

# TINA KIM GALLERY



**Tina Kim Gallery Presents Group Exhibition Focused on the Emergence of South Korea's Contemporary Art Scene**

***“Two Hours” Features Painting, Sculpture, Video, and Mixed Media Works by Yiso Bahe, Seoyoung Chung, and Beom Kim***

**On view September 22 - October 29, 2016**

**Opening Reception: Thursday, September 22, 2016 | 6PM – 8PM**

**Special Panel at NYU: Friday, September 23, 2016 | 5PM – 6PM**

September 20, 2016 (New York, NY) – Tina Kim Gallery is pleased to present *Two Hours*, an exhibition curated by Hyunjin Kim featuring work by three seminal contemporary South Korean artists: **Yiso Bahe** (1956-2004), **Seoyoung Chung** (b. 1964), and **Beom Kim** (b. 1963). Comprised of 42 works made between the late 1990's and the early 2000's – a period of dramatic change in South Korea as the country established a civilian government and a more open economy – *Two Hours* provides an inevitable basis for understanding the emergence of South Korea's contemporary art scene.

The title of the exhibition is taken from a video work created by Yiso Bahe in 2002 that records the movement of the sun over a span of two hours in the early evening, just as day is transitioning into night. The video demonstrates Bahe grappling with a moment of ambiguity as he attempts to capture time in flux. This exercise of delving into uncertainty relates to the three artists' individual struggles as they each attempted to define contemporary art in South Korea through their work amidst the major shifts in Korean society that took place at the turn of the century.

Since the 1950's – following the end of Japanese occupation – South Korean artists have developed a unique art history that reflects both the country's traditional aesthetics and the influence of modern and contemporary art movements from the West. Due to this complex balance of old and new artistic practices in Korea, artists from the region have often struggled to establish their own identity – a challenge that became even more pertinent in the 90's and 2000's when the rise of a new consumer culture and a more liberal marketplace in Korea led many artists to leave the country for the U.S. and Europe to study the prevalent Western art movements at the time. Upon returning to Korea, these artists contributed to a critical moment for contemporary art in South Korea as cultural diversity, critical studies, and new underground art scenes began to flourish throughout the country, and conceptual art became a part of the mainstream. It is within this context that Yiso Bahe, Seoyoung Chung, and Beom Kim established themselves as leading contemporary artists in the region, particularly through their desire to define modern and contemporary art not by Western ideals, but rather by the political, social, and aesthetic themes that were specific to Korea.

However, while the significance of their contributions to Korean contemporary art cannot be denied, these artists were often misrepresented under the confused reality of the Korean art scene in the 1990's, in which both modern and contemporary art movements coexisted and were often not differentiated. As a result, these artists, and many of their peers, have fallen into an interstitial role having come “too early” to capitalize on the growing art market and cultural embrace of contemporary art at the time, and “too late” to have been grandfathered into the historic milieu of Korean modernism.

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*Two Hours* at Tina Kim Gallery attempts to remedy this oversight by showcasing how these three artists not only shared artistic sympathies, but also created works that reflected the many themes that would come to dominate contemporary art trends in the new millennium in South Korea.

After attending universities in South Korea in the 1980's, Bahc and Kim traveled to the U.S. to continue their studies, while Chung traveled to Germany. While this time abroad allowed the artists to develop a new global perspective and gain a comprehensive understanding of artistic practices in the West, they decided not to adhere to the mainstream Western styles that many considered superior at the time. Rather, upon returning to Seoul in the mid-1990's, the artists dedicated themselves to creating a contemporary artistic discourse that reflected the complexities and particularities of Korean society. They refused to produce works in a signature style or medium, and instead experimented across sculpture, installation, two-dimensional drawings, and video. Bahc, Chung, and Kim distinguished themselves by incorporating critical commentary into their work without rejecting popular Korean idioms such as materiality, demonstrated by their use of mass market objects to engage with Korea's rapid industrialization at the time. The artists also employed dark humor in their works to satirize society's focus on creating grand narratives and challenge the irrationality and unethicity that they endured in their everyday lives.

One of the most recognized Korean artists of the 1990's, **Yiso Bahc** obtained his BFA in painting from Hongik University in Seoul in 1981, after which he spent nearly fifteen years studying and working in New York before returning to Korea. In the years following his return, Bahc's work increasingly garnered international attention, and in the late 1990's and early 2000's, he participated in numerous art biennials and exhibitions across Asia, Europe, and the U.S. Throughout his career, Bahc grappled with the challenge of connecting local Korean idioms with Western art theories. He strongly argued that the arc of art history in South Korea must be articulated differently than that of the West, and instead proposed a more local and regional context for Korea's burgeoning art scene that focused on the rapid industrialization that defined Korean society at the time. Bahc actively participated in contemporary art criticism, keenly addressing this discrepancy between Korea's deep fascination with the Western discourse of post-modernism, and the need for Korea to establish its own artistic identity separate from outside influences. Focusing on his own status as a minority within American society from his time in New York, Bahc imbued his artworks with a nihilistic sense of humor that at once satirized consumer culture while also revealing the poetic ephemerality and fragility of those living on the margins of an industrial society, which can be illustrated in Bahc's drawing *We Are Happy* (2004). In works such as *Beginnings* (2000), *Avantgarde* (1997), and *World Chair* (2001), Bahc interrogates such fundamental concepts as the notion of "art" and the artists' vain yet often futile desire to become a part of the art historical cannon.

