

For Immediate Release

Minneapolis Institute of Art Explores complex array of Contemporary Korean Art in New Exhibition

MINNEAPOLIS—(Feb. 21, 2024) — The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) announced today a new exhibition of contemporary Korean Art. “The Shape of Time: Korean Art after 1989,” organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, covers five themes: Dissonance, Reinvention, Coexistence, Being Seen, and Portraying Anxiety. The exhibition will be on view in the museum’s Target Galleries from March 23 to June 23, 2024. Tickets are \$20, with additional discounts for Mia members.

The year 1989 marked a major shift in the world order, with Eastern European countries breaking away from the Soviet Union even as pro-democracy protests were crushed in China. It’s also the year the World Wide Web was invented, jumpstarting the modern era of interconnectivity. South Korea, in the wake of the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, transitioned from a long-standing military dictatorship to a legitimate democracy. An international travel ban was lifted, creating opportunities for global engagement, powerful economic growth, and cultural exchange. South Korean artists began to connect in earnest to the global art scene.



Jae Woo Oh (South Korean, born 1983), *Let's Do National Gymnastics!*, 2011, single channel video. Collection of the artist.

“The works in this serve as a snapshot of an important moment in Korean history, and global history,” said Katie Luber, Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President of Mia. “The diversity of feelings and experiences shared by these artists is profound. I hope that visitors will leave the exhibition with new insights into the ways this historical moment echoes today.”

Using a variety of mediums, including ceramics, painting, fiber, photography, lacquer, installation, metalwork, mixed media, embroidery, and video, these artists explore themes like conformity, displacement, gender and sexuality, coexistence, and dissonance, making universal connections that offer a deeper understanding of South Korea, its history, and its culture.

Dissonance

Ongoing tensions with North Korea and the effects of unprecedented economic growth have long been a part of daily life for South Koreans. The artists in this section reflect on South Korea’s past and present, the foundations of Korean society, and the paradoxes of a divided Korea. Dissonance abounds in works such as Hayoun Kwon’s single-channel video *489 years* (2016). The viewer occupies the role of a soldier undertaking a daylong patrol of the demilitarized zone (DMZ), a strip of land separating North and South Korea along the 38th parallel. The work’s title, *489 Years*, references the amount of time experts anticipate it would take to clear the one million mines in the area. Yet in the 11-minute single-channel video, the DMZ appears lush and filled with wildlife, the destructive potential of the area hidden.

Reinvention

In the 1990s, South Korean artists began re-engaging with traditional arts and culture, infusing long-established aesthetics with a contemporary sensibility. Some of them employ centuries-old hand processes, materials, and narratives. All of them re-examine the past, addressing notions of resilience and transformation that are at once specific to their experiences and transcend geographical boundaries. Suki Seokyeong KANG’s vibrantly woven mats from 2018 and 2019, made to be used in the *Chunaengmu* royal dance, are inspired by *Hwamunseok*, a handcrafted straw mat tradition dating to the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392). These large-scale, abstracted weavings—made with *Hwamunseok* thread, painted steel, and leather scraps—feature vibrant colors and abstract patterns that bridge contemporary practice with historic craft traditions.

Coexistence

As Korea participated in a new level of exchange, artists embraced the coexistence of new ideas and existing Korean values and artistic traditions, imbuing them with new meaning. Yoo Eui-jeong’s *Treasures of Daily Life* (2018) expresses this fusion of ideas in his series of recognizable corporate logos for companies including McDonald’s, Louis Vuitton, and Hello Kitty. Created in valuable materials such as ceramic, gold, and porcelain and presented as dishes served at a banquet, these cultural icons of today are presented as valuable treasures for the future.

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Being Seen

The artworks on view in this section reflect the reality of the present and express hope for the future. Challenging patriarchal power structures and cultural standards, the artists center experiences that are often marginalized, silenced, or erased. Ultimately, they celebrate their resilience and that of their communities. *An Attack by Green Horns*, by Sang-hee Yun, is a pair of lacquered and gold dagger-like spikes worn on the front torso and back shoulder, protruding like horns. Drawing on experiences from her childhood, Yun created these spikes as a form of protection for the wearer, simultaneously ornate and ominous.

Portraying Anxiety

Responding to the tensions of being part of a collective and expressing individual identities, artists have turned to alternative ways of approaching, discussing, and challenging social mores. The works in this section raise questions about group participation and the acts of looking and being looked at, while touching on larger societal challenges in Korea and elsewhere. In *Let's do National Gymnastics*, Oh Jaewoo fuses nostalgia and the messaging of collectivity and its continued impact on South Korean society. In this ten-minute, single-channel video, Oh evokes the compulsory exercise program prevalent in Korean schools between 1977 and 1999. The video is set to the militaristic beat of the Korean National Stretch Anthem in a commentary on the ubiquitous pressure to conform and the associated anxiety pervasive across Korean culture.

Works from Mia's permanent collection will be added to the exhibition in Minneapolis, including Do Ho Suh's *Some/One*, a 2005 sculpture based on a coat of traditional armor. Composed from thousands of polished military dog tags, the work juxtaposes the collective (represented by the armored sculpture) with the individual (symbolized by the dog tags, each representing a single soldier). Also featured is a selection from Byron Kim's ongoing *Synecdoche* portraiture project, currently comprised of more than 400 panels, each approximating the skin color of a person Kim has met.

"The artworks in this exhibition respond to South Korea's complex history and culture, which have been marked by the division of a country, political upheaval, and economic growth, all within a few short decades," said Leslie Ureña, Associate Curator of Global Contemporary Art. "The exhibition has gathered artists who have made dynamic works that are deeply imbued with their shared artistic and social contexts. They invite us to consider the experience of exploring the past, present, and potential future."

"The Shape of Time: Korean Art after 1989" is organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with major sponsorship from Wells Fargo, and media sponsorship from the Star Tribune. Major support for this exhibition is provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

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About the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Home to more than 100,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

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