

Yong Soon Min: Bridge of No Return

Art in General, New York
April 18 - June 27

At the threshold to Art in General, Yong Soon Min's *Prop*, a red neon sign over the door, warns: "contents under pressure." It is an apt beginning—an artful use of language and distancing strategies mixed with measured intimacy. In this cleanly installed exhibition of mixed media works by the Korean-born, Los Angeles-based conceptual artist, we can trace the interests of a demurely radical agent of identity politics: myths of globalism and multiculturalism; feminism; art as political activism. Her idea-laden works focus on cultural and political identity, sometimes using her own history as the source of her discourse. Here she seems poised to turn a larger scope on the global politics of difference.

Min exposes the complexities of living in one culture while remembering another in *Dwelling* (1993), a diaphanous ghost of her Korean self that floats mutely in a corner of the gallery. Using the familiar feminist trope of dress-as-body, she has constructed a husk of a woman using a gauzy white hanbok, the traditional Korean garment. Made exquisitely translucent by a light bulb, its visible skeleton is composed of twigs and scraps of photographs, to make a text we cannot read. Below is a pedestal of white-jacketed books, the topmost charred black. Min addresses the subaltern status of Korean women, but the fragile delicacy of her empathy allows others to don the luminescent shadow of dashed hopes of many in this romantic work. The photo scraps incorporated in *Dwelling* refer to the series titled "Defining Moments" (1992), represented here by one print of Min's nude torso upon which dates important to her personal history and that of Korean-Americans are inscribed: 1953, the year of her birth and the end of the Korean War; 1992, the year of the Los Angeles riots.

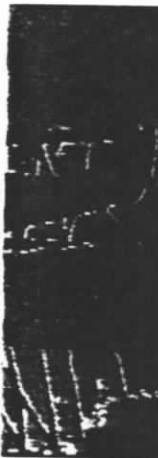
Also touchingly effective in its use of fabric to suggest damage is *Mother Load* (1996), a four-part cloth sculpture that is based on pojaji, the traditional Korean bundling cloth. Combining feminist and political views with the personal, this work clearly declares that women are dominated by male power structures.

Bridge of No Return (1997) dominates the exhibition with its lengthy, steely, implacable presence curving fence-like through the gallery. Still, it's more ideogram than sculpture. A chronotope, it refers to the irrevocable moment of exchange of prisoners of war between the North and the South made at the close of the Korean War on a bridge at the 38th parallel where the DMZ (demilitarized zone) was established. Each side of the wall is covered with one-handed clocks ticking inexorably on and decorated with symbolic pink or blue xeroxes in a dense array of texts and images of the collective but split memories of North and South Korea. The mesh walls of north and south—so close yet so far—enclose a breath-filled interval, a third space, symbolic of a liminal zone where the voices of the third world speak, where hybridity comes from dynamic collision. "What have you done to understand the other?" Min also asks in *Kindred Distance* (1996), four tight color prints that show South Korean tourists staring voyeuristically at government-sponsored displays purporting to inform about life in North Korea. Overlaid with queries of why and

airplane as a travel meta-
possible vehicles such as the
se "pilot" is more available.
ot not only becomes unavail-
d through a terrain of warn-
ills. We are given images of
procedures. Are we then still
a case we would be issuing
passenger? To conclude that
declare oneself the only occu-

ctory is loaded with the chal-
he invisible visible. Because
he airport scenario, sugges-
s—radar, visibility—are fre-
it. The background setting of
ds attempts to confirm this
y in the voices and the short
ds only confirms a distance.
on is one of many forms and
come up in recent years which
nfortable conversion of mili-
devices (flight simulators as
t) to domestic amusement to,
of cerebral exploration. A new
st, in an attempt to keep an
spite of media, loses faith in
techniques to resort to tech-
ter fields. The difference this
me goes by, these new addi-
lary require more and more
ng.

dric DeSouza, Atlanta, Georgia



table



Yong Soon Min, *Defining Moments #6*, 1992, black and white photograph, 20" x 16" (photo courtesy of Art in General).

where in Korean and English, the transparent other remains opaque.

Min worries that she will be known as a political or ethnic artist, but why? She is an intellectual terrorist, at her best constructing edgy dialogic works. *Axis* (1997), a cinema-like installation, combines an ironic use of low technology with highflown ideas about economic globalism in the age of post-colonialism to create a space of contestation. Transparent plastic beach balls printed with maps of the world dangle from the ceiling. A revolving carousel projector shoots out images on the walls: shop signs that appropriate global imagery to sell something; Jurassic World Park, World Supply Shop, Coffees of the World, etc. The images have a bland, documentary air, somewhat like Catherine Opie's photographs of LA mini-malls that capture the amazing prevalence of Korean businesses flourishing without a word of English. All these globes look alike, but this confrontational work is not an allegory of liberal diversity but rather an affirmation of difference. In the liminal space of the suspended luminous orbs, the de-centered viewer struggles to find her place; it's made clear that one's cultural identity can exist only in the light of the other's.

Jane Nocol, New York

