transPOP: KOREA VIETNAM REMIX

Dec 6, 2008–Mar 15, 2009

NGUYEN MANH HUNG: *BUILDING*, 2004, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

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Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

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transPOP:

KOREA VIETNAM REMIX

offers a rare opportunity to view cutting-edge contemporary art by 16 critically acclaimed artists from Vietnam, Korea and their respective diasporas in the US. The featured artworks explore interconnections between Vietnam and Korea, including the intersections of history, trauma and contemporary popular culture.

Though the interactions between Vietnam and Korea span centuries, *transPOP* focuses on their shared history of a highly accelerated modernization process with militarized roots and the Cold War. During the Vietnam War, the Republic of Korea was the second largest foreign military and economic presence in Vietnam behind the US, with over 300,000 combat forces and approximately 24,000 skilled workers in exchange for substantial US aid. The financial boon from the involvement in the war played a catalytic role in the development of Korea, laying the foundation for what is now the world's 12th largest economy. The legacy of the Cold War is evident in the large Korean and Vietnamese diasporic communities in the US. In Vietnam, this accelerated modernity is evident in the breakneck speed of current economic development, as well as its entry into the World Trade Organization.

Since the late 90s, Vietnam and Korea have witnessed a significant development of popular culture, fostering greater cultural proximity locally and abroad. A global phenomenon known as the "Korean Wave" has popularized Korean television dramas, pop stars, music, films and fashion throughout East, Southeast Asia and beyond since the new millennium. As part of a growing inter-Asian flow of pop culture, the Korean Wave has also been influential in Vietnam, spurring numerous joint efforts between the two countries. "V-Pop" and "Viet Wave," or Vietnamese pop music and film, have created an explosion of pop stars and media products in Vietnam and overseas. The triangulated relationship between Korea, Vietnam and the US forged through the Vietnam War is also manifest in the increased cross-pollination of cultural influence and exchange.

In terms of the exhibition title, the "trans" refers to key themes: translation, transnationalism, transgression while the "remix" refers to the prevalent pop-cultural practice for creating new possibilities in the act of appropriation and reconsideration. After all, the exhibition concept was conceived during a lunch of *budae jigae* (translated as army base stew—a Korean goulash-like holdover from the impoverished Korean War days when surplus canned meat such as Spam ruled), a form of culinary remix. This project reflects our interest in the dynamic pulse of transnational and inter-Asian cultural flows as well as the twinned forces of media and migration.

The exhibition premiered at ARKO Art Center in Seoul, December 2007 and has since traveled to Sàn Art in conjunction with Galerie Quynh in Ho Chi Minh City (August 2008) and to the University Art Gallery at UC Irvine (October 2008). Select exhibition artists were invited to participate in month-long summer residencies in Seoul (2007) and Ho Chi Minh City (2008) to create and exhibit new works. The multidisciplinary approach to the exhibition is reflected in the various programs, including symposia, which are integrated with the exhibition, providing a mutual context for each. Given that multifaceted and varied sources inform the exhibition, a resource room has also been created that invites viewers to browse through related fiction and nonfiction books and articles, a chronology of significant events from the Cold War era to the present, as well as to listen to a selection of Korean and Vietnamese songs that can be considered touchstones for this period.

—Viet Le and Yong Soon Min

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BAE YOUNG WHAN (b. 1969, Seoul; based in Korea. BFA, Oriental painting, Hongik University, Seoul) has been gaining prominence since the mid-90s with works in a broad range of media and processes. He is part of a new generation of artists whose work diverges from the didacticism of the *Minjungmisool* (people's art) movement. His work reveals an ongoing interest in the vernacular aesthetics of pop songs and popular culture with mundane yet unexpected materials such as common digestion pills, plastic flowers and broken glass from soju bottles. He has exhibited widely in Korea including solo shows at the PKM gallery, Kumho Museum, Namu Gallery, Ilju Art House and Alternative Space Pool.

