

Expanding scope of art

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Experimental artists expand scope of art

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There has been an age-long controversy over whether art can be graded and rated, but prestigious art awards across the globe hint at what is going on in contemporary art and what artists are doing. In Korea, the Korea Artist Prize (KAP), currently ongoing at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) Seoul, plays this role.

This year, Kim Eull, 64, Back Seung-woo, 43, Ham Kyung-ah, 50, and mixrice, an artist duo consisting of Cho Ji-eun, 41, and Yang Chul-mo, 39, were selected in February to take part in the KAP 2016 exhibition.

The four candidates came up with new works with funding from the SBS Foundation, which co-hosts the annual art awards with MMCA. Though each employs a distinctive approach, they all provide a slice of the vibrant contemporary Korean arts scene simmering with a wide range of experiments. The winner among the four will be announced on Oct. 13 and awarded with 10 million won in prize money.

Kim constructed "Twilight Zone Studio," a two-story building resembling the artist's studio, in Gallery 1. The structure, standing on the border between reality and virtuality, is filled with objects from Kim's own studio and gives a glimpse of the fierce creative process happening within and outside an artist.

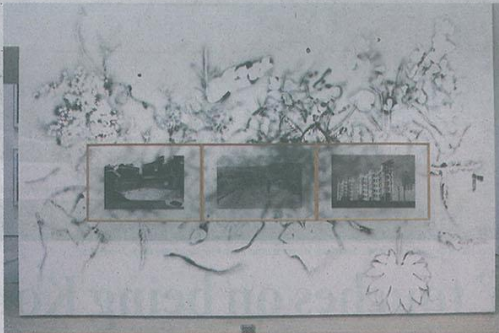
On the second floor of the "Twilight Zone Studio," visitors can view "Galaxy," a collection of 1,450 drawings displayed in the shape of the Milky Way on the 27.5-meter wall.

MMCA curator Lee Chu-young said the drawing is a self-portrait reflecting Kim's artistic perspective.

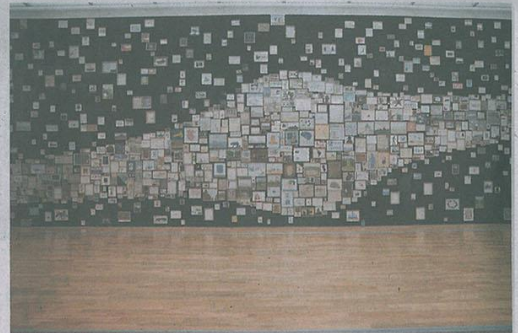
"Transcending narrow definitions and formal limitations, Kim generates a wide spectrum of drawings that freely traverse the boundaries between painting, sculpture and installation," Lee said.

Back insists that he is a "pictureographer," distinguishing himself from photographers and questioning the fundamentals of photography.

His works raise doubts on the inherency of photography, Back once said. "In this era characterized by the inundation of digital images, taking a photograph is a meaningless act, like shooting a water gun underwater." So

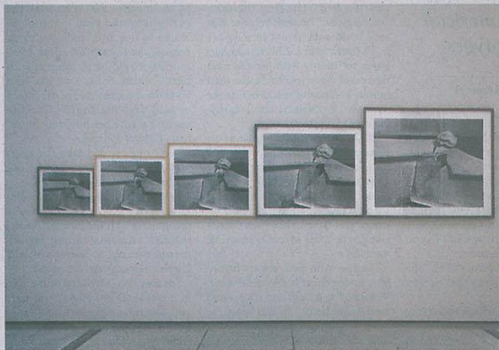


"Window" by mixrice



"Galaxy" by Kim Eull

Courtesy of MMCA



"Wholeness" by Back Seung-woo



"Soccer Painting by the Soccer Ball Bouncing Over Crocodile River" by Ham Kyung-ah

the artist takes an alternative approach toward photography by ascribing new dimensions and meaning to the medium.

"Framing From Within" is the only work on display that is taken by Back himself. He extracted images of people captured in his photos while aiming to shoot other objects such as cityscape. He emphasizes his role as a collector of images floating around online and offline in "Betweenless" and "Wholeness" by enlarging or enhancing parts of photographs col-

lected from archives.

Ham is known for her embroidery canvases in collaboration with North Korean artisans, but she presents a new series exploring the value of money.

"I want to experiment on the maximum value out of the funding from the KAP. I was interested in the process of defacing and resetting so devised a project documenting the journey of a North Korean defector," Ham said.

However, the project fell through

due to social and political reasons and Ham ended up with "Unrealized the Real," consisting of a sound installation behind closed steel shutters.

"Soccer Painting by the Soccer Ball Bouncing Over Crocodile River" is a video and performance of a boy who defected from North Korea now settled in Korea. It represents two sides of defector issues.

Sculpture series "UnCamouflage" looks like abstract shapes, but in fact these are decolorized shapes from military camouflage patterns.

Artist duo mixrice has consistently produced works related to immigrants, collaborating with migrant workers in Korea. Their interest shifted from migration of humans to that of plants in these latest works.

"Korea went through rapid development in the 1970s and '80s and plants have migrated along with humans," curator Lee said. "Mixrice questions the significance of the time accumulated, often neglected in this modern society."

"Badly Flattened Land 2" reconstructs the floor plan of an apartment with dirt collected from a redeveloped neighborhood, while "The Vine Chronicle" traces vestiges of plants that have been transplanted by humans for various reasons such as redevelopment or landscaping.

The exhibit runs until Jan. 15, 2017. Admission is 4,000 won for all exhibitions at MMCA Seoul. For more information, visit www.mca.go.kr or call 02-3701-9500.