

Life Writing in the Long Run: A Smith & Watson Autobiography Studies Reader

By Sidonie Smith; Julia Watson

Part IV: Visualized Lives

10. Introduction: Mapping Women's Self-Representation at Visual/Textual Interfaces
From *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (2002)

C. Spatial Interfaces: Palimpsestic, Paratextual

Third, the interface can be *spatialized* as a site that is permeable, infiltrated either from inside out as a *palimpsest* or outside in as a *paratext*. The apparent space of the surface is redefined by its surround; or, alternately, shown as masking a history of previous iterations that can be differently arranged. In either case, the act of putting a seemingly two-dimensional surface into the three-dimensionality of embodied space animates surfaces with cultural residue.

In a *palimpsest*, one image lies submerged, apparently erased or overwritten by a second image; but traces of what has been erased or overwritten leak through the overlaid surface. The layers underneath, as in an archeological site, house alternative narratives or images that compete with and contest the visible or apparent meaning. For example, the installation by Korean-American artist Yong Soon Min entitled *deCOLONIZATION* (1991) makes visible the multiple layers of a postcolonial, multicultural identity (Figures 4.1 & 4.2). The installation is punctuated with words, from the “COLONIZE” that adheres to the floor, to the black and white words on a vinyl sheet that capture the binary oppositions foundational to colonizing concepts and events, to the Plexiglas intersection of “NATURE” and “NURTURE,” to a poem written upon the front and back of a dress in English and Korean, to a poem by Martinican writer Aimé Césaire, to the “OCCUPIED” layered over with frosted Mylar. Amid the words that constitute a complex history of discourses of colonialism stands a tree branch of knowledge. A traditional Korean dress hangs suspended from the ceiling. The layerings multiplied in the diverse contexts of *deCOLONIZATION* suggest the multiplicity of colonizations of Korea by China, Japan, and the United States as a

nationalist bricolage. The physical layerings—the dress that hangs layered above the words on the floor, the layers of Plexiglas—combine with the metaphorical layers of the pages of the table of contents of an *Encyclopedia Americana* and the mirrored images of letters. Taken together, they situate the viewer in the internalized cacophony of external forms of gendered identity. Displaying fragmented objects and letters to evoke in pieces a culture that has been splintered through colonization, Yong Soon Min uncovers the differential effects on female subjectivity of the processes of de/colonization often occluded in official discourses of nation.

