

KOREA

KOREA

Work by North and South Korean Artists
June 25 - July 13, 2014
Hosted by FiveMyles at 558 St. Johns Place
Brooklyn, NY 11238

Featured Artists

Chang Ho Choi
Gye Keun Choi
Ildan Choi
SunTek Chung
Ju Won Ha
Jeong Sik Ji
Jae Won Kang
In Chang Kim
Kyoung Hun Kim
Tcha Sup Kim
Young Il Kim
Kakyoung Lee
In Soo Pang
Kelvin Kyung Kun Park
Yooah Park
Chang Ri
Sungsook Setton

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Korea Art Forum
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New York, NY 10001

Designed by Minsook Nam

Curated by Heng-Gil Han
Organized by Korea Art Forum

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I. Press Release of KOREA

June 10, 2014, New York — KOREA features works by artists from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Korea has been divided for the last sixty-nine years. Koreans are a people cut in half. This exhibition collects artworks made by South and North Korean artists in one place, attempting to find a point of breakthrough for future cultural dialogue and mutual understanding between the two parts of Korea.

North Korean artists, Chang Ho Choi and Chang Ri, each have contributed an ink painting depicting the landscape of Chonji (The Heaven's Lake) at the top of Mount Peakdu, which is considered "the Sacred Mount of Revolution" in North Korea. Choi's powerful brushwork in the Molgol style, in which figures are shaped by coloring without preliminary contours, creates energetic painting of a scenic landscape, which instills the feeling of a great and strong fatherland. Ri's fine detail-oriented brushwork captures Mount Peakdu's warm, soft and intimate atmosphere, emphasizing the perception of the mountain as the birthplace of the Korean people and the mythopoeic origin of their motherland.

South Korean artists, Kakyoung Lee and Tcha Sup Kim deal with the self-referential idea of artwork as a window, a path to the real world behind the pictorial space. Through her video, Lee brings noise and the daily routines of commuters into a white-cube gallery, a sanctuary for pure art isolated from worldly life, while Kim depicts a rectangular window in his etching, referencing the modernist use of grids that led to the idea of abstractionism in the early twentieth century.

In their ink-paintings, Gye Keun Choi and In Soo Pang from Pyongyang represent the open air of a mountainous landscape from a bird's-eye view. A nomad artist from South Korea, Sungsook Setton's gestural painting in ink presents an abstract landscape that is torn in the middle, creating a metaphor for the divided country by means of literalness. Ildan Choi's *What Are You Lookin' At* (1983) is a kind of Zen painting done in a few brush strokes that the artist humor-

ously calls “dog droppings.” However, beneath the humor is an unmistakable undercurrent of emotional drang, urgency, crisis and discontent.

SunTek Chung, born and raised in the US, contributes two bronze sculptures portraying Myongbak Lee, the former president of South Korea, and Kim Jong Il, the former supreme leader of North Korea. The figures are positioned facing each other so they look about to kiss. The outcome is a humorous satire about the escalating tension between the two states of the same homogeneous culture.

In their work, Yooah Park and Kelvin Kyung Kun Park, both from South Korea, discuss issues related to the state’s fast paced economic development in the 1970s and 80s. Yooah Park’s *Music Box* (2013) is a comment on modernization’s destruction of the intimate fabric of human relationships among family members, friends and colleagues, pointing out the loss of individuality. In his experimental film *Cheonggyecheon Medley: A Dream of Iron* (2011), Kelvin Kyung Kun Park retells the industrialization of South Korea through nostalgic images of scrap metal shops and historical footages woven together with haunting sounds, producing a sense of loss, trauma and angst.

II. Plates



Kyoung Hun Kim
Ok Ryu Kwan (famous noodle house in Pyongyang), 2009.
Linoleum print, edition 1 of 5; 12 ¼ x 17 ½ in.

The print is available for tourists to purchase at Mansudae Art Studio in Pyongyang, DPRK.



Jae Won Kang
Ryeon Kwan Jong, 2009.
Linoleum print, edition 6 of 10; 12 ⅞ x 17 ⅞ in.

The print is available for tourists to purchase at Mansudae Art Studio in Pyongyang, DPRK.



Foreign Publishing Company
Arirang, date unknown.

Promotional color poster; 30 ¼ x 20 ¾ in.

“Arirang” is the monumental mass game involving hundred and thousands participants. Pyongyang used to offer it every summer, but will not be continuing it this year.



Anonymous artist
New York Times August 16, 2000, 2000.
Red ink on New York Times newspaper; 21 ¾ x 6 ½ in.