MIN HWA CHOI CHUL-HWAN (b. 1954, Seoul; based in Korea. painting, Hongik University) first came to prominence in association with the Minjung movement, a cultural and political movement struggling for socio-political change that peaked during the mid- to late 80s. Min Hwa Choi Chul-Hwan's paintings feature contemporary youth and youth culture derived from television and magazine depictions; figures and gestures are obsessively reworked and remixed to evoke a sense of unsettling posturing and emotional paralysis. His solo shows in Korea include exhibitions at Munhwa Ilbo Gallery, Alternative Space Pool, Seonam Museum, Gongpyeong Art Center and Hansun Gallery.

TIFFANY CHUNG (b. 1969, Danang; based in Vietnam; BFA, California State University, Long Beach; MFA, UC Santa Barbara) is a Vietnamese-American artist based in Saigon. Chung's pastiche installations utilizes a pop sensibility to capture the essence of the vibrant city life of an increasingly urban–and urbane–Vietnam: a candy-colored utopia, a hyper real fantasy. Her solo exhibitions include *Play*, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, NY; *wonderland*, Galerie Quynh; *Momentum*, Mai's Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City; *Fifteen Seconds of Fame* at the Sugarless Factory, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan; and *Beyond Soft Air and Cotton Candy*, LMan Gallery, L.A.

SOWON KWON (b. 1963, Seoul; based in the US; BA, UC Berkeley; MFA, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn) *dongghap* (same birth year in Korean) prints and drawings are part of an ongoing series of self-portraits that chart historical and political events constellated by the year of her birth and gasoline. She has had solo exhibitions at The Kitchen, Berkeley Art Museum; and The Whitney Museum at Philip Morris (now Altria).

Since 2001 the collaborative team **LIN + LAM (LANA LIN + H. LAN THAO LAM)** (b. Taiwan and Vietnam respectively; based in US. Lam: MFA, CalArts; Lin: MFA, Bard College) have produced interdisciplinary projects that examine the ramifications of the past on the current socio-political moment. Their work has been exhibited at venues including the MoMA; the Whitney Museum; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions; and the Arte Nuevo InteractivA'07 Biennial, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico.

AN-MY LÊ (b. 1960, Saigon; based in US; MFA, photography, Yale University) staged photographic images and films draw parallels between the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, and explores the shifting and amorphous boundaries between fact and fantasy, politics and play, horror and banality. Her solo exhibitions include *New Photography 13*, MoMA; *Small Wars*, PS1 Contemporary Art Center/MoMA, among others.

DINH Q. LÊ'S (b. 1968, Ha-Tien; based Vietnam; BA, UC Santa Barbara; MFA, School of Visual Arts, New York) video installation juxtaposes military helicopters with interviews and images of the Hai-Danh "peace" helicopter, built by a Quixotic Vietnamese farmer for agricultural use. Lê has had numerous solo exhibitions including shows at the Bellevue Arts Museum, WA; Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica; Asia Society, NY; University Art Museum, Santa Barbara; Photology, Milan; 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong; and the Houston Center for Photography, TX. He is also the director of Sàn Art, a non-profit independent art space in Ho Chi Minh City.

LEE YONG-BAEK (b. 1966, Gimpo; based in Korea. Fine Art, Hongik University; painting and sculpture, Stattliche Akademie der bildende Kunste, Stuttgart, Germany) is known for large-scale, fabricated sculptures and installations that often involve mechanically driven components as well as highly technical and digitally processed videos and performances. He is represented by two video installations that obliquely reference the residual, anxiety-laden affects of Korea's military legacy as well as economic and social displacements in the recent history of modernity. He has had solo shows at Arario Gallery, Beijing; +Gallery, Nagoya, Japan; Alternative Space Loop, Seoul; Kuandu Museum of Fine Art, Taipei; Sungkok Museum, Seoul; Gallery Zehentscheuer, Munsingen, Germany; and Sonamu Gallery, Seoul.

