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Koreans, Vietnamese Share History and Art



Korean artist Choi Min-hwa is known for his socio-political paintings such as "Lying on Fascism."

By Cathy Rose A. Garcia
Staff Reporter

Contemporary Korean and Vietnamese art come together in an engaging and fresh mix of history and pop culture, through an exhibition "transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix" at the Arko Art Center.

"transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix," featuring works of 16 artists from Korea, Vietnam and the United States, opens on Dec. 18 and runs through Feb. 28.

The idea for the exhibition exploring the interconnection between Korea and Vietnam was formed while the two U.S.-based curators Min Yong-soon and Viet Le were dining in Koreatown in Los Angeles. Min and Le, who are also artists, realized their common interest in the history and contemporary pop culture of their respective native countries.

"transPop' is an attempt to create a new word, combining transnational and pop. It tries to convey our interest in examining the transnational flow of culture. Hallyu is a very strong force in this transnational flow of culture. ... 'Korea and Vietnam Remix' is taken from hip-hop, where you mix the music and take some of the elements and create something new," Min said, in a meeting with reporters Wednesday.

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Vietnamese artist Manh Hung Nguyen creates surreal landscapes playfully dealing with global issues, as seen in this work "Go to Market."

Min, who was born in Korea but moved to the U.S. in 1960 when she was only seven years old, said the exhibit is part of her on-going quest to learn more about her connection to Korea. "The exhibition reflects my two areas of interest: history and popular culture. I'm a huge fan and addicted to TV dramas. ... And the particular mix of U.S., Korea and Vietnam comes from the background of the Korean involvement in the Vietnam War. The war becomes the historical movement that influences the exhibition," she said.

During the Vietnam War, Korea was the second-largest foreign military and economic presence in the country, after the United States. It is also well known that Korea's economy received a big boost from its participation in the Vietnam War. However, the historical and cultural ties between the two countries are not often explored.

Le's own experience as a child when his family escaped from Ho Chi Minh by boat after the Vietnam War, led to his interest in "historical trauma, pop culture and modernization."

"As an artist, I am interested in what is remembered and what is forgotten. Some of that is represented through pop culture, movies and propaganda. Both Korea and Vietnam have gone through rapid modernization progress. ... Modernization can also be traumatic and violent," Le said.

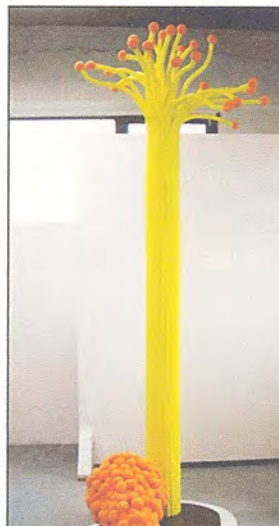
Both countries share common experiences in war, and subsequent rapid modernization, Korea in the 1980s and Vietnam in the 1990s. In the 1990s, the presence of many Korean companies in Vietnam led to the influx of Korean dramas, which became widely popular and even influenced the development of Vietnam's own pop culture.

>Tiffany Chung, a Vietnamese-American artist based in Hanoi, will show a video about Vietnamese pop star Lam Truong. "He is the first Vietnamese pop icon. The video shows him and how Vietnamese are starting to idolize and worship pop stars. This is an influence of the Korean Wave. He does a lot of covers of famous Korean pop songs. This isn't just about him, but also about the new Asian identity," Chung said.

During the exhibition, there is a lounge where visitors can read books and other materials on the project, listen to K-pop and V-pop music and watch Korean and Vietnamese videos.

On Jan. 18 and 19, there will be a symposium focusing on "transnational exchanges and the intersections of history, trauma and popular culture" and with experts from Korea, Australia, Japan, Vietnam and the U.S.

After Seoul, Min said the exhibit will be shown



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at the University of California Irvine University Art Gallery in October, and Verba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco in November.



Vietnamese-American artist Tiffany Chung's "Sugarcane-Kumquat Mixed Juice" is one of works displayed at "transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix," which opens Dec. 18 at Arko Art Center.

While they would love to bring the exhibition to Vietnam, the curators admit it is difficult but are still trying to work it out.

Tickets are 2,000 won for adults and 1,000 won for children and students. Visit www.arko.or.kr or call (02) 760-4724.

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