

Exhibition Calendar

Country City
 60 days from / /

Exhibition Reviews

transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix

12.18 - 2.29

[Arko Art Center](#), Seoulby [Park Soo-mee](#)

In many ways *transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix* - an exhibition featuring 16 artists from Korea, Vietnam and the United States - takes an amusing path to exploring the emotional residue shared by three nations. It digs into local pop culture as a symbol of loss and desire born of historical traditions, and of the confusion and repulsion artists face in the changing states of their societies. As a means to express these complex emotions, the artists often borrow a dose of sentimentalism from pop culture.

One of the most poignant works comes from Bae Young-whan, who is known for his use of banal everyday objects such as digestive tablets, plastic flowers and broken pieces of *soju* (cheap Korean liquor) bottles as sources for lyrics of sad love songs or as actual materials to express grand ideas on his 'canvases'. In this exhibition he presents *Revolution*, a stencil of flower on paper accompanied by the word 'revolution' in Korean and English, much like an illustrated dictionary. The central idea of the work is self-pity, an element common in Korean TV dramas and music videos. On a deeper level, however, the notion of self-pity is also political in the Korean context, because it reflects a means by which Koreans came to recognize and acknowledge their traumatic past, ridden with the memories of war and colonization.

The exhibition also mimics a function of pop culture in society in that it illustrates the artists' efforts to seek hope in their present conditions. The point clearly gets across. The artists mark their political positions differently with directness, sarcasm or plain earnestness. Yet none of the works are devoid of hope - a tendency perhaps intrinsic to human nature.

For decades, Vietnam and Korea were enemies. South Korea dispatched 320,000 troops to fight alongside American and South Vietnamese soldiers in the Vietnam War. Today, the tables are turned: trendsetting pop stars, singers and television actors from Korea dictate everything from cosmetic brands to what Vietnamese teens wear, eat and watch. On a simpler note, Vietnam considers Korea an economic role model, and Korea sees Vietnam as target for exporting its 'refined' cultural products. But *transPOP* also suggests that this cross-cultural trend may have at its source deeper connections, such as shared Confucius values.

Indeed throughout the exhibition similar signs of confusion and hope pervade the subjects of many works dealing with the dilemmas of contemporary Vietnam. In *Lam Troung*, Tiffany Chung reflects an idealized vision of modernity by taking glamorous music-video footage of the famous Vietnamese pop star Lam Truong on stage and paralleling it with men in shabby shirts and jeans on bicycles who hang around the city's streets. Nguyen Manh Hung as well playfully delves into socio-economic aspects of Vietnam's rapid urbanization.

The show seeks to find the cultural ties between Korea and Vietnam through their common history of war and colonization. And by including the U.S.-based diasporic communities of the two nations, the exhibition



Bae Young-whan, *Revolution*, 1999
Mixed-media installation



Tiffany Chung, *Sugarcane-Kumquat Mixed Juice*, 2007
Mixed media, 200 x 50 x 70cm



Ding Q. Le, *The Farmers and the Helicopters*, 2007
Three-channel video installation



Lin+Lam (Lina Lin + Lanthao Lam), *Unidentified Vietnam*, 2001 (ongoing)

examines how the history of trauma is tolerated, shared and healed through art.

Mixed media installation

2008.02.19



Sandrine Llouquet , 2005
Mixed media installation (detail)