SANDRINE LLOUQUET (b. 1975, Montpellier, France; based in Vietnam; diasporic artist. Fine Art University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; BFA, EPIAR [International Pilot School of Art and Research] Villa Arson, Nice, France) presents images that are at once familiar and unsettling. Her drawings and animations point at the complexities of memory and representation, jouissance and despair. In the past decade, she has participated in several international exhibitions and events in Asia and Europe. Since 2000, in conjunction with her personal artwork, she has collaborated with Bertrand Peret to develop and promote contemporary art in Vietnam, organizing Wonderful District projects in Vietnam and abroad.

TRAN LUONG (b. 1960, Hanoi; based in Vietnam. BFA, Hanoi Fine Arts Institute) is an artist and curator based in Hanoi. Luong was originally part of the Gang of Five, an influential avant-garde group of painters who came to international attention in the mid-90s. His site-specific installation is intended as a critique of propaganda as well as of popular culture in Vietnam and Korea, in which harsh socio-economic realities and political policies are camouflaged by consumerism. He has had solo exhibitions at numerous international venues including the Vietnamese Cultural House, Paris; Art In General, NY; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University; and the Civitella Ranieri Center, Umbria, Italy, among others.

LY HOANG LY (b. 1975, Saigon; based in Vietnam) is a poet, performance and visual artist whose works in the exhibition are informed by memories of Vietnam War. She has had exhibitions in Vietnam, Thailand, Korea, Japan, the US and Germany, including shows at the Dahlem Museum, Berlin; National Gallery, Bangkok; Chiang Mai Art Museum, Chiang Mai; Blue Space Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City; Zen Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City; Vietnam Contemporary Art Center, Hanoi; and 4th Asiatopia, Bangkok/Chiang Mai, among others.

NGUYEN MANH HUNG (b. 1976, Hanoi; based in Vietnam. BFA, Hanoi Fine Arts Institute) creates surreal landscapes that playfully deal with issues of globalization, industrialization, urbanization and Vietnam's rapidly changing socio-economic and cultural terrain. Hung has particiapted in numerous group exhibitions and live performances including the *Experimental Music and Video Show*, Goethe Institute, Hanoi; *Out of Context*, Huntington Beach Art Center, CA; and *Room-Zoom*, Nha San Anh Duc, Hanoi, among others.

OH YONGSEOK'S (b. 1976, Seoul; based in Korea. BFA, painting, University of Suwon) video landscape montages consist of fragments culled from Asian films and dramas; a commentary on modernity and shifts in temporality within global capitalism. Oh has had a solo show at Alternative Space Pool, Seoul and participated in exhibitions and media art festivals internationally including the Asia Video Art Conference, Tokyo and Bandung, China; Incheon Media Art Festival, Incheon, Korea; *Crystallization of Time*, MAAP, Singapore; Media Art Biennale at Seoul Museum of Art; Shanghai Biennale; *Seforma*, Yonsei University and Art Center Nabi, Seoul.

AREA PARK'S (b. 1971, Pusan; based in Korea. BA, Kyung-il University, Taegu; MFA, Chung-ang University, Seoul) photographs complicate the distinctions between documentary and more formal approaches to the medium to represent the political undercurrents in the cityscape of Seoul. He has had solo shows in Seoul at the Chohung Gallery and the Kumho Museum of Art. His group exhibitions include *In & Out: Korea–Japan Young Artists*, Konica Plaza, Tokyo; *Standing Point*, Back Sang Memorial Hall, Seoul; *From the East*, Morisita Gallery, Kyoto; and the Pinyao International Photography Festival in China, among others.

SONG SANGHEE'S (b. 1970, Seoul; based in Korea. BFA, MFA, painting, Ewha Women's University, Seoul) photographs and video in the exhibition address the intersection of gender and history in representations of Korean modernity. She has had solo shows at Insa Art Center, Seoul; Freespace PRAHA, Sapporo; Alternative Space Pool, Seoul; Gallery ICON, Seoul. Her group exhibitions include *Global Feminisms*, Brooklyn Museum of Art; *Artspectrum 2006*, Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; and *Stepping Across Borders*, among others. Song has also participated in biennales in Sao Paulo, Busan and Gwangju.

