothing is missing, each movement is itself the shape their inner being takes, which is what makes it sacred, the unity of inner and outer being. The power of the cranes is

Sacred	danger	danger	sacred	sacredsacredsacred
danger	danger	danger	danger	sacred.....

We fly as one people, the crane people. Stronger than hunger, cold and danger is our longing. The hot air streams that lift us and the image of a snowy field that pulls us are part of us.

Us cranes think and express with our feathers, muscles and skin, we use the language of our bodies to communicate, thinking, moving, talking is one. Our extraordinary anatomy is behind a posture not quite like any other species.

Although our females are smaller, the sexes of our species are indistinguishable, we appreciate equality. Even in our rivalry there is no disagreement after all, because we are a collective body. The spirit of the group dictates our family life.

All who traverse this valley
will leave sharing a single collar.
Here, the many and the few
will merge and meld into one.

When many are united in the One forever,
then all inside the One is a perfection.

This is not a place for uniformity;
Here you find unity in diversity.

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Since I first met with cranes in Cheorwon, I got to imagine myself as a crane from time to time, if not in my waking life then in my dreams. Enthusiasm towards cranes are 'contagious' as Dr Archibald once expressed it (and I could not stop thinking about them since I met with them. Thinking of cranes alerted me to hear birds' communication more often here and there. In the area I live, there are a number of large gulls and pigeons you meet near the harbour. Doves can be found in a farm or in their hedges. You hear sparrow, magpies, chaffinches and many other birds when being in the garden or woodlands. I started to record them whenever possible, and began wondering what they are talking about. I feel closer to the cranes through hearing other birds. I miss cranes.

If human beings can have multiple personalities and still be one, could multiple humans also be one in a seemingly divided unity? Could the One extend to other species? The more I think of cranes, the more I feel that

The Beginning is lost;
The End stretches into eternity.

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since all is really nothing,
then nothing is truly everything.

Through generations we have travelled the length, width and height of our nation and that memory is alive and singing in us. We have lost brothers and sisters to harsh conditions, to fly-lines, power-lines and shootings. Human industrialisation, farming, fishing, mining and grazing have threatened our resting places. But our longing is still alive and mobilising

our bodies. The fortunate among us will have the joy of bonding with our lifelong partners. All of us dance as one just like we fly as one. On arrival we still expect to find grains left by humans, though we can never be sure how long our protected zone will still be peaceful and safe.

They traveled for years,
crossed deserts and mountains.
They spent their whole lives traveling
toward the Great Simorgh.

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Some drowned in the sea;
others simply vanished.
Some succumbed to thirst
on lofty mountaintops,
others to injuries and heat.
Some burned their wings in the sun
or the heat baked their hearts.

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qrrreuk..... qrrreuk, qrrreuk, qrrreuk,..... qrrreuk, qrrreuk, qrrreuk, qrrreuk, qrrreuk,

Our large bodies are strong. We protect our children when threatened by foxes or eagles. It is the humans that have been the only real threat to our ancestors. We roost in big numbers always prepared to fly off and find other roosting areas should we come under attack.

The gorani, water deers, befriend us in the DMZ. Though they are moving differently to us – they jump and run fast- when we roost, they never disturb us but adore us. Gorani are always waiting for our return in winter. It is good to have friendly neighbours. Our respective crane people will continue to survive together. Only here in Cheorwon, not in Russia nor in Japan do we meet these quirky and amusing creatures, which to us signals that this area is safe. Both our people recognise the DMZ as a sanctuary with limited human interference. Still the humans build and expand their facilities that harm us here and the noise from

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Each one of us here observing the cranes are lost in our own experience but we have also momentarily lost the burdens of our personal narratives and the weight of the past, for the movement of the cranes pull us into the present. In East Asia, Cranes have been painted by many artists and artisans. I am tempted to paint them, as this might help connecting myself more with cranes. Crane has been the esteemed companion of sages, scholars and musicians. Their dance is magnificent, often the movement has been mimicked in traditional Korean dance.

What we're witnessing is a miracle, a true ritual. Rituals still exist among some groups of humans that live intimately with the natural world, but for many it has been replaced by the atomism of technology as an illusion of communication, speaking without essence. That is why I long to hear the calls of the cranes, because I need to fill my inner reservoir with direct

All that you have known,
all that you have seen
were illusions, all of it.
Nothing you have said or heard
was actually so.
The valleys you traversed
were in Me,
The bravery you displayed
was Mine.

We know that we will land as we always have done, that the ground will receive us, that the air will aid our wings as we settle. Joy and celebration is its own reward, being who we're meant to be is its own reward, one people, one nation, the crane nation and our land is vast, covering ground and sky alike, uniting heaven and earth through the movement of our bodies.

Ddrreut, ddrreut, ddrreut,
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As an artist I must invent my own purpose, my own line of flight. I want this to be natural, in alignment with the land as I see it with my inner eyes, a place where also humans can share experiences that break with the limitations of language and unite us despite our sense of separation, if only for a moment as fleeting as the dance of the cranes.

Peter Matthiessen, in his book of the Birds of Heaven, called the DMZ an 'accidental paradise' for cranes. He travelled to DMZ with Dr Archibald and saw that DMZ provides an ideal habitat for red crowned and white naped cranes. He also observed that the political backdrop and economically fast growing country were irrational associations with these sacred birds. Every year the cranes migrate into the accidental paradise with their grown offspring, yet the heavy tension of the dilemma and the historical and

No	human	no	human	no	human	no	human	no	human	no	human
Sanctuary											
No	human	no	human	no	human	no	human	no	human	no	human
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If I was able to live in such a protected land, I would fly 5000km or even longer. But then again, I know that no humans should live here. So what matters is this fleeting moment of grace in the presence of the cranes. Yakuts people believe that seeing a crane will ease difficulties and misfortune. It is only their shamans who become cranes flying to the upper and lower worlds enhancing their power to predict future. I dream to become a crane, traversing across different worlds that I am unable to see.

Bewildered, bereft of reason and steeped in thought,
they could fathom nothing, because
They stood in a state of absolute nothingness.
Wordlessly they asked the Beloved to unveil
the mighty secret, relieve them
of the confusion of identities -

You	Us	Us	You	You	You	Us	Us	You	Us	You	Us
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References and quotes from:

The Birds of Heaven: Travel with Cranes, Peter Matthiessen

My Life with Cranes, George Archibald

The Conference of the Birds, Attar

Special thanks to:

Ole Hagen