

Superflex turns financial crisis into art

August 26, 2019 | By Kwon Mee-yoo

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Jakob Fenger, left, and Bjornstjerne Christiansen of Superflex pose in front of "Bankrupt Banks, October 30, 2013" at Kukje Gallery Busan. Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

BUSAN — Danish artist group Superflex interprets the symbolism of power and capital at the heart of the 2008 global financial crisis in "In our dreams we have a plan" at Kukje Gallery Busan.

The title of the exhibit is borrowed from the lyrics of ABBA's hit song "Money Money Money," but changed "my" to "our," suggesting that the financial crisis was not an individual issue but a challenge for everyone.

Superflex is an artist collective that consists of Jakob Fenger, Bjornstjerne Christiansen and Rasmus Nielsen, founded in 1993. Since they teamed up, they stopped individual activities and have only worked as a group, reflecting their belief in the power of collective creation.

The trio recently brought playful three-seat swings to the inter-Korean border in May, marking their first solo exhibition in Korea. However, they have been showing their work in Korea since 2003, participating in the Gwangju Biennale five times.

Fenger and Christiansen visited Korea on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition in Busan.

"We can move faster (as a group) than when we are alone. That strength is why we keep this collective. We may say different things, but we believe in diversity and we like the tension among us," Fenger said during a press preview Aug. 14.

On one side of the wall is "Bankrupt Banks, October 30, 2013," a long black panel with the names of banks that went under during or after the 2008 financial crisis, with some familiar names including "JEONJU SAVINGS BANK, acquired by FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION SOUTH KOREA, September 5, 2011."

"We are dealing with power and money here. As we researched the names of banks that went bankrupt from 2008 to 2013, we looked into the financial system and it led us to how the mechanism of the economy works," Christiansen said. "There are names of Korean banks here, which means everything is related all over the world; not isolated."

Superflex took an interest in the friction between ideas and reality — one side is a monument to collapsed banks, which is negative, while the other side is the bank's logos without any text, which imply a positive image.

"When the image of trust is isolated from its text, it almost looks like a modernist icon," Christiansen said.

For the Busan exhibit, logos of banks from various countries — two American, two Icelandic, one Australian and one Danish — are simplified, suggesting that there is no border in the financial crisis.



"Connect with Me," front, and "Bankrupt Bank" by Superflex / Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

The three blue steel sculptures that come between the "Bankrupt Bank" artworks are called "Connect with Me," which visualizes the dramatically fluctuating value of Bitcoin in the form of a graph.

The intangible substance of the controversial cryptocurrency is transformed into physical sculptural works by Superflex, symbolizing the irregularities of the current global economic system.

A small, but still impressive piece is "Apres Vous, Le Deluge / Year 2104 0.98 meter," three blue glass sculptures on the wall.

The height from the floor indicates the rise of the sea level, predicted by the 2015 Paris Agreement.

It visualizes the impact of climate change as people can see in front of them how much the sea is predicted to rise in the next 100 years.

"It originated as a response to the climate change. Economy and climate change are closely related. The way we decide and organize directly influence our lives," Fenger said.



"Free Beer" by Superflex / Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

The colorful letters "Free Beer" is an introduction to the trio's experiment in shared economy. However, the Free Beer is not free of charge.

"The brand name is ambiguous by intention. We started with a recipe, shared the knowledge and you can earn money from it in this open source economy," Christiansen said. "When the concept of open source was first introduced, it was more about virtual things. We wanted to link it to a more tangible object, so created the recipe for beer, which is similar to coding. We can prove the benefits of sharing by sharing this recipe."

The trio offers the open-source recipe and label design under a Creative Commons license, so that anyone can use the recipe to brew their own Free Beer, modify the recipe or even sell their Free Beer.

"It is our direct proposals into real life. The old way of economy was based on copyright, putting emphasis on individualized rights. However, Free Beer is the new economy where information are exchanged freely," Fenger said.

The first recipe was developed with a microbrewery in Superflex's home country of Denmark and now there are several different versions worldwide.

Praha 993, a pub inside multicultural space F1963 along with the gallery, offers Free Beer Version 7.0, created in collaboration with Superflex. The latest version of Free Beer is called Plum Monastery Amber Lager, as it features "maesil," or Korean plums, used for their aroma and sweetness.

"The recipe develops and develops. Maesil is an ingredient not used in Denmark, but added for Free Beer 7.0," Christiansen said.

Superflex engages with social issues as they believe art is an important tool of a society that gets people to act together.

"We all are living creatures on the planet. The only difference between human and other creatures is that we can share narratives even if we don't know each other," Christiansen said.

The exhibition runs through Oct. 27. For more information, visit www.kukjegallery.com.