SOON-MI YOO'S (b. 1962, Seoul; based in the US; MA, German literature, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea; MFA, photography, Massachusetts College of Art) experimental video is a poetic, haunting exploration of the aftermath of atrocities committed by Korean soldiers in a Vietnamese village during the Vietnam War. Yoo has screened work at the London Film Festival, Images Festival, Oberhausen Film Festival, Rotterdam Film Festival, New York Film Festival, Pacific Film Archive, Flaherty Seminar, Academie Schloss Solitude, Seattle International Film Festival, Hawaii International Film Festival, and the Cinema du Reel Film Festival at the Centre Georges Pompidou.

AREA PARK, *THREE SECOND–FROZEN DEFECTORS FROM NORTH KOREA*, 2005, COLOR PHOTOGRAPH

TIFFANY CHUNG, *BUBBLE DOUBLE BAZOOKA*, 2005, C-PRINT

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Both Viet Le and Yong Soon Min are US–based artists and independent curators.

VIET LE has exhibited at Sàn Art, Vietnam; the Banff Centre, Canada; and Cape Museum of Art, US; among other venues. Le curated the *Charlie Don't Surf!* exhibition at the International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (Centre A Gallery) in Vancouver. He received his MFA from UC Irvine and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Southern California in American studies and ethnicity.He was part of the curatorial team for *humor us*, a large-scale exhibition/event series for the Los Angeles Municipal Gallery at Barnsdall Art Park.

YONG SOON MIN'S recent exhibitions include the 10th Havana Bienal, Smith College Museum, 7th Gwangju Biennale and the 3rd Guangzhou Triennial. Her curatorial projects in Korea include *THERE: Sites of Korean Diaspora*, an exhibition of the 2002 Gwangju Biennale framed around five international cities that featured 24 artists and a program of 34 film and video works. She has an MFA from UC Berkeley and is currently a professor of studio art at UC Irvine.

RELATED PUBLIC PROGRAMS

CURATOR'S TOUR: *TRANSPOP: KOREA VIETNAM REMIX*
Sat, Jan 31, 2009, 2 pm // Galleries // FREE w/ gallery admission

Join curators Viet Le and Yong Soon Min for a guided tour of the exhibition.

SYMPOSIUM
Sat, Feb 14, 2009 // 1:30–5 pm // FREE
UC Berkeley Institute for East Asian Studies & Center for Korean Studies
(2223 Fulton Street, 6th Fl, Berkeley, CA)

YBCA and UC Berkeley's Institute for East Asian Studies/Southeast Asian Studies and Center for Korean Studies host a symposium that brings together leading scholars, artists, media producers and activists to explore the intersections of contemporary popular culture—including *hallyu* and "V-pop"—and the legacies of historical trauma in Korea, Vietnam and their diasporas.

transPOP: Timeline

1950—The Korean War begins. Korea is officially divided into North and South Korea along the 38th parallel.

1953—The Korean War is halted in a ceasefire that has remained in force until now.

1954—Geneva Convention ends French colonial rule in Vietnam and temporarily partitions the country into North and South along the 17th parallel.

1960—A student uprising begins the April Revolution, which overthrows the autocratic First Republic of South Korea. Syngman Rhee resigns and goes into exile.

1961—Military forces, headed by General Park Chung Hee, overthrow the Second Republic of South Korea in what is known as the Glorious Revolution.

1962—First US combat missions against the North Vietnamese.

1965—Republic of Korea commits troops to Vietnam in alliance with the US.

1969—First popular song recorded about a returning Korean soldier from Vietnam, *Sergeant Kim*, by Kim Chu Ja.

1973—R.O.K. officially withdraws combat forces from Vietnam. Over 325,000 Korean soldiers are deployed in Vietnam; 5,000 or 1.6% of the Korean forces lose their lives in this war (compared to 1.7% casualty rate for US soldiers).

1975—North Vietnamese take over Saigon. North and South are reunified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

1979—South Korean President Park Chung Hee is assassinated by his intelligence chief.

