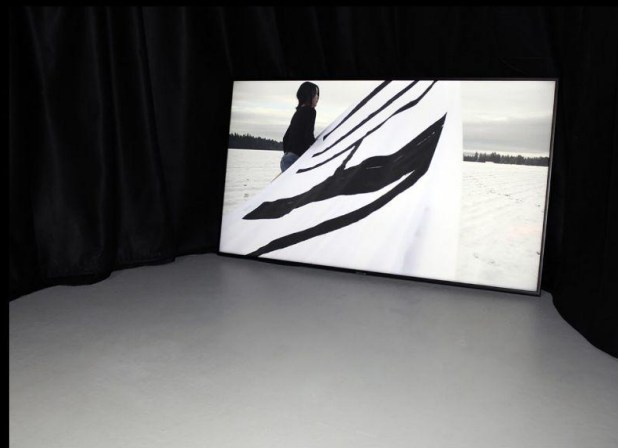


*Practice until you feel the language inside you at*  
Unrequited Leisure

BY SARA LEE BURD  
APRIL 19, 2021



Installation view of *Practice until you feel the language inside you*, courtesy of the artist and Unrequited Leisure.

**W**all texts and press releases usually identify artists by location. Noting a birthplace or “based in” provides context, but not everyone has a singular place to call home. Having lived around the United States, Canada, and South Korea, artist Josephine Lee knows the experience of defining herself in new environments. In her solo show, curated by Tanya Gayer at Unrequited Leisure through May 31, Lee shares her perspective as a migrant person. Her video installation *I think I Canada I know I Canada* positions viewers to consider how much effort it takes to become part of a place. Through her body, the location, a flag, and written language she gives a physical interpretation of an outsider’s attempt to manage alienation.

The video begins with a vast snow-filled field followed by Lee’s quiet entrance with a flag. The sound of her feet crunching on the frozen land builds anticipation, and her gait exudes confidence. The ceremonious-feeling procession takes 30 seconds—she reaches a stopping point, gathers a long, trailing flag, and attempts to wave it. The seriousness fades. The absurdly scaled flag coupled with her flagrant gestures gives the work an absurdist feel. Over the course of the thirteen-minute performance it becomes clear that she is not a humorist; she is an individual laboring to communicate.



Still from Josephine Lee, *I think I Canada I know I Canada*.

The experience of seeing the video at Unrequited Leisure physically establishes a power dynamic between the viewer and the performer. The display screen located on the floor requires people to look down to engage with the art. The position welcomes visitors into the landscape but also asserts their authority over the bungling figure embroiled in an impossible task. This arrangement echoes the unequal standing of insiders and outsiders.

The performance looks exhausting. Lee engages her body—extending her arms and legs with strength—to cantilever the pole and force the flag to move. The length of the fabric and the lack of wind work against her

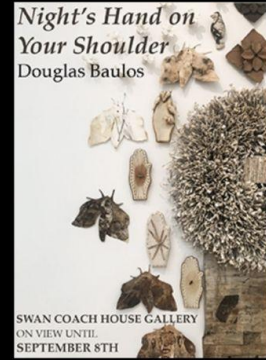


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attempt to fly it proudly. She takes hold of it, strikes at it, runs with it, but the flag will not yield. Her actions indicate that no amount of mental or emotional resolution can overcome the impossibility of the object.

Although the words on the flag seem significant based on her enthusiastic attempts to share them, the phrases remain unintelligible throughout the performance. Lee's inability to effectively relate the message on her flag points to a cultural disconnect that immigrants encounter and a type of isolation she must have felt personally while moving around the world. The sustained effort of her body communicates that she is trying, although awkwardly, to be seen and understood. The exhibition title, *Practice until you feel the language inside you*, indicates the belief that vigilance leads to success. However, witnessing Lee's impractical attempt to connect linguistically or fully display the flag twists that expectation. Her body tells us that control is illusory. If Lee had community support, people could help hold the flag, her words could be read, and she would not battle alone.

The video and installation challenge viewers to question their position in power structures and acknowledge that belonging is a privilege. While humorous at times, the situation Lee presents remains unmanageable. Watching the futility of her efforts in spite of her resolve elicits empathy. The performance encourages those who identify as insiders to learn compassion for those striving to belong. For the outsiders, it offers solidarity.



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*Josephine Lee's solo exhibition, Practice until you feel the language inside you, is on view at Unrequited Leisure in Nashville, TN through May 31.*