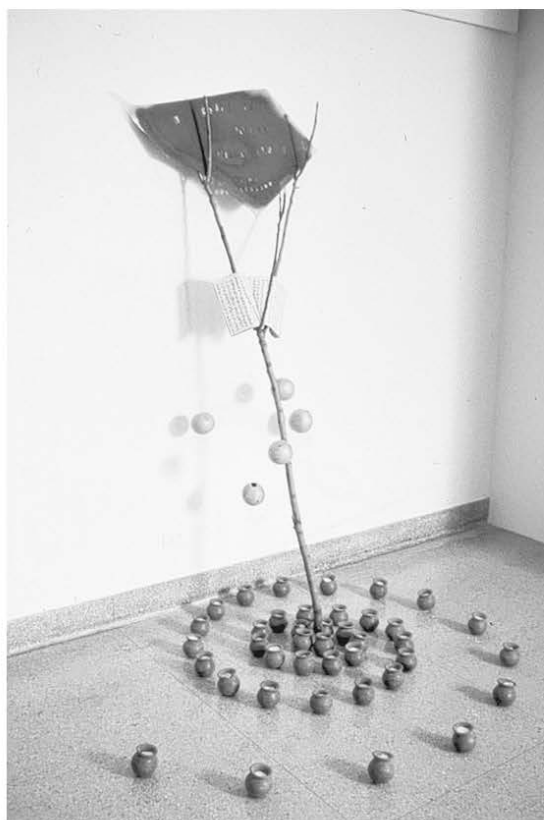
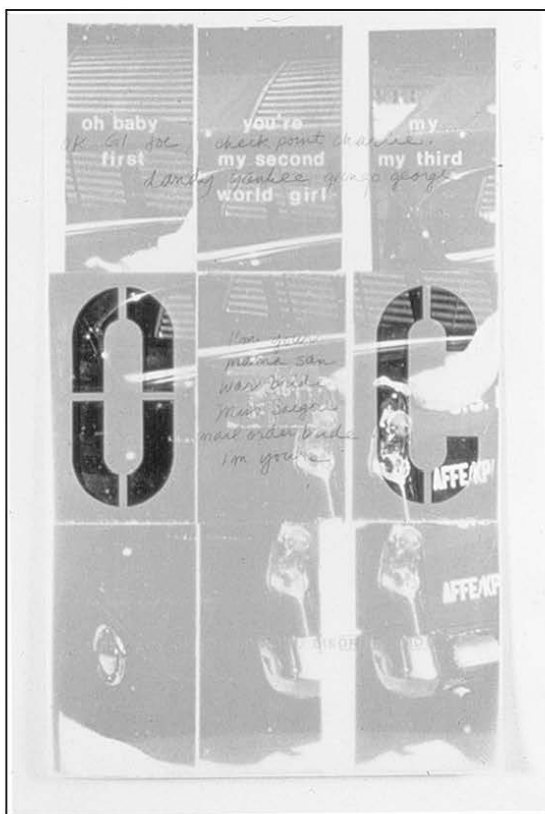
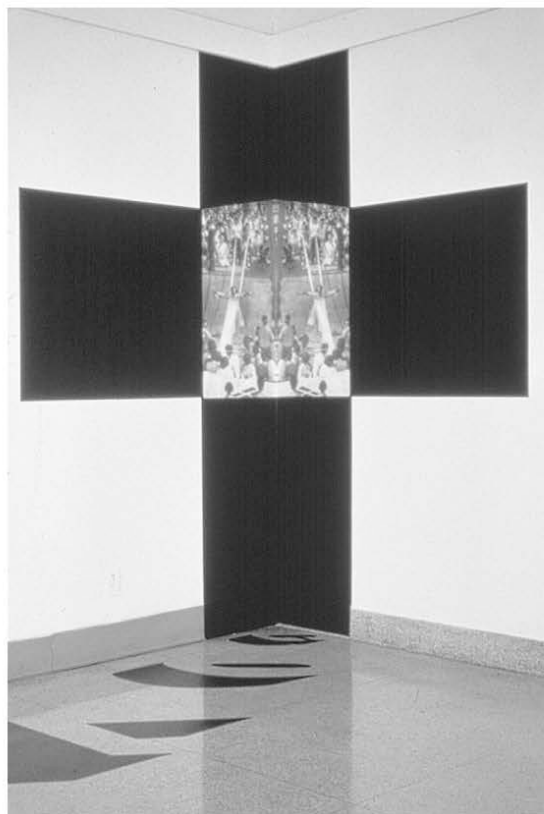
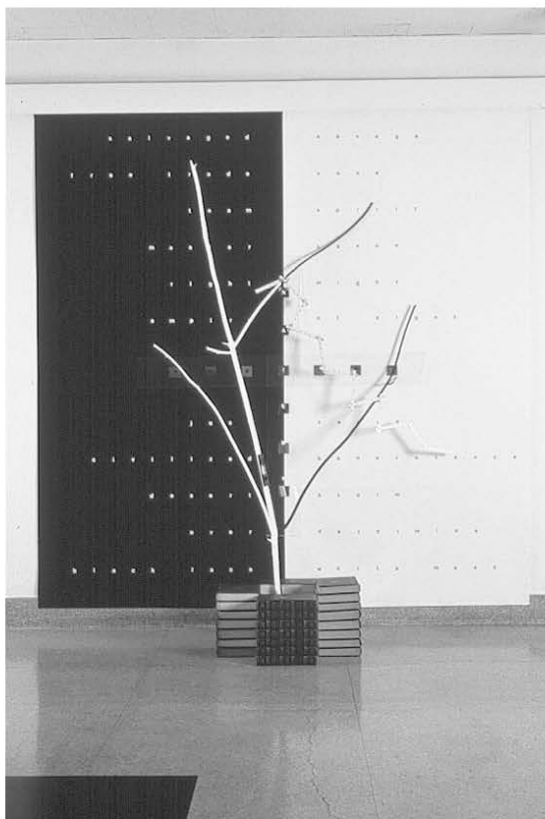


Figure 4.1.

Yong Soon Min. deCOLONIZATION. 1991. Courtesy Yong Soon Min.

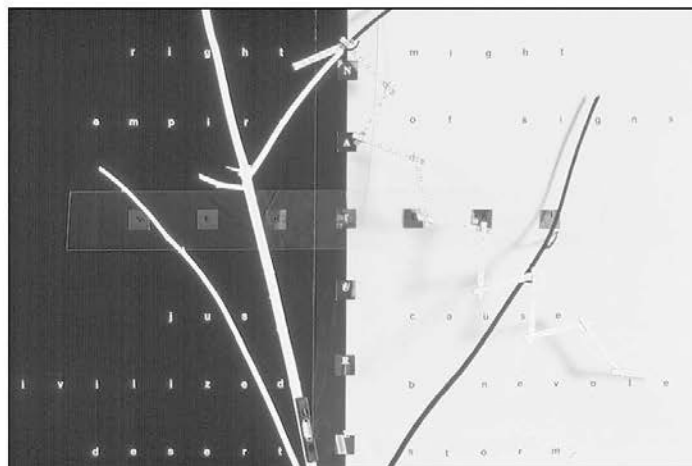


Figure 4.2.

Yong Soon Min. deCOLONIZATION. 1991. Courtesy Yong Soon Min.