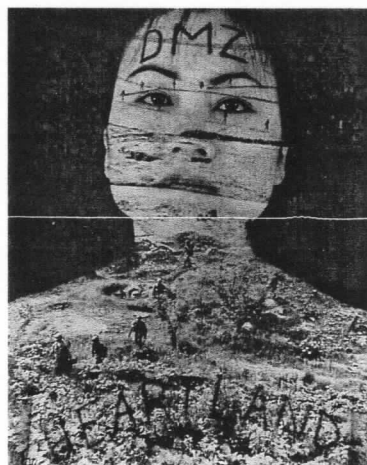


37, 2003

Apinan Poshyananda

left: YONG SOON MIN,
'Defining Moments', 1992,
silver gelatin print; right:
YONG SOON MIN, *Ritual
Labor of a Mechanical Bride*,
1993, mixed media
installation.



Yong Soon Min was born in South Korea, but as a young girl moved with her family to California. Although her childhood and education were 'Americanised', Min has maintained an attachment to Korean values. Many of her works are concerned with issues of Korean-American identity and the double marginalisation of being a female of non-European descent. Min's thought-provoking art, teaching and curatorial work have contributed greatly to the study of the Korean diaspora.

Min's installations, photographs and texts closely relate to Korean-American cultural and racial conflicts. I first encountered her work in 1990 in 'The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s' at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. *Make Me*, 1989, comprised dissected images of Min's self-portrait superimposed with phrases such as 'exotic immigrant' and 'assimilate alien'. One image commented on Asian stereotypes, showing Min making a slit eye with her finger. In the exhibition 'Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art' at the Asia Society in New York in 1994, Min's work *Dwelling*, 1992, was a poetic and moving installation in which a *hanbok* (traditional Korean dress) was suspended like a translucent form over assorted memorabilia. The flowing garment was like a spatial identity with no fixity, commenting on how interpretations of identity, race and gender become slippery.

In the exhibition 'Across the Pacific' at the Queens Museum of Art, New York, in 1993, Min stunned audiences with *Ritual Labor of a Mechanical Bride*, 1993. In this work a lifelike robot of a traditional Korean bride stands and bows. On a carpet an inscription reads: 'Welcome/ please walk and step all over me/ now as always/ I am your humble and obedient servant/ your comfort girl/ your faithful daughter.'

'Defining Moments', 1992, is a series of photographic images of the 1980 Kwangju uprising and massacre superimposed on Min's body. Her ghostly self-portrait hovers

like a wandering spirit that mourns, her body a metaphoric space of bitter and traumatic memory. 'DMZ' (dematerialised zone) scratched on her forehead implies imperial power, as well as male/militaristic forces on the body of Korean women.

Movement, 2001, a semi-permanent installation commissioned by the Asia Society in New York, consists of 170 clear vinyl records of pan-Asian music converted into plastic clocks which are placed in front of mirrors. This work gives viewers the sense that they are part of a timeless place and pace as their reflection blurs with fragments of transforming cultures through Asian 'windows' and LPs. Min has also collaborated with her husband, artist Allan deSouza, their work focusing on the exoticism of foreign bodies and exploring the overlaps between art and anthropology.

As curator of 'There: Sites of Korean Diaspora', a component of the 2002 Gwangju Biennale, Min's in-depth research on Korean diasporans in Almaty (Kazakhstan), Los Angeles, Yanbian (China), São Paulo and Osaka contributed enormously to the study of art and dislocation.

Yong Soon Min moved to the United States from South Korea in 1960 at the age of seven. She is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. She is now Assistant Professor of Studio Art at the University of California, Irvine, and a recipient of a Visual Artists Fellowship Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her work has been exhibited in the United States and abroad, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Camerawork Gallery, London; Kumho Museum, Seoul; Fourth Baguio Art Festival, The Philippines; Museum Folkwang, Germany; and in two Havana biennials, Cuba.