1980—The Gwangju Uprising in South Korea. Martial Law is declared throughout the nation. The city of Gwangju becomes a battleground between dissenters and the Armed Forces.

1980s—Artists such as Nam June Paik, whose video installations garner international critical attention, typify the expansion of postmodern art in South Korea. The *Minjung Misul* (populist art) movement reaches a peak.

1983—*White War*, a novel by Ahn Junghyo about a man who recounts surviving both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, is published to popular acclaim in South Korea.

1986—The Vietnamese government implements free market reforms, called *Đoi Moi* (renovation). Private ownership is encouraged in commerce, industries and agriculture.

1988—24th Olympic Games are held in Seoul.

1989—France-based Thúy Nga Productions variety show video series *Paris By Night* debuts. Headquarters are soon moved to Orange County, California.

1992—South Korea normalizes diplomatic relations with Vietnam; the film *White Badge*, directed by Ji-yeong Jeong, based on Ahn Junghyo's 1983 novel, is released.

1994—Renowned Korean writer and Vietnam War veteran Hwang Suk-Young's *The Shadow of Arms* (Cornell University Press) is released in the US. Originally published in two volumes (1985/1988) as *Mugi ui Kunul* by Hyongsong-sa, it is the first novel in Korea to expose the atrocities and corruption of the Allied war effort, clearly sympathizing with the cause of the National Liberation Front.

1995—US restores diplomatic ties with Vietnam.

1997—IMF Crisis, or Asian Economic Crisis, severely impacts South Korea; Korean TV dramas begin broadcasting in Vietnam.

1998—South Korea begins to lift restrictions on Japanese cultural imports such as comic books, magazines and movies. South Korean Cultural Ministry begins to carry out plan to build the domestic culture industry.

1998—South Korean actor Jang Dong Gun makes his first trip to Vietnam to promote TV drama and is mobbed by thousands of women at the Hanoi airport.

1999—Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*, is coined by Chinese journalists to describe the growing popularity of South Koreans and South Korean goods in China, beginning with the export of Korean pop music and TV dramas such as *Jewel in the Palace* and *Winter Sonata*.

2000—Korean daily newspaper, *Hangyore Shinmun*, and its weekly magazine, *Hangyore 21*, publish first investigative reports of atrocities committed by South Korean troops during the American war in Vietnam.

2001—Jang Dong Gun is hired by Seoul-based manufacturer Daewoo Electronics as its Vietnam spokesperson.

2002—The Korea Culture and Content Agency is established to encourage exports.

2003—Vietnam's highest grossing domestic film, *Gái Nhay* (*Bar Girls*) by Lê Hoàng, marks the beginning of a new wave of Vietnamese "propatainent" film—a mix of propaganda and entertainment; South Korean entertainment industry jumps from $8.5 billion in 1999 to $43.5 billion.

2004—Vietnamese pop star My Tâm participates in the Asia Song Festival in Seoul; the festival is the largest culture and music event in Asia.

2005—*Bride of Hanoi* is released, a two-part Korean drama that was filmed to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the end of the American War in Vietnam. It tells the story of a Korean doctor who goes to Vietnam and falls in love with a half-Korean, half-Vietnamese woman.

2006—Vietnam joins the World Trade Organization (WTO); Vietnamese singer My Tâm is hired by a Korean recording company to produce a hip-hop and R&B album in collaboration with six Korean musicians and six Vietnamese musicians.

2006—Over 10,000 Vietnamese women marry South Korean men, mostly through marriage brokers, a business that started in the late 1990s. Most women cite Korean television dramas as being their main source of knowledge about Korea.

2007—*Golden Bride*—a popular television drama with renowned Vietnamese actress, Nhu' Quynh in the role as mother of Jin Joo, a half-Korean, half-Vietnamese girl who marries a Korean man in order to look for her biological father—adds 20 episodes to its original run of 50 due to its high TV ratings. Lee Young-ah and Song Chang-eui, lead actors in *Golden Bride*, meet Vietnamese families at an event called Vietnam & Korea Family Day, sponsored by the Vietnamese Embassy.