

Purpose of Planning

Hong, Seong mi, Exhibition planner of the Gail Art Museum

60 years have passed since the DMZ (demilitarized zone) was established. There are neither weapons nor power. With the natural ecosystem preserved, it has become a precious area of the global ecosystem with the passage of 60 years; and it is more frequently recognized as a beautiful place and a paradise for migratory birds. However, the DMZ (demilitarized zone), which only appears to be peaceful on the outside, is still a zone of military confrontation full of wounds and tension that result from the division of the nation, as well as a paradoxical space most intensely militarized in the world. Are we trying to see only the externals that cover and hide the reality of this paradoxical DMZ, which is actually quite desperate? Do the plants and migratory birds living there know about this crisis? This DMZ tends to be remembered by foreigners as a symbol of Korea, the only divided territory in the world.

Gail Art Museum planned this exhibition to create a place for true communication and discourse, so that the DMZ, a place of severance, can change into a channel of communication, and create the possibility of unexpected growth from the smallest things.

The significance of this exhibition, which is of contemporary visual art focusing on the DMZ (demilitarized zone), is that various artists from different generations discuss public opinions from their generation about the current situation via their artworks, through which we can understand the ideologies and concepts that different generations hold on to.

Germany, which overcame national division before us and was unified, was an area, like the Korean Peninsula, that suffered a lot of stress and strain before unification. However, as they initiated communication through extremely small acts of cooperation, they began to interact fully and cross the border freely; and finally, they became unified.

This exhibition is being held in Korea as well as in Berlin, Germany. Berlin, as a city representing a divided nation in the past and now unified, holds a different position in currently compared to Korea. Thus, by showing such different views reflected in our artists' works, this exhibition will provide an opportunity to share the emotions generated by division and allow us to communicate.

Nine artists are participating in this exhibition: Kang Yong Suk, Ko Jung Nam, Kim Yong Tae, Kim Tae Eun, Yoo Yeun Bok, Son Ki Hwan, Song Chang, Lee Bann and Hwang Se Jun. Visitors can see how the artists view the DMZ and what they want to talk about through their own formative language.

In Kang Yong Suk's artwork <Monument to Korean War>, war memorials not only serve as symbols to mourn the war victims but also to console the survivors. However, they are losing their meaning, and he said that we should listen to their forgotten voice.

Ko Jung Nam presents photographs depicting scenes of a divided country by placing the tank barriers in the demarcation line and azaleas in parallel. His camera lens presents blocked human's path for over half a century in contrast with the flower way.

Kim Yong Tae designed his work while visiting military camp towns including Dongducheon. He found and collected in the town was the photos of Korean women and US forces together, and he complete his artwork <DMZ> in the form of a collage. However, Kim discarded all relevant photos out of shame, so the remaining photos are copied versions. In this artwork, Kim express the DMZ with a result that invisible confrontation between Korea and neighboring country.

Kim Tae Eun's video art is completed with <Panmunjom> as a stage. This is created by the joint security area and demarcation line. The artist tells the reality of the division by filming the scenes. This artwork shows ambiguous gap to us through the videotaped artificial place which applied filmic imagination and editing techniques, at the difference between situation, reality, and distortion of the reality.

Yoo Yeun Bok reveals traces of hidden pain and agony in the DMZ. The artist shows that there is an undertone of peace from the traces of pain which he calls friendly, strange and uncomfortable scenery. In his artwork <Facing Each Other>, Son Ki Hwan asks intrinsic questions about what we try to see,

what there is to see and to be seen which is the essence of painting, and the artist's way of seeing. The artist symbolically demonstrates a limited condition in which the leaders of the South and North or the US and North Korea try to see something but end up by recognizing only what they want to see.

Song Chang also agonizes about matters of the reality of Korean division. <Spring of DMZ> depicted the inside of a ruined building of the Labor Party. <Black Tears>, a description of a bird sitting on a red-colored wire fence across a chilly field, is shows the divided land where only birds can freely cross.

Lee Bann received a presidential award at the Korean Exhibition in 1977 for his artwork titled <Expansibility-Digging> which was changed from the original title of <Expansibility-the Winter of the Demilitarized Zone> because the term "demilitarized" was prohibited at that time. The artist creates a narrative in his drawing based on the traumatic experience that resulted from his father's defection to North Korea.

Hwang Se Jun depicts the irony of the current status of division through his novel setting where the whole of the Korean peninsula is militarized except for the narrow horizontal area of DMZ that is 4 km in width. The artist reminds us about the limits of practical and critical thinking on the division and DMZ through various exhibits obtained from the DMZ or the war and organizes then in a commercialized, kitsch way to denounce the lack of gravity and serious thinking on the subject.

This exhibition is organized so that viewers can acquire critical ways of thinking by looking at the artworks, thinking about the role of art in the society, its being, its statement and how it deals with reality through critical thinking.

This exhibition reflects different approaches by dividing them into different themes.

The first section directly traces our memory into the past; and the second section examines the recollection of time with the memory of the DMZ and the Cold War, and displays stories through the records of the DMZ.

This exhibition has a clear message: to constantly ask about what the DMZ has become: a place of harmony among people and nations, a place of remorse about the war, a place of peace where reconciliation and cooperation can take place rather than conflict and dispute and a place that symbolizes the desire for unification like the lyrics "we hope for unification even in our dreams."