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ART REVIEW

Korean Artists Mix, and Nature Mingles

By [BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO](#)

In terms of seasonal art pleasures, few outings in the Hudson River Valley match a visit to the Hammond Museum and Japanese Stroll Garden in North Salem, N.Y. You can stop at the museum, then at your leisure putter around the Japanese-inspired gardens stretching over about three and a half acres.

Now and through the fall is a terrific time to visit, not only because of the changing foliage but also because the museum is host to a small but worthy exhibition highlighting the work of about a dozen contemporary Korean artists. It dovetails nicely with the museum's focus on Asian art and culture.

Put together by Inhee Iris Moon, an independent curator living in Westchester, "Incarnation" includes Korean artists living both in their homeland and in the United States, specifically New York. The exception is Nam June Paik, a Korean video artist and New York resident since the mid-1960s who died last year.

Mr. Paik, born in Seoul, is the best-known artist in the exhibition and Korea's most famous contemporary art export. He is revered for his pioneering video and new-media artwork, including interactive robots and sculptures using old-fashioned television monitors. He was also involved with the Fluxus group, known for mixing various types of artistic disciplines in the 1960s, and early, experimental performance art.

At first, the works in this show look unassuming, but up close they reveal their depth. Mr. Paik's contribution is a sculpture in the form of a chandelier laden with plastic vines, leaves and ripe fruit, along with small video monitors displaying abstract patterns. It is an eccentric mix, one that puts you in mind of the ornate decadence of European Rococo and Baroque-era furnishings.

The photographer Atta Kim is another established Korean artist, though unlike Mr. Paik, he chose to remain in South Korea. Here, he shows ethereal images of nudes encased inside transparent plastic boxes, which are sometimes stacked on top of one another and installed in forest and urban settings. It is a strong statement about the alienation of modern life and loss of individual identity.

No exhibition of contemporary Korean art would be complete without Nikki S. Lee, a Korean-American artist who stages photographs of herself as a member of different religious, social and ethnic groups. In one photograph here she is dressed up as a punk sitting on the pavement; in another she takes on the appearance and mannerisms of a young Latina from the barrio. Her blank, androgynous features greatly assist the transformation.

Branching out, Ms. Moon has also endeavored to include some fresh new faces, among them Kwang Young Chun, who makes mesmerizing wall-mounted collages out of dense aggregates of tiny triangles of wrapped paper covered with calligraphic characters. They look like lunar landscapes, but also call to mind the ancient Korean practice of wrapping medicine in mulberry paper triangles.

Accretions of objects are also the basis for other works here, among them Junho Lee's sculptures made up of hundreds of used seals and stamps bunched together inside a baroque frame, their inky bases facing up. Then there is Ran Hwang's wall installation of a resting bodhisattva made of thousands of buttons and pins. The finished sculpture transcends the accretion of humble materials as a metaphor for the way in which religion transcends the material world.

More modestly scaled, but equally thoughtful and lovely, is Duck Hyun Cho's photorealistic portrait of two young Korean women in traditional dress. Exquisitely drawn using graphite and charcoal on canvas, the image resembles an aged historical photograph. Intriguingly, the artist has layered sections of canvas drop cloth beneath the drawing to enhance its verisimilitude.

Nearby, Chong Gon Byun's panoramic oil painting looks like a historical group portrait of Native American Indians, until you notice that a senior figure at center holds an oversize bottle of Channel No. 5 perfume. Though shamelessly kitsch, it is about ideas of identity and cultural boundaries between different groups of people and is one of the most provocative works in the show.

Little of the art here is noticeably Korean, or Asian, suggesting Korean artists are increasingly international. The one exception is Jaye Rhee's video "Cherry Blossoms" (2003), in which clumps of pink chewing gum blowing in the wind resemble cherry blossoms falling from trees in a reference to this popular Asian festival. It is also a reminder to head outdoors, where nature awaits.

"Incarnation: Korean Contemporary Art," Hammond Museum and Japanese Stroll Garden, 28 Deveau Road, North Salem, N.Y., through Sept. 7. Information: www.hammondmuseum.org or (914) 669-5033.

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