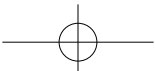


Notes from a Study of
Contemporary Korean Artists

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Translated by Iris Moon



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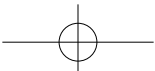
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Preface

The present volume is an 'extract' of a more extensive work, originally written and published in Korean as *Crazy Art, Made in Korea*, in the winter of 2006. The Korean publication featured the entirety of the twenty-one encounters I had made as part of my personal investigation into contemporary Korean artists: Chung Suejin, MeeNa Park, Kim Doojin, Nakhee Sung, Lee Dongi, Yoon-Young Park, Yoo Seung-ho, Choi Jeong-hwa, Lee Sookyung, Jo Seub, Park Chankyung, Koh Seung-wook, Sora Kim & Gimhongsok, Lee Bul, Osang Gwon, Sulki & Min, Hyungkoo Lee, Kim Sanggil, Choi Byoungil, Sasa [44], and Jackson Hong. This English version will start off with six of those encounters. Please think of this work as an informal greeting.

Although contemporary art in the Republic of Korea (like that of other countries) is mostly trash, every now and then one comes across something captivating. For a country with a post-colonial experience, the history of modern art in Korea is relatively expansive and its art movements are quite diverse. Despite this, however, an artistic contemporaneity had not yet really emerged: not, at least, until the mid-1990s. As an art lover, I became fascinated by the unfolding of the new visual/non-visual contemporaneity. By researching the major contemporary artists of the moment, I wanted, as both an art writer and artist who writes, to document and give proof that such a contemporaneity existed in Korea, despite the continuous threat of disappearing into an art that must bow to 'white taste' and turn into a hopelessly tacky 'Third World art'. The first question I asked was simple: 'What kind of contemporary art is currently being made in

Korea?’ Asking the question was easy; preparing the answer was a long and arduous journey. Before beginning my investigation in January 2004, I set down a number of general rules. First: to choose one artist (or a collaborative team) every month and explore their processes and work. Second: to choose artists who could be set within the (global) artistic ‘timeline’, and who successfully asked and operated within questions relevant to contemporary art. Third: to create an archive of all the available materials on the artists. Fourth: to compose my writing as if I were telling a story to you, in person. Fifth: to pursue the shared paths that arose in each story, in order to weave them together into a larger narrative – a narrative about the art of our time.

Some of the artists I met presented a world resembling an asphyxiating jungle, while others’ felt like a desert where everything collapsed from heat exhaustion. One felt like an electronics factory where the machinery continually repeated and revolved, while another struck me like a haunted house at an amusement park. While all of the journeys were fun and engaging, none of them followed exactly the same itinerary. Nor did they allow my role any consistency. I would enter some of these artistic worlds as an anthropologist, while others would compel me to engage with all the riotous passions of a very biased art lover. Still other moments would have me adopt the stance of a suspicious investigative reporter.

Sensitive readers will be able to discern a stinging level of engagement at various moments in the narratives. However, the stories in my investigative journey of Korean contemporary art should not force your brain to recoil in pain. I only hope you enjoy each text as a pleasurable mental exercise. So you should just sit back and relax like King Shahryar in *The Thousand and One Nights* and all this book should do is take the role of Scheherazade weaving her tales every night – but just for six nights. And that should be it. As a reinvented criticism to fit today’s postmedium condition, my criticism is no different than a collection of tales that, by exploring an interdependent relationship with artist and work as subject matter, hopes for an independent life.