

## From Working with North Koreans to Spying on Apple, How Far will These Four Asian Artists go?

23 March, 2016 | Payal Uttam

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While Art Basel Hong Kong and surrounding shows in the city tend to be dominated by tame commercial works, this year a host of daredevil artists from across Asia are making their mark.



Kyungah Ham's What you see is the unseen / Chandeliers for Five Cities, 2015. The work took four North Koreans about 2,400 hours to embroider. Photo Credit: Kukje Gallery

### Making art not war...with North Koreans

It's hard to believe an artist could penetrate the world's most secretive state, yet South Korean artist Kyungah Ham has been at it for more than six years. Working with an unnamed middleman, she sends drawings and collages containing news articles, images and text across the border to North Korean textile workers. Acting like a coded language, these images are laden with information concealed by the North Korean government. She also sends secret messages in an effort to connect and converse with the women textile workers such as "Are you lonely too?" To ask about someone's emotions may appear to be an innocent question but many acknowledge that in North Korea it's against their ideology. The women recreate these words and images in embroidery, which is carefully transported back to the artist. Due to censorship issues, she has no idea if and when she'll get works back. "When you shout in a valley the echo comes back one second later but if I do this it can take one year to get any messages back," Kyungah says. Five pieces will be on view at Art Basel Hong Kong this week. Titled Chandeliers for Five Cities, the giant embroidery works show precarious chandeliers, a symbol of wealth and power reflecting the economic differences between the two peninsulas. Alexie Glass-Cantor, the curator who selected Kyungah to be part of the show, admires the artist's bravery and says she could be arrested for this kind of work.

URL: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/payaluttam/2016/03/23/from-working-with-north-koreans-to-spying-on-apple-how-far-will-these-four-asian-artists-go/#20da77754874>