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YONG SOON MIN
8518 Saturn St
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Where Pop Meets Politics

Contemporary art exhibit merges Korea and Vietnam

> By Michelle Woo

1. "Lying on Fascism" by Min-Hwa Choi, oil on canvas, 2005
2. "Go To Market" by Manh Hung Nguyen, acrylic on canvas, 2004
3. "Building" Manh Hung Nguyen, acrylic on canvas, 2004
4. "Double Bubble Bazooka" by Tiffany Chung, C-prints, 2005
5. "Unidentified Vietnam" by Lin + Lam, multimedia installation, 2003



DURING an intellectual discussion over an apt meal of *budae jjigae* (war stew), Yong Soon Min and Either Viet Le came up with the idea. They would explore the historical interconnections between their homelands — Korea and Vietnam, respectively — through the lens of contemporary art.

What they brought to life is a fascinating exhibit called "transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix," which features eye-popping pieces by 16 critically acclaimed artists from Korea, Vietnam and their respective diasporas in the United States. It runs at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco through March 15.

As the Korean War in the United States has become known as the Forgotten War, the war in Vietnam can be considered similarly in Korea, says Min, a professor of studio art at the University of California, Irvine. During the Vietnam conflict, the Republic of Korea had the second largest foreign military and economic presence in Vietnam behind the United States, with more than 300,000 combat forces and about 24,000 skilled workers stationed there in exchange for substantial U.S. aid.

Subsequently, each country often references the other in pop culture. Vietnam got to experience the "Korean Wave" starting in the late '90s, as it was one of the first countries in Southeast Asia to import Korean dramas.

The exhibition premiered in Seoul in 2007, then traveled to Ho Chi Minh City before making its way to the U.S. One photograph, "Double Bubble Bazooka" by Tiffany Chung, shows men and women in bright ensembles with color-coordinating umbrellas, bicycles and other whimsical doodads. Min-Hwa Choi's "Lying on Fascism" is a socio-political painting that documents a demonstration in 1980s Seoul. Also included in the collection are audio and video pieces.

"I hope that audiences will not only gain information, but also consider the ways in which historical events such as the war in Vietnam are imbedded in the cultural fabric of each respective country," Min says. "And as with any engagement with art, I hope the exhibition instills an appreciation of the pleasures of living a life animated with questions and curiosity."