

In May 2016, I ended my lease and returned to my childhood home. During a deep cleaning of the house, I cleared the long-accumulated clutter from the back balcony, revealing a patterned floor of blue, white, and grey tiles. As I walked from one end to the other, I admired this long-lost "emptiness." Looking up, I rediscovered the old bamboo laundry pole—I remember calling it tiek-ko as a child.

The tiek-ko hung close to the ceiling, marking the fruits of labor and cleaning from one end of the space to the other. Once a mundane tool, it has now retired from its duty of drying clothes to become a memento of childhood: 4.9 meters long, with a warm hue and a texture somewhere between smooth and coarse, one end slightly splintered. It has rested there for over thirty years, lying in quiet interaction with the passage of time.

Mundane yet unique, silent yet prominent... much like my mother. These days, every time I visit her, I press my face close to hers, hoping this proximity allows her to see me clearly. My cheek gently touches hers; I breathe in and out slowly with her rhythm. At first, it feels cool and tacky, but over time, it grows warm with our shared moisture. My body rises and falls silently with her frequency. "Inhale" and "Exhale" have become our language—an even, steady rhythm that signals we are both okay.

“Breathing”—a phenomenon so taken for granted that we usually don't even notice its presence. It is only when the limbs can no longer move and the tongue can no longer speak that breath becomes a precious message, revealing the state of a “living being.” I think of that retired tiek-ko; when it no longer serves any garment and remains bare, its very existence becomes the purpose, and its texture becomes its clothing.

Thus, I place this old tiek-ko across my shoulders as an extension of my body. It acts as an invisible magnifying glass, amplifying the ebb and flow of "breathing," highlighting its presence and cadence. In dialogue with accordionist Timo Kinnunen's performance and composer Antti Myllyoja's music, *Inhale/Exhale: Words Without Language*, this piece activates a three-way conversation between performer, object, and music—exploring the gathering, waxing, and waning of our shared existence.

Jia-Ling Hsu June 3, 2017