

Critic's View: Gangnam Style Comes to ArtHamptons

July 12, 2014

by James Croak

One of the best reasons to attend ArtHamptons in Bridgehampton (through July 13) is the unexpected inclusion of 15 galleries from the Korean Peninsula that made the 7,000-mile trip to Bridgehampton en masse to exhibit works by 83 Korean artists. Had the Parrish Art Museum mounted a survey of contemporary art of South Korea I doubt it could have been more interesting.

This is the fifth time the Korean Art Show, as they describe themselves, has gathered at an art venue in New York. They are a well-organized group of individual galleries that produced a catalog outlining their wares for ArtHamptons. I noticed that all fifteen galleries used "South Korea" on their marquee as if we couldn't guess the other half of their peninsula probably wasn't free to wander the planet selling luxury goods. I won't dwell on their political situation other than to note that the hoax magazine The Onion reported Kim Jong III had agreed to suspend his nuclear program in exchange for the lead role in the next Batman movie.

Eleven of the 15 galleries hail from the city of Seoul and five of those from the government district of [Gangnam](#). Gangnam is perhaps the only Korean word the rest of the planet can pronounce correctly due to the K-Pop megahit [Gangnam Style](#) by Korean rapper Park Jae-sang, also known as PSY.

YouTube lists it as the first video to hit a billion views and it has now topped two billion. Only three or four dozen came from my household. The video is a pastiche of American music and dance moves with some Korean flavor added in; very much like the artwork on view at ArtHamptons.

Gangnam-gu is one of 25 districts in Seoul, but one with 28 contemporary art galleries, according to Art Info. Gangnam means "south of the (Han) River," curiously similar to the art neighborhood SoHo which means "south of Houston." The ArtHampton galleries from Gangnam are Chung Art, [Chung Jark](#), [Park Ryu Sook](#), Um Gallery, and Pyo Gallery. If there turns out to be a Gangnam style of visual art, you heard it here first.

A lot of the South Korean work on display tends toward illustration rather than fine art, perhaps in Asian culture these are not as distinct as they are here. Illustration tends to be formulaic and not emotionally felt (except for, perhaps, in graphic novels), used in the West primarily for books and advertising, but not fine art, which should have an inner necessity.

In my view, work that uses illustration without irony has no place in a contemporary art gallery and

the dealers will improve their standing if they wean themselves off this pabulum. I'll pass on mentioning names so as not to interrupt budding talent, but you know you are.

One of the striking pieces in the show is by Yoon hee Suh from the Um Gallery, whose mixed media work is a beautiful wash of sharp light across a body of water with tiny figures interacting with each other. The piece is entitled *Memory Gap*, as are many of his other works, this one a portrayal of the Geum River, its brown and tans shimmering with a raking light of evening or early morning.



"Memory Gap - 0069" by Yoonhee Suh, 2007. Mixed media, 147 x 185 cm.



“Memory Gap - Geum river 1” by Yoonhee Suh, 2004. Mixed media, 104 x 119 cm. Exhibited with Um Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.



Detail of “Memory Gap - Geum river 1” by Yoonhee Suh, 2004. Mixed media, 104 x 119 cm. Exhibited with Um Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.

The Pyo Gallery is showing a real beauty by Jonghyun Ha entitled *Conjunction*. It's a late abstract

expressionist painting, from when the wild emotions of that era were more subdued and geometry began to work into the forms. It almost seems a minimalist work, with short strokes of paint floating above a darker ground, a peaceful work that some collector will enjoy.



Artwork by Jonghyun Ha. Exhibited with the Pyo Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.



Artwork by Jonghyun Ha. Exhibited with the Pyo Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.

Dae-Sub Kim has a clever trompe l'oeil crowd pleaser on display at the [Nine Gallery](#). He first carved an apple and a bread board out of wood and attached it to a unprimed canvas. Then with perfect skill he painted three additional apples on the board, causing optical confusion of the real and the graphic imitation of the real, at once primary image and symbol.



"Mulah (The ego and the non-ego)" by Dae-Sub Kim. Mixed media. Exhibited with the Nine Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.



Detail of "Mulah (The ego and the non-ego)" by Dae-Sub Kim. Mixed media. Exhibited with the Nine Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.

This optical confusion, some achieved by other methods, appears in several of the South Korean galleries; perhaps this is a current feature of their evolving aesthetic.

Sukju Lee has a beautifully rendered pair of horses at [Kim Jae Sun Gallery](#) and Hongsun Choi has some contemplative ceramics at [Paik Hae Young Gallery](#).



Artwork by Suk-Ju Lee. Exhibiting with Kim Jae Sun Gallery. Photo by Pat

Rogers.



“Space-Contemplation” by Suk-Ju Lee, 2014. Oil on canvas. Exhibiting with Kim Jae Sun Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.



“Picture of Vessel Form (5pieces)” by Hongsun Choi, 2013 and Artwork by Yongho Kim (Photographs). Photo by Pat Rogers. Exhibited with Paik Hae Young Gallery.

Seungmo Park has a curious image made of stainless steel mesh that shows there is still some life left in pointillism at [Keumsan Gallery](#), and Wonyoung Jang shows familiarity with a short-focus photograph processing technique put to good use in his “HK in my sight.”



“Maya1176” and “Another wall 527” by Seungmo Park. Stainless steel mesh. Exhibiting with Keumsan Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.



“Another wall 527” by Seungmo Park, 2014.
Stainless steel mesh, 189 x 95 cm. Exhibited
with Keumsan Gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.

These and many other works from among these 15 South Korean galleries will be on display through Sunday, July 13, at ArtHamptons.

BASIC INFO: ArtHamptons 2014 takes place from July 10 - July 13, 2014 at the Sculpture Fields of Nova’s Ark. The Sculpture Fields of Nova’s Ark are located at 60 Millstone Road, Bridgehampton, NY 11932. www.arthamptons.com.

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