An artist made this strange work by using a New York Times report on family reunions taken place in the summer of 2000 in Korea. While the red dots associate with Chinese culture, they literally illustrate the Korean term “피눈물” (tears of blood), expressing the hard feeling of the country’s separation.



Kakyoung Lee

Window View, 2012.

Video projection on pencil-drawn window on wall, color, sound; overall dimensions of the installation:

12 ½ x 5 ½ x 10 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Ryan Lee, New York.

Through her video, Lee literally brings noise and the daily routines of commuters into the Gallery space, a sanctuary for pure art isolated from worldly life.



SunTek Chung

Me and You, You and Me, 2011.

Bronze, two pieces; each 24 x 18 x 12 in.

SunTek Chung, born and raised in the U.S., contributes two bronze sculptures portraying Myongbak Lee, the former president of South Korea, and Kim Jong Il, the former supreme leader of North Korea. The figures are positioned facing each other so they appear as if they are about to kiss. The outcome is a humorous satire about the escalating tension between the two states of the same homogeneous culture.



Gye Keun Choi
Mount Gungang, 2003.
Ink and color on mulberry paper; 27 x 50 in.

In his ink-painting, Choi from Pyongyang represents the open air of a mountainous landscape from a bird's-eye view.



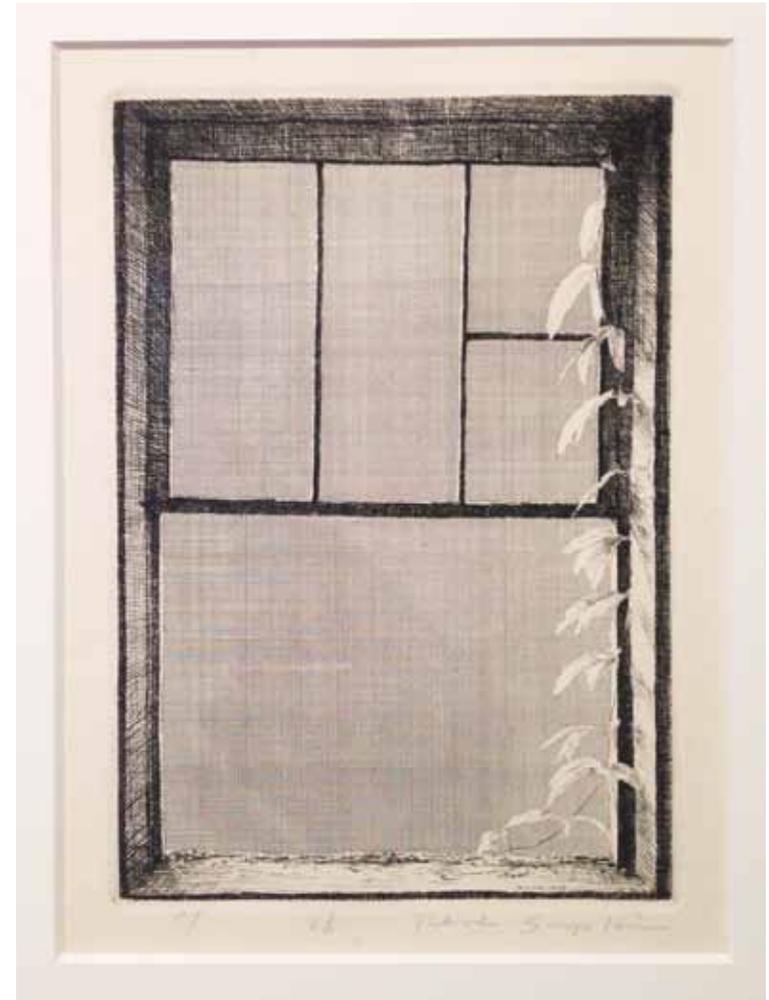
Sungsook Setton
Duality, 2005.
Ink and watercolor on paper; 22 x 18 in.

Sungsook Setton's gestural painting in ink presents an abstract landscape that is torn in the middle, creating a metaphor for the divided country by means of literalness.



In Soo Pang
Ship Sun Bong (Ten Peaks of Virtue) of the Mount Gumgang Above Cloud, 2008.
 Ink and color on mulberry paper; 33 ½ x 55 in.

Like Gye Keun Choi, In Soo Pang also depicts the open air of a mountainous landscape from a bird's-eye view in his painting. The saturated blue tone of the painting is distinctive and remarkable.