Born in Seoul in 1964, **Seoyoung Chung** explores questions of form and materiality through various genres, including sculpture, installation, drawing, and performance. In her work, Chung emphasizes the arbitrariness and absurdity of everyday objects by combining cheap, Korean-made construction materials from the country's 1990's manufacturing boom – including styrofoam, linoleum, lumber, and plywood – with abstract work titles such as *The Sculpted Bride* (1997) and *Ghost will be better* (2000-2005) that imbue these otherwise banal objects with almost humane-like characteristics. Chung also discerns allegories from the sculptural situations and abstract languages created by the physical surfaces and material nuances in her works. In her carbon paper drawing series (1996-2000), which will be exhibited on one wall of the gallery, Chung creates stencil-like replicas of South Korea's new industrial landscape. Compiled from the artist's edited images of the new factories and cheap building materials scattered throughout cities in South Korea, these works are based on the modality of an urban environment in a culture of rapid manufacturing.

Similar to Chung, **Beom Kim** transforms ordinary, everyday objects in order to emphasize the limitations of our visual perception and reveal the profound possibilities once we tap into the power of our imaginations. In works such as the concise how-to guidebook *The Art of Transformation* (1997), Kim offers readers instructions on how they can transform themselves into inanimate objects such as a tree or a rock. Other pieces on view, such as the mixed

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media work *The Tree that Became Man and Found its Own Picture in Its Dream* (1998), suggest a situation in which one may be in the state of a dream, while the drawing, *Practice for Good Samaritan* (1995), provides a scenario of slight humor by inviting viewers to participate in an activity that offers guidance on how to be a good Samaritan.

Through exploring the shared language and unique characteristic of Yiso Bahe, Seoyoung Chung, and Beom Kim's practice, *Two Hours* offers new methods for understanding the development of contemporary art in South Korea and reaffirms these artists' significant contributions during a period of radical social change in the region.

## PANEL AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

**Friday, September 23, 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM**

**19 University Place, The Great Room, First Floor**

In collaboration with Tina Kim Gallery, NYU will host a special talk titled "The Very Symptom of Contemporaneity of Korean Contemporary Art in the 1990's" during which curator Hyunjin Kim and artist Seoyoung Chung will discuss the *Two Hours* exhibition. This talk is sponsored by NYU East Asian Studies and Tina Kim Gallery, and is chaired by Yongwoo Lee, Assistant Professor/Faculty Fellow of EAS, NYU.

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

Hyunjin Kim is a curator, writer and researcher based in Seoul. She was a co-curator of the 7th Gwangju Biennale, *Annual Report* (2008), and recently worked as Director for Arko Art Center, Seoul (2014-2015). Since 2001, Kim has worked for institutions including Ilmin Museum of Art (2013), Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven (2005-2006), Art Sonje Center, Seoul (2001-2003) and Ssamzie Space, Seoul (2000). She has curated a number of exhibitions and projects such as Nina Canell *Satin Ion*, Hwayeon Nam *Time-Mechanics*, and *Tradition (Un)Realized*, Arko Art Center (Seoul, 2014-2015); Seoyoung Chung *The Speed of the Large, the Small, and the Wide* (2013), *The Brilliant Collaborator*, Ilmin Museum of Art (Seoul, 2013); *Play Time: The Waiting Room of Episteme*, Culture Station Seoul 284, (Seoul, 2012); *Perspective Strikes Back*, Doosan Gallery, (Seoul, 2009); and so on. Since 2009, Kim has closely collaborated with contemporary artists to produce performance pieces like *In the Room 3* by Sung Hwan Kim, Performa (New York, 2009); *Off-Stage /Masterclass* by siren eun young jung, Culture Station Seoul 284 (Seoul, 2012) and Festival BO:M (Seoul, 2013); *Ten Years* by Jewyo Rhii, Mullae factory (Seoul, 2016) and Namsan Art Center (Seoul, 2017). Her catalogues and edited publications include: *Satin Ion-Nina Canell*, Arko Art Center and BomDia (2015); *The Speed of the Large, the Small, and the Wide-* Seoyoung Chung, Hyunsil Books, Seoul (2012); *Inter-views*, BigakuShuppan, Tokyo (2011); *The Other There-Gao Shiqiang*, Timezone8 (Beijing, 2009); *Jewyo Rhii*, Samuso, (Seoul, 2008); *Sadong 30*, Wien Verlag (Berlin, 2007); *Dolores Zinny and Juan Maidagan*, Sala Rekalde (Bilbao, 2007). She also has contributed to art magazines and journals such as *Wolganmisool*, *Artinculture*, *Yishu*, *Art Asia Pacific*, *Art Review* among others. Kim is currently an advisory member of Haus der Kunst der Welt, Berlin and Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong.

## ABOUT TINA KIM GALLERY

Founded in New York in 2001 and located in Chelsea, Tina Kim Gallery is celebrated for its eclectic programming focused on international contemporary art. Closely affiliated with Kukje Gallery in Seoul, Tina Kim regularly collaborates on organizing exhibitions that feature emerging and internationally renowned Korean artists. Tina Kim Gallery is open Tuesday – Saturday 10 AM – 6 PM

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Image caption: Seoyoung Chung, *The Sculpted Bride*, 1997, sponge, wood, and plaster, 59.06 x 82.68 x 39.37 inches