



"Xijing Olympics" (2008) by art collective Xijing Men (Gim Hong-sok of Korea, Chen Shaoxiong of China and Tsuyoshi Ozawa of Japan) is on display at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Seoul through Aug. 2.

Courtesy of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art

Asian artists meet in 'City of Xijing'

By Kwon Mee-yoo
meeyoo@ktimes.com

Visitors are required to go through some novel procedures to enter the imaginary city of Xijing at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) Seoul's Gallery 5.

At "the port of entry," all visitors have to meet at least one of three regulations — wear a bright smile, sing a tune or do a charming dance. When admitted to Xijing, each visitor receives a passport that doubles as a brochure for the exhibit.

This city is governed by three presidents — or artists — named Xijing Men. The Xijing Men is a collective composed of Gim Hong-sok of Korea, Chen Shaoxiong of China and Tsuyoshi Ozawa of Japan. Founded in 2006, the trio established the fictional city of Xijing, which literally means "Western capital."

As Asian art had a meteoric rise on the contemporary scene in the 1990s,

Asian artists searched for the cause of the phenomenon, which resulted in introspection. Some artists sought solidarity and the Xijing Men is an example of the tripartite artists' collaborative way of looking back on themselves.

"There is Beijing (Northern Capital), Nanjing (Southern Capital) and Tokyo (Eastern Capital), but the Western Capital is nonexistent as of now," Ozawa said. "So we decided to name the unseen city after the once-existing city of Xijing. We chose to pronounce it in the Chinese way because all three of us liked it best."

Xijing has appeared in historical and literary references, but the city does not exist anymore. Xijing Men's Xijing is not a mere fiction, but a reflection of where we live now.

The imaginary city is a drifting mass. It has been exhibited in many places throughout Asia and on the other side of the globe, including the United States, in the past decade.

MMCA's "World of Xijing" features all the works of the Xijing Men, providing a broader understanding of the project.

Gim said they did not try to be funny, but their works made visitors laugh. "Xijing Olympics" (2008) is the trio's criticism of the Olympic Games growing away from the true spirit of sportsmanship. In this performance video, Gim, Shaoxiong and Ozawa play various games with new rules they have conceived.

Watermelons become soccer balls, while loaves of bread substitute for guns. For the marathon, they set stopwatches by their pillows and compete to sleep longer.

The artists went on to host their second Olympics last year, playing the Winter Games. They played ice hockey using teaspoons to pass ice balls and curling using their luggage as the stone. After the Olympics, all three were awarded the same medals, only differentiated by colors.

"I love Xijing — Xijing School" offers an interesting insight into how education shapes a country. Xijing Men suggests a new way of education, not unilateral lectures, but an environment for self-teaching. Urban planning of Xijing is compared to cutting a watermelon in the video "Daily Life of Xijing President."

The exhibit wraps up with the individual works of the three artists. Gim presents his signature sculpture "LOVE (192 Hours)," which parodies Robert Indiana's pop art sculpture. Ozawa offers his soy sauce prints of Western masterpieces of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Shaoxiong's "Ink Media" is an animation in ink-and-wash style. The three have distinct styles, which represent their countries in some way.

The exhibit runs through Aug. 2. For more information, visit www.mmca.go.kr or call (02) 3701-9500.