Tcha Sup Kim
Window, 1976.
 Etching on paper; 11 ¾ x 7 ¾ inches.
 Printed by the artist

Tcha Sup Kim deals with the self-referential idea of artwork as a window, a path to the real world behind the pictorial space. Kim depicts a rectangular window in his etching, referencing the modernist use of grids that led to the idea of abstractionism in the early twentieth century.



Chang Ho Choi
Mount Paekdu in May, 2008.
Ink on mulberry paper; 30 x 52 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

A North Korean artist, Chang Ho Choi paints the landscape of Chonji (The Heaven's Lake) at the top of Mount Paekdu, which is considered "the Sacred Mount of Revolution" in North Korea. Choi's powerful brushwork in the Molgol style, which shapes figures by coloring without preliminary contours, creates an energetic painting that instills the feeling of a great and strong fatherland.



Chang Ri
Shore of the Lake Chonji of Mt. Paekdu, 2005.
Ink and color on mulberry paper; 35 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 60 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.

In this painting, Chang Ri from North Korea depicts the landscape of Chonji (The Heaven's Lake) at the top of Mount Paekdu. In contrast to Chang Ho Choi's painting above, Ri's fine detail-oriented brushwork captures Mount Paekdu's warm, soft and intimate atmosphere, emphasizing the perception of the mountain as the birthplace of the Korean people and the mythopoeic origin of their motherland.



Ildan Choi
What Are You Lookin' At, 1983.
 Ink on mulberry paper; 19 1/2 x 21 1/2 in.

Ildan Choi's *What Are You Lookin' At* is a kind of Zen painting done in a few brush strokes that the artist humorously calls "dog droppings." However, beneath the humor is an unmistakable undercurrent of emotional drag, urgency, crisis and discontent.



Catalogues of the 2009 and 2011 North Korean national exhibitions (left and right) and a monograph of Young Man Jung's art (center).

The national exhibition is an annual event that recognizes outstanding artists in the country and introduces new faces of young artists to the public. It is an important opportunity for artists to build their professional careers.



Young Il Kim

All People of Korea, in the North, the South and the Overseas! To the Front of the Task of Reunification!, 2006.

Propaganda poster, color on paper; 40 x 29 3/4 in.

The Korean term “조국” [cho-guk], which is written on the woman’s shoulder, has two meanings in Korean. It can mean the fatherland, but also the DPRK. Therefore, the poster implicitly suggests a red revolution reunifying the Korean peninsula by integrating the South into the DPRK.



Kelvin Kyung Kun Park
Cheonggyecheon Medley: A Dream of Iron, 2011.
Film, color, sound; 21 min 35 sec.
Courtesy of the artist and Opsis Art, Seoul, Korea.

In his experimental film *Cheonggyecheon Medley: A Dream of Iron*, Kelvin Kyung Kun Park retells the industrialization of South Korea through nostalgic images of scrap metal shops and historical footages woven together with haunting sounds, producing a sense of loss, trauma and angst.



Ju Won Ha
Single Minded Unity of Ten Millions of the People and the Army!, 2007.
Propaganda poster, color on paper; 40 ½ x 30 ½ in.



In Chang Kim
Withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty is an Appropriate Measure of Self-defense for Our Republic!, 2007.
 Propaganda poster, color on paper; 40 ¾ x 30 ½ in.



Jeong Sik Ji
Coal Generated Electricity, the Metal Industry, and Railroad Transportation are Important for the Revitalization of the People's Economy!, 2007.
 Propaganda poster, color on paper; 30 ½ x 41 in.



Yooah Park
Music Box, 2013.

Ink on mulberry paper, powder pigment, and amalgam; dimensions variable.

Courtesy of the artist and Opsis Art, Seoul, Korea.

Yooah Park's *Music Box* is a comment on modernization's destruction of the intimate fabric of human relationships among family members, friends and colleagues, pointing out the loss of individuality.



Posters of Farmers' Lives

Artist unknown

Date estimated to be the 18th century

Posters partially representing a screen painting series in the collection of the Chosun Fine Art Museum in Pyongyang, North Korea; each 20 3/8 x 14 5/8 in.

Installation Views



Jul 6, 2014

Fluid Pot of Koreans in NYC: On “KOREA” at FiveMyles

By Candy Koh

The exhibition simply titled “KOREA,” curated by Han Heng-Gil, is a rare occasion, if not the first here, that has provided an opportunity for New Yorkers to view contemporary works by North and South Korean artists within the same space. Mr. Han has been around the New York City art scene as a curator at the Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning and, over the years, has developed relationships with Korean artists who have both passed through the cultural hub for brief residencies as well as those who have decided to stick around for a longer term. Han occasionally travels back and forth to NYC and South Korea, but the current exhibition at FiveMyles Gallery in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, is the result of a trip the curator recently made to North Korea. He was fortunate to have been able to bring back several paintings by North Korean artists, whose work are on display with those of South Korean as well as Korean American artists.

