

"transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix"

Artists gathered by curators Viet Le and Yong Soon Min are the children of Andy Warhol and Coca-Cola

BY KIMBERLY CHUN
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REVIEW Spam, napalm, and derivative pop songs weren't quite the only legacy of U.S. military sojourns through Asia — and specifically Korea and Vietnam — as Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' "transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix" exhibit demonstrates. The artists gathered by curators Viet Le and Yong Soon Min are the children of Andy Warhol and Coca-Cola.

Credit goes to the organizers for pointing to the connections between Vietnam and Korea, which are seldom at the foreground stateside: both shared a history of rapid modernization facilitated by U.S. wartime adventures, and Korea benefited economically for their hand in the Vietnam War, as the second largest foreign military and economic presence. Trade in pop culture — film, music, TV, fashion — has evidently continued between the two countries. But despite the presence of a book and zine reading room filled with Korean, Vietnamese, and American transplants' ballads, bubblegum, rockers, and protest music, this grab bag of an exhibition manifests little of the fizzy wit and energy implied in its title. Instead it assumes a primarily somber, somewhat cryptic tone — more wall text would have helped.

This solemn quality is most forthrightly and movingly manifested in Dinh Q. Lê's video triptych, *The Farmers and the Helicopters* (2007).

The exceptions make their *mélange* of pop and politics simultaneously pointed and explicit: examples include Tiffany Chung's video works, *Lam Truong* (2007) and *the scooter-guys* (2007), which juxtapose the frenetic movements of Viet boy bands with bands of working delivery boys; and Min Hwa Choi Chul-Hwan's 2006 *To the Rockers* paintings of lost-looking urban youth, paired with *Twentieth Century — 1972.6 III* (2006), his blown-up deconstruction of AP photographer Nick Ut's 1972 image of a naked Vietnamese girl burnt by napalm running toward the viewer. Would Warhol have approved? And do any works make as much of a stealth impact as Oh Yongseok's video montages *Drama No. 3* and *Drama No. 5* (both 2004-2005)? Cornered by these pieced-together panoramas, which appropriate snippets of Asian films and TV, one is confronted by both the Korean tradition of landscape painting *and* small, startling moments of violence and disquiet that rupture the stillness at the edges of the frame.

TRANSPOP: KOREA VIETNAM REMIX Through Sun/15. Tues.–Wed., Fri.–Sun., noon–5 p.m.; Thurs., noon–8 p.m. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission, SF. \$6; \$3 seniors, students, and youth; free for members (free first Tues.). (415) 978-ARTS, www.ybca.org