

# SUM

**Elly Cho**

Director, Writer, Producer, Sound

**Roberto Occhipinti**

Composer

**Yuri Cho**

Music Performers

Violin solo

**Roberto Occhipinti**

Music Performers

Bass

**Mikyung Park**

Key Cast

dancer

**Byungwha Kim**

Key Cast

Choreography

**Gahee Ha**

Key Cast

Custom designer

**Jung Hoon**

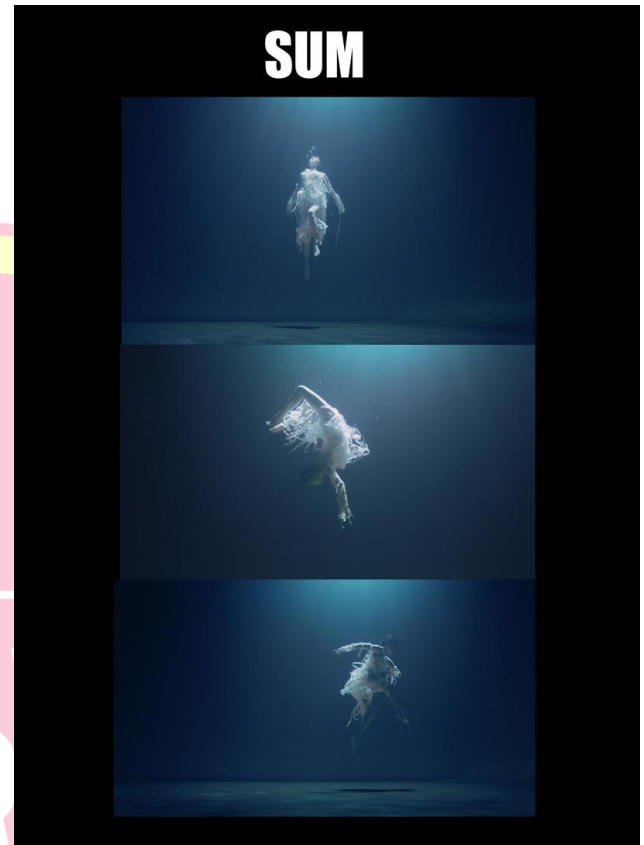
Key Cast

Director of Photography

**Jung Jung Ran**

Key Cast

Makeup Artist





## Synopsis:

*Island is a silent piece that depicts life on an Island. Using the island as a place and a metaphor for life, the film interprets life in a dance piece. Inspired by all the islands the filmmaker has lived- London, Manhattan, and Jeju Island, the film uses dance as means of communication and hope.*

## Critical Analysis

★★★★★

SUM was submitted to festivals under its English translation “Island” and, like its stranded and submerged characters, treads depths with the symbolic themes found in their movements. It ultimately serves less as an underwater dance film and more as a visual metaphor for one’s inner conflict with themselves: a dance of duality. The struggling woman in the shredded white dress, who is our primary focus of this story, plays in complete contrast to the woman in black, who dances in a more relaxed manner with her less gaudy, short-skirted attire.

Although both characters are portrayed by the same actress (Mikyung Park), the women's movements are so disparate that they are best interpreted as two separate entities, a twofold performance a la Kim Novak in *Vertigo*. Contrast will prove to be a common theme throughout this short: the very first juxtaposition of shots is a calm, comfortable breaststroke only to cut to its



uselessness with a wide shot signifying nothingness: the camera is static and refusing to even follow the direction of the swimmer's flight.

Picturesque wide shots further show the film on the woman in white, floating cradled and crouched as if to suggest her own peaceful solitude and acceptance in the depths, only for both directors to reveal via close-ups that therein lies struggle with frantic swimming upward in order reach land. She seems to succeed in her flight and continues to do so for several scenes to follow, only to be faced with the harsh and punishing cut of the editor bringing her back to the subsurface.

What happens in the interim, whether she returns of her own volition or surrenders as she was so close, can only be left to the audience's imagination; nevertheless, a breath of air is never shown. When we see this same woman, now dancing in a refined black dress, her movements are conversely more colloquial and casual.

The choreography, attributed to Byungwha Kim, would certainly suffice in contemporary dance floors. In this case, she dances just above the sea floor to unheard music as if there were no depths, with a quickness that almost makes one forget the deep sea's murky rules of gravity. Further distinguishing the woman in white is her possession of two blunt-edged sabers: their appearances alter as at different points she wields one, both, or neither of them.

At one point, she surrenders to the surface and offers the sword in a samurai-like genuflection, only to turn away and hold her palm up in gesture of shame toward the violence they wrought.



They serve as her best weapon against the powerful currents of the water – yet she allows them to float back upward to the surface in apparent surrender. In her longest duration without the weapons toward the end, the woman in white tries swimming to the front only to rely on them yet again to cut through the depths.

The score for the film, a blend of violins and bass, offers a meditative mix: whether or not the characters are in rhythm in their movements is, like their habitat, tidal. Curiously, there are two instances in which the sound of a ‘plunge’ can be heard overbearing the once meditative ambience. Are they the sabers emerging from water only to be plunged back in? Or is it the woman’s inner psyche, coming to their senses that this is her new land or island?

However one interprets it, the film demonstrates such comfort in its material that when a quick millisecond flash of the woman in white is superseded by her swimming again, one believes it not be a lapse in the editor’s judgment but rather a quick flash in its incongruous cuts to show fleeting hope of escape. Dance films have historically been ascribed as musicals, and while not synonymous, Sum does exhibit traits of the iconic Broadway Melody sequence Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen’s Singin’ in the Rain.

They obviously differ in overall exuberance and type music yet their characters face the challenges of their environment by dancing in spite of it all.

We end with a close-up of the woman in white floating above, drowned and eyes closed, which show Cho & Park’s method of demonstrating the film’s thesis duality: we can fight or fly, accept



one's drowning on the underwater island that is despair and death – or find one's footing, in the sea floor and dance on it as if were the stage. For the characters in SUM, finding one's island in the midst of the sea represents the union of two different identities.

