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Do-Ho Suh
ArtSonje Center, Seoul
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Four fine art degrees, New York gallery representation, and seven international solo exhibitions later, Do-Ho Suh is back in Korea with a solo show, a homecoming long overdue. Leaving behind the famous fabric houses in New York, the show at ArtSonje consisted of various iterations of many identical units: 70,000 dog tags (*Some/One*); 200,000 yearbook portraits (*Who Are We?*); 4,000 embroidered signatures (*Paratrooper-I*); and 1 80,000 PVC figurines (*Floor*). Bordering on obsessive repetition and collective accumulation, Suh's works continuously explore binary situations where the whole and part play hide-and-seek: one visible only in the obscurity of the other.

With a history of thirty years' military regime, Fascist beauty of militaristic mass calisthenics (synchronized group exercises) and army parades are visually embedded in every Korean citizen, along with the corporal excitement of experiencing thousands of human bodies moving together, secondhand. The notion that when many of the same gather together they form a complete and stronger single entity seems to prevail amongst most Koreans. The phenomenal mass of the Korean cheering section at World Cup 2002 is only one of many such manifestations. As the last internationally recognized country in the world which remains divided due to political differences, the people's longing for the united 'one' is both justifiable as well as problematic.

Suh's continuing challenge to address the issues of micro and macro, individual identity and pluralistic society—a potentially unified and sovereign international identity—is clearly legible in his sculpture series. One of two most recent works presented at the show, *Karma* (2003), takes Suh's initial address further, as the anticipated participation of the audience present in *Floor* or *Doormat: Welcome* is nullified by the actual presence of a gigantic booted foot about to step down on one hundred little figures. The group of tiny figures runs in one direction under the shadow of the impending footstep, in similar fashion to the marching comrades depicted in Social Realist paintings. Reinforced by the title of this work, one is compelled to contemplate the retributive power of karma within the universal wheel of life, in a Buddhist sense.

In another recent work, *Paratrooper-I* (2003), four thousand signatures of different people were collected by the artist and embroidered on layers of thin linen. War and domestic references incur the 'Senin-Bari' (one-thousand stitches) in Japanese war

tradition where the family of a draftee collects red stitches from one thousand women for the talismanic protection of their son. Thus the 'Senin-Bari' symbolically carries the strength of one thousand people. In Paratrooper-I, the blood-red threads that extend from each signature are bound and held together by the paratrooper on a pedestal who pulls the bundle as if he were tugging at a deflated parachute. Once a life-saving device in the air, it now drags him heavily to the ground. Again, a suggestive switch takes place between the supporting device and the supported. Suh's remarkable concentration on the subject matter continues to hold, gradually testing the grounds for more open interpretations.