III. Reviews

Whenever I see an art exhibit as of late, my focus increasingly turns to the curatorial efforts: the way in which the selected art works are displayed as a whole, their flow as overcoming and complicating what the individual works may offer in isolated or otherwise different contexts. Sometimes a curator makes or breaks art works by their arrangements in a given space. My interest in “KOREA” lies in the clear traces of the curator’s hand. When visitors walk into the gallery, the visual divide between the two sides of the space is clear: the two dimensional works along the left side of the space are monochrome, while the works along the right side burst in a clash of vivid colors. In the middle of the floor between the two divides, bronze busts of the former president of South Korea, Lee Myung Bak, and the likewise former ruler of North Korea, Kim Jong-Il, turn around on the floor—just moving in for, or breaking away from, a kiss.

The bronze work, titled *Me and You, You and Me*, 2011, is by SunTek Chung, a born-and-raised American. Its position at the center of the space casts a curious light on the nature of the entire

show itself: was this convergence of North and South Korean art work—and a critique of North-South relations—only possible by virtue of its locale in New York City, a third-party? NYC serves as the neutral ground (arguably the DMZ in this context) in which the curator (also a “global” citizen in a sense, though South Korean by nationality) is able to articulate a possible utopia or instigate a dialogue about the relationship between two nations whose separation, Mr. Han seems to suggest, have been imposed—and still exist—artificially.

The installation of the art works indicates the artificiality of the divide between North and South (similarly applicable to East and West, but that is indeed another discussion à la Edward Said). The monochrome side of the exhibit is particularly interesting especially in context of the recent Korean monochrome “trend” as legitimized by exhibitions in “Western” spaces (Alexander Gray Associates in NYC, for one) and the climbing prices for such representative mid- and late-career artists such as (now Guggenheim veteran) Lee Ufan and Park Seo-bo. In contrast, perhaps the nearly intrusive vividness of bright colors on the right side of the gallery may even appear too cheesy and “pop.”

“KOREA,” however, does not clearly indicate which of the works are by North, South, or Korean American artists. The majestically tacit North Korean monochrome ink paintings hang next to South Korean ones, whereas the display of colorful North Korean propaganda posters from 2007 are interspersed by the equally (if not more) colorful paintings by New York-based Yooah Park and a projection of *Cheonggyecheon Medley* (2011) by Kelvin Kyung Kun Park, a UCLA and CalArts graduate, who grew up around the world. Kelvin Park’s film portrays South Korean metal shops during the nation’s time of modern development and Yooah Park’s paintings prod at questions about “couples,” but juxtaposed with the propaganda posters, all of their differences melt into a single visual image.

The inclusion of Lee Kakyoun’s video work acts as a humorous visual summary of the almost deceptive melding of the so-called national and cultural divides within the entire exhibition. The work, titled *Window View*, 2012, is the sole piece placed at a

narrow wall adjacent to the monochrome side, only visible when one turns one’s body fully toward the left-hand side. The sneakiest is the work itself: what appears from a distance as a slightly open window penciled onto the surface is actually accompanied by a video projected only onto the open crack of the drawn window. Small people move around busily outside (inside?) this fictional opening.

The best thing about the exhibition, though, is that the visual result achieved by the curatorial efforts overcomes what could have been a cheesy, ideologically propaganda-esque, and utopia-driven project about a “united” Korea. The simultaneous dissonances and resonances offered by the visual selection of works in “KOREA” reaches beyond a singular argument for a possible utopia, but rather opens a dialogue. During my visit, I overheard other visitors argue whether or not the Kelvin Park’s film projection was a North Korean film. We need fresh eyes to look at our world anew in order to change it for the better. I received some hope today that it may still be possible with art.

This essay originally appeared in “the ordinary aesthetic” at: <http://kohrea.blogspot.com/>

Jul 3, 2014
Korean Artistic Unison
By Tanya Silverman

KOREA makes for a simple, self-referential title for an exhibit combining artwork from both halves of the divided peninsula. North and South Korean works are arranged by curator Heng-Gil Han, who intends to promote “mutual understanding” and “cultural dialogue” between the two countries.

Two featured North Korean artists are Chang Ho Choi and Chang Ri, who both painted landscapes of Chonji, “Heaven’s Lake”. Standing atop the peninsula’s tallest mountain peak, the lake, Han affirms, is a common theme in the nation’s art. Indeed, North Korean folkloric accounts ascribe Chonji as the birthplace of the Korean people, not to mention Kim Jung-il.

Choi’s Chonji painting exhibits energetic “Mongol style” brush strokes of intense clouds powerfully stirring around solid rock ridges. The clouds in Ri’s landscape look lighter and calmer against the earthly scenery, serving as mystical backdrops to the centered pastel spread of blossoming flowers.

Han interprets the essence of the two Chonji paintings, as, respectively, “fatherland” and “motherland.” However, whether that’s what these North Korean painters themselves specifically intended remains undetermined, as they did not provide artist statements (only their work).

Duality is an abstract watercolor painting by Sungsook Setton. She is a South Korean born “nomad artist” who acknowledges her dual Eastern and Western influence. As such, her cohesive brush strokes—which range from round and meditated to thin and jagged—resemble the Korean peninsula. The DMZ is possibly represented through a noticeable middle-section split, perhaps cast on a fixable paper platform to offset implications of mending.

South Korean Kelvin Kyung Kun Park portrays a “feeling of the sublime in an industrial age” through his 2011 experimental film, *Cheonggyecheon Medley: A Dream of Iron*. Certain scenes show the collection of scrap metal, Han explains, referencing the era following the Korean War. Because South Korea lacks under-

ground metal reserves, and importing is expensive, mass-recycling becomes necessary.

Cheonggyecheon is a district in Seoul, Han says, a neighborhood that formerly had a high concentration of “small family metal shops... smelting facilities or blacksmith’s workshops.” Collected metal was taken there, which workers would manually melt and produce hardware or machine parts.

“Park made this film because his grandfather was one of the store owners in the Cheonggyecheon area,” Han explains as we watch the film. “He was inspired by a nightmare—he told me that almost every night he dreamed of metal shops with weird sounds.”

Replete with clangs, bangs, and buzzes, the incorporated footage slinks around the narrow city streets to depict the small-scale metalworking process. Mechanisms of massive factories geared for mass production are also documented to portray the large-scale later stages of industrial development.

Notions behind the course of North Korean industrialization are illustrated in one of the exhibit’s four featured propaganda posters. Profiles of four bright, bold workmen appear glistened in an inspiring light, with smoke stacks and piles of raw-material as backdrop.

Han explains that while the North Korean land does harbor “rich underground natural resources,” the issue lies in finding ways to mine them quickly and efficiently. He cites “Cheollima”, a post-Korean War campaign promoting increased production and industrialization, which implicitly encourages mining “raw resources in quantity and speed.” Translating “a slogan that talks about the importance of railroad connecting, energy production, coal mining and metal production,” Han expresses that the 2007 poster demonstrates how aspects of “Cheollima” prevail through current times.

Han affirms my inquiry that *KOREA* is the first time many spectators may witness North Korean art. To curious parties, he takes the opportunity to share observations about his recent trip to the country, confirms that Americans can actually travel there, and talks about how the society has a middle class that’s even growing.

Though logistical factors are very challenging because of diplomacy and finances, Han hopes, in the future, to arrange an art-

ist exchange program where North Korean artists would be able to travel to places like NYC.

“KOREA” will be on display at FiveMyles Gallery in Brooklyn, NY, until Jul. 13.

This essay originally appeared on the site of the Break Thru Radio at: <http://breakthru radio.com/#/post/?blog=72&post=39389>

Acknowledgements

FiveMyles

Located in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, FiveMyles is an exhibition and performance space where art and community connect. FiveMyles was founded and incorporated as a non-profit in 1999. Its mission is to advance public interest in innovative experimental work; to identify and exhibit the work of under-represented artists, and to engage the local community through participation in the arts.

FiveMyles is in part supported by Public Funds from the New York City Dept. of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Greenwich Collection, and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts.

Korea Art Forum

Korea Art Forum is devoted to providing channels for dialogue and mutual understanding between communities in conflicts through arts and culture.

With the vision that geopolitical, economic, or cultural conditions of the Korean peninsula and history have the potential to shift the field of contemporary art, the Korea Art Forum (KAF) is a New York based non-profit independent organization committed to presenting thought-provoking practices by artists and curators of the Korean Diaspora and others, for all audiences. KAF organizes international exhibitions of contemporary art, lectures, seminars, and other public initiatives worldwide, fostering dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences. KAF embraces experimental works of art, challenges conventional notions of art, and stimulates provoking conversations on